

What Works Clearinghouse



Breakthrough to Literacy

Effectiveness

No studies of *Breakthrough to Literacy* that fall within the scope of the Early Childhood Education review meet WWC evidence standards. The lack of studies meeting WWC evidence standards means that, at this time, the WWC is unable to draw any conclusions based on research about the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of *Breakthrough to Literacy*.

Program Description¹

Breakthrough to Literacy is a literacy curriculum for preschool through third grade that introduces students to a book-a-week throughout the year. Students gain exposure to the book-of-the-week through multiple formats. They receive a Big Book, a Take-Me-Home Book, an audio book, and a computerized version. The book-of-the-week serves as the basis of classroom and independent learning activities for that week. Classroom activities that focus on the book include: (1) teacher-led whole group instruction, (2) teacher-led small group instruction, and

(3) independent learning activities including individualized computer instruction that allows students to progress at their own pace. Activities for preschoolers are designed to teach oral language, phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, and concepts of print. *Breakthrough to Literacy* also includes professional development activities for teachers that are designed to help incorporate the *Breakthrough to Literacy* curriculum into their day-to-day activities and improve their classroom management skills.

The WWC identified thirty-two studies of *Breakthrough to Literacy* that were published or released between 1985 and 2008.

Nine studies are within the scope of the review and have an eligible design, but do not meet WWC evidence standards.

- Two studies used random assignment of centers or classrooms to groups, but many children included in the study entered the centers or classrooms after group assignments were known. The study did not establish that the comparison group was comparable to the treatment group prior to the intervention, and the overall attrition rate exceeds the WWC standards for the topic area.
- Another six studies used quasi-experimental designs, but did not establish that the comparison group was comparable to the treatment group prior to the start of the intervention.
- One study had a confounding factor, assigning only one unit per group, which made it impossible to attribute the observed effect solely to *Breakthrough to Literacy*.

Eight studies were out of the scope of the review because they had an ineligible study design that does not meet WWC evidence standards, such as a study that does not have a comparison group.

Fifteen studies were out of the scope of the review, as defined by the Early Childhood Education protocol, for reasons other than study design.

- Eight studies either did not include or report disaggregated results for students between 3 and 5 years old.
- Seven studies were either not effectiveness studies or did not include outcomes in the specified domains.

¹The descriptive information for this program was obtained from a publicly-available source: the program's website (www.breakthroughtoliteracy.com, downloaded July 2008). The WWC requests developers to review the program description sections for accuracy from their perspective. Further verification of the accuracy of the descriptive information for this program is beyond the scope of this review.

References

Studies that fall outside the Early Childhood Education protocol or do not meet evidence standards

- Anderson-Abrams, L. M. (2006). *Empirically derived reading instruction developing word level skills with Breakthrough to Literacy's technology*. Unpublished doctoral thesis. State University of New York at Buffalo, New York. The study was ineligible for review because it does not use a sample within the age or grade range specified in the protocol.
- Bennett, C. (2006). *What are the effects of "Breakthrough to Literacy" in a prekindergarten classroom?* Unpublished master's thesis. Midwestern State University, Wichita Falls, TX. The study did not meet WWC evidence standards because the measures of effect cannot be attributed solely to the intervention – there was only one unit of analysis in one or both conditions.
- Browne, A. (2001). *Parent involvement at home: Assessing the parental component of our new Breakthrough to Literacy program*. Master's project, State University College at Buffalo. The study was ineligible for review because it does not include an outcome within a domain specified in the protocol.
- Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. (2001-2002). *Controlled study: Early grade readiness-exiting kindergarteners*. Breakthrough to Literacy, Thompson Child Development Center. Charlotte, NC. The study was ineligible for review because it does not use a comparison group.
- Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. (2001-2002). *Pretest/Posttest: Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, Third Edition-Prekindergarten*. Breakthrough to Literacy, Thompson Child Development Center. Charlotte, NC. The study was ineligible for review because it does not use a comparison group.
- Commission of the States. (1999). *Breakthrough to Literacy*. Denver, CO. The study was ineligible for review because it does not examine the effectiveness of an intervention.
- DeZavala Elementary – Fort Worth, TX. (2002). *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, 1998-1999. The new three Rs: Research, reading, and results. Breakthrough to Literacy*. NY: Wright Group/McGraw-Hill. The study was ineligible for review because it does not use a comparison group.
- English, E. M. (1996). *The effects of the addition of the Breakthrough to Literacy program for kindergarten children*. Unpublished master's thesis, Mercer University. The study was ineligible for review because it does not use a sample within the age or grade range specified in the protocol.
- Fort Worth Independent School District – Fort Worth, TX. (2005). *Evaluation of instructional programs: Fort Worth Independent School District*. TX: Gibson Consulting Group. The study was ineligible for review because it does not examine the effectiveness of an intervention.
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- Foster, J. A. (2001). *The effect of the Breakthrough to Literacy program on kindergarten writing quality*. Unpublished master's thesis, Mercer University. The study was ineligible for review because it does not use a sample within the age or grade range specified in the protocol.
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- Glynn County Schools – Brunswick, GA. (2001-2002). *Controlled study: Letter sound assessment-prekindergarten*. Breakthrough to Literacy. The study did not meet WWC evidence standards because the intervention and comparison groups are not shown to be equivalent at baseline.
- Glynn County Schools – Brunswick, GA. *Controlled study: Letter identification assessment-prekindergarten, 2001-2002*. Breakthrough to Literacy. The study did not meet WWC evidence standards because the intervention and comparison groups are not shown to be equivalent at baseline.
- Glynn County Schools – Brunswick, GA. *Pretest/Posttest: District literacy assessment-prekindergarten, Fall 2002-Spring 2003*. Breakthrough to Literacy. The study was ineligible for review because it does not use a comparison group.
- Grand Rapids, MI Preschool Work Sampling, 1997-1998. (2002). *The new three Rs: Research, reading, and results. Breakthrough to Literacy*. NY: Wright Group/McGraw-Hill. The study did not meet WWC evidence standards because the intervention and comparison groups are not shown to be equivalent at baseline.
- Grand Rapids Public Schools. Michigan Education Special Services Association. (1997-98). *Breakthrough to Literacy*

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- program evaluation. Grand Rapids, MI. The study did not meet WWC evidence standards because the intervention and comparison groups are not shown to be equivalent at baseline.
- How the well-known CSR models match up. (2007). *Education Daily*, 40(40; 40), 7-7. The study was ineligible for review because it does not examine the effectiveness of an intervention.
- Hurtig, R., & Layzer, C. (2007). *CLIMBERs second year implementation report*. In *IES annual performance report*. The study did not meet WWC evidence standards because the intervention and comparison groups are not shown to be equivalent at baseline and the overall attrition rate exceeds WWC standards for this area.
- I.M. Terrell Elementary-Fort Worth, TX: Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, 1999-2000. (2002). *The new three Rs: Research, reading, and results*. *Breakthrough to Literacy*. NY: Wright Group/McGraw-Hill. The study was ineligible for review because it does not use a comparison group.
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- Woodward, A. W. (2007). The effects of Breakthrough to Literacy on the phonological awareness skills of students in early elementary school. *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences*, 68(5-A), 1825. The study was ineligible for review because it does not use a sample within the age or grade range specified in the protocol.