

WWC Quick Review of the Report “Summative Evaluation of the Ready to Learn Initiative”^{1,2}

What is this study about?

The study examined whether preschoolers who were exposed to a media-rich literacy curriculum had better early reading skills than preschoolers who were exposed to a media-rich science curriculum.

The study randomly assigned 80 preschool classes to incorporate either a media-rich literacy curriculum or a media-rich science curriculum. The final study sample included 398 students from 47 early childhood centers serving children ages 4 and 5 from low-income households in New York City and San Francisco.

Five tests measured the students’ early reading skills: the letter name, letter sounds, and common initial sounds subtests of the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS); an assessment of print awareness; and a researcher-developed test of how well the student recognized letters in his/her own name.

WWC Rating

The research described in this report is consistent with WWC evidence standards

Strengths: This is a well-implemented randomized controlled trial.

Cautions: Any effects of the media-rich literacy curriculum may be due to the non-media components of the curriculum (such as independent reading and singing the alphabet song). Additionally, the study does not assess whether a media-rich literacy curriculum is superior to a traditional literacy curriculum or other reading activities. Instead, it measures the impact of using a media-rich literacy curriculum compared to a media-rich science curriculum.

Features of the Media-Rich Literacy Curriculum

Students participate in teacher-guided viewing of the children’s shows *Sesame Street*, *Between the Lions*, and *Super Why!* at least twice a week for ten weeks.

Teachers use scripted lessons to reinforce key learning elements before, during, and after showing the video segments.

Students practice literacy concepts with group-based and individual activities such as free writing and online computer games.

Teachers received a two-hour initial training and ongoing support from coaches throughout the duration of the intervention (as did teachers in the media-rich science curriculum).

What did the study authors report?

Students in the media-rich literacy classrooms outperformed students in the media-rich science classrooms by a statistically significant margin on all but the PALS Beginning Sound Awareness subtest. Across the four statistically significant impacts, the authors reported an average effect size of one-third of a standard deviation, equivalent to moving a student from the 50th percentile to the 63rd percentile.

¹ Penuel, W. R., Pasnik, S., Bates, L., Townsend, E., Gallagher, L. P., Llorente, C., & Hupert, N. (2009). *Summative evaluation of the Ready to Learn initiative*. Newton, MA: Educational Development Center, Inc. and Menlo Park, CA: SRI International Technical Report.

² Absence of conflict of interest: This study was conducted in part by SRI International, which is a subcontractor to Mathematica on the WWC. For this reason, no staff from SRI International participated in the review of the study or development of this quick review.

Quick reviews assess whether a study’s design is consistent with WWC evidence standards. They are based on the evidence published in the report cited and rely on effect sizes and significance levels as reported by study authors. The WWC rating refers only to the results summarized above and not necessarily to all results presented in the study. The WWC does not confirm study authors’ findings or contact authors for additional information about the study.