

What Works Clearinghouse



Let's Begin with the Letter People[®]

Program Description²

Let's Begin with the Letter People[®] is an early education curriculum that uses 26 thematic units to develop children's language and early literacy skills. A major focus is phonological awareness, including rhyming, word play, alliteration, and

segmentation. Children are encouraged to learn as individuals, in small groups, and in a whole-class environment. Teacher resource books and a set of classroom books and other program materials are available as a program kit.

Research³

Two studies of *Let's Begin with the Letter People*[®] meet What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards and no studies meet WWC evidence standards with reservations. The two studies include children in 49 classrooms in 25 preschools in Houston, Texas, and southeastern New York State.⁴

to large for oral language and print knowledge and small for phonological processing and math. No studies that meet WWC evidence standards with or without reservations examined the effectiveness of *Let's Begin with the Letter People*[®] in the early reading and writing or cognition domains.

Based on these two studies, the WWC considers the extent of evidence for *Let's Begin with the Letter People*[®] to be medium

Effectiveness

Let's Begin with the Letter People[®] was found to have no discernible effects on oral language, print knowledge, phonological processing, or math.

	Oral language	Print knowledge	Phonological processing	Early reading and writing	Cognition	Math
Rating of effectiveness	No discernible effects	No discernible effects	No discernible effects	na	na	No discernible effects
Improvement index⁵	Average: +1 percentile point Range: -1 to +3 percentile points	Average: +6 percentile points Range: +1 to +12 percentile points	Average: -5 percentile points	na	na	Average: +3 percentile points Range: -4 to +8 percentile points

na = not applicable

1. This report has been updated to include reviews of two studies that were released since 2007, a review of one study that was released in 2002 but was not reviewed for the previous report, and a rereview of two studies that were included in the previous report. Of the five studies, two meet evidence standards and three were within the scope of the protocol but did not meet evidence standards. A complete list and disposition of all studies reviewed are provided in the references. The findings described in the previous *Let's Begin with the Letter People*[®] intervention report were based in part on a study by Assel et al. (2007). A rereview of that study for the present report revealed that the subcluster attrition rate of children exceeded standards, as specified in the Early Childhood Education protocol. Hence, results from the Assel et al. (2007) study were not considered when preparing the present intervention report.
2. The descriptive information for this program was obtained from publicly available sources: the program's website (www.abramsllearningtrends.com/lets_begin_with_letter_people.aspx, downloaded July 2009) and the research literature (Assel et al., 2007; Fischel et al., 2007). 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.
3. The studies in this report were reviewed using WWC Evidence Standards, Version 1.0 (see the WWC Standards).
4. The evidence presented in this report is based on available research. Findings and conclusions may change as new research becomes available.
5. These numbers show the average and range of student-level improvement indices for all findings across the studies.

Absence of conflict of interest

The PCER Consortium (2008) study summarized in this intervention report had numerous contributors, including staff of Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. (MPR). Because the principal investigator for the WWC Early Childhood Education review is also an MPR staff member, the study was rated by

Chesapeake Research Associates, who also prepared the intervention report. The report was then reviewed by the principal investigator, a WWC Quality Assurance reviewer, and an external peer reviewer.

Additional program information

Developer and contact

Abrams Learning Trends is the developer and distributor for *Let's Begin with the Letter People*®. Address: P.O. Box 10025, Waterbury, CT 06725. Email: customerservice@abramslearningtrends.com. Web: www.abramslearningtrends.com. Telephone: (800) 227-9120.

Scope of use

According to the developer, approximately 750,000 children have used the full program since its initial publication in 1999. Several million more children have used parts of the curriculum to supplement other preschool curricula. Information is not available on the number of centers and classrooms using this program or on the demographics of children using this program.

Teaching

Let's Begin with the Letter People® includes 26 units arranged around five thematically organized Teacher Resource books: All About Me; Animals, Animals, Animals; Everyone Has Needs; Getting Along with Others; and Nature All Around Us. Each of the Teacher Resource books offers varied teaching strategies and suggested activities. The units in each book have a Classroom Floor Plan Model, which includes suggestions for Interest Centers (individual and small-group time) and Meeting Circle (whole-class time), providing teachers with a number of choices for teaching knowledge and skills in language and literacy, as well as in science, math, art, music, social development, and motor skills. Through the Interest Centers, children are able to explore, investigate, construct, and apply knowledge. Skills are integrated in the classroom's daily events and are taught using a number of materials such as Letter People Huggables®, children's literature,

Big Books, Little Books and story tapes, songs and rhymes, Just Listen™ computer program, Ready to Read PREdecodable books, Me Bag™ (for sharing special items), Letter People Stickables™, Puppet Patterns, and Family Activity Pages. Teachers introduce concepts during Meeting Circle time that are then explored in the Interest Centers and other group activities. For instance, the Letter People Huggables® (for example, Mr. N) are used to introduce letters, sounds, stories, colors, shapes, and characteristics. Blueprint for Learning, the program guide for *Let's Begin with the Letter People*®, provides an overview of the program and its components and includes information teachers can use for setting up their classrooms, as well as various instructional strategies. Teachers are trained during professional development activities and with other resources such as the Teacher Resource books.

Cost

Let's Begin with the Letter People® products can be purchased separately or in various combinations. The introductory set is available for \$1,930 and includes the Teacher Resource File (\$695), Letter People Huggables® (\$585), Meeting and Greeting Cards (\$110), Let's Sing with the Letter People CD (\$30), Big and Little Books (\$338), a read-along CD (\$30), and a set of Letter People Virtual Books (\$199). Packages that include additional components at extra cost are also available. Information about the cost of professional development is not available. Additional pricing information for separate products from the *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® is available on the website: www.abramslearningtrends.com/lets_begin_with_letter_people.aspx.

Research Five studies reviewed by the WWC investigated the effects of *Let's Begin with the Letter People*[®]. Two studies (Fischel, Bracken, Fuchs-Eisenberg, Spira, Katz, & Shaller, 2007; PCER Consortium, 2008) are randomized controlled trials that meet WWC evidence standards. The remaining three studies do not meet WWC evidence standards.

Meets evidence standards

One study reviewed by the WWC (PCER Consortium, 2008) assessed the effectiveness of *Let's Begin with the Letter People*[®] as part of the Preschool Curriculum Evaluation Research (PCER) effort.⁶ The PCER Consortium (2008) used a randomized controlled trial design in which 19 preschool programs in Houston, Texas, were randomly assigned to implement *Let's Begin with the Letter People*[®], to implement Doors to Discovery™, or to a control group. For the *Let's Begin with the Letter People*[®] versus control study, data were collected on 184 children (95 *Let's Begin with the Letter People*[®] and 89 control). Fifty-five percent of the children were male; 43% were Hispanic, 30% were Caucasian, and 13% were African-American; and 12% were reported to have a disability. Pretest data were collected in the fall and posttest data were collected in the spring of the preschool year. Follow-up kindergarten data were collected in the spring of the following year. The study investigated effects on oral language, print knowledge, phonological processing, and math. The control condition consisted of teacher-developed, nonspecific curricula with a focus on basic school readiness.

A second study (Fischel et al., 2007) examined the effectiveness of *Let's Begin with the Letter People*[®] and the Waterford Early Reading™ Level One curricula using a randomized controlled trial design in 27 full-day Head Start classrooms in six Head Start centers in southeastern New York State. In each of the two intervention conditions, one of the experimental curricula was used in conjunction with the High/Scope[®]

program that had been used by the Head Start programs for more than 10 years. Control classrooms used only the High/Scope[®] program. Classrooms were randomly assigned in each of three years, and data were collected in each year. In the first year, three classrooms were assigned to each group. In the second year, intervention group classrooms continued in the same group, the control group classrooms were randomly assigned to an intervention group, and eight new classrooms were randomly assigned to the three groups. In the third year, intervention group classrooms again continued in the same group, control group classrooms were randomly assigned to an intervention group, and three new classrooms formed the control group. The original number of children in these classrooms over the three years was 507. The mean age was 4.3 years at pretest. Participating children were 42% African-American, 41% Hispanic, 8% multiracial, 7% Caucasian, and 2% other race/ethnicity. Approximately 14% of the children were identified as Spanish-language dominant at the outset of the study. Pretest data were collected in the fall and posttest data were collected in the spring of the preschool year. The study investigated effects on oral language and print knowledge. The WWC includes the data from children participating in classrooms that were newly-randomized to study groups in each year, because the classrooms that continued in the same study group in later years might have been chosen by some parents because of their curriculum. The WWC thus includes data for 132 children in eight *Let's Begin with the Letter People*[®] classrooms and 149 children in 11 control classrooms over the three-year period.

Extent of evidence

The WWC categorizes the extent of evidence in each domain as small or medium to large (see the WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook, Appendix G). The extent of evidence takes into account the number of studies and the total sample size across

6. The Preschool Curriculum Evaluation Research Consortium (2008) evaluated a total of 14 preschool curricula, including *Let's Begin with the Letter People*[®], in comparison to the respective control conditions.

the studies that meet WWC evidence standards with or without reservations.⁷

The WWC considers the extent of evidence for *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® to be medium to large for oral language and print knowledge, and small for phonological processing and

math. No studies that meet WWC evidence standards with or without reservations examined the effectiveness of *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® in the early reading and writing or cognition domains.

Effectiveness Findings

The WWC review of interventions for Early Childhood Education addresses child outcomes in six domains: oral language, print knowledge, phonological processing, early reading and writing, cognition, and math. The studies included in this report cover four domains: oral language, print knowledge, phonological processing, and math. The findings below present the authors' estimates and WWC-calculated estimates of the size and the statistical significance of the effects of *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® on children.⁸

Oral language. The PCER Consortium (2008) analyzed the effectiveness of *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® on oral language using the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test–III (PPVT-III) and the Test of Language Development–Primary: III (TOLD-P:3). The authors report, and the WWC confirms, that differences between *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® and the control group are not statistically significant or substantively important (that is, an effect size of at least 0.25) on any of these measures. Fischel et al. (2007) analyzed the effectiveness of *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® on oral language using two measures: the PPVT-III and Comprehension. The authors report, and the WWC confirms, that differences between the *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® and the control groups on these measures are not statistically significant or large enough to be

substantively important. According to WWC criteria, these two studies show no discernible effects on oral language.

Print knowledge. The PCER Consortium (2008) analyzed the effectiveness of *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® on the Test of Early Reading Ability (TERA-3), the Woodcock-Johnson–III (WJ-III) Letter-Word Identification subtest, and the WJ-III Spelling subtest. The authors report, and the WWC confirms, that differences between the *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® and control groups are not statistically significant or large enough to be substantively important on any of these measures. Fischel et al. (2007) analyzed the effectiveness of *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® on print knowledge using six measures: the Woodcock-Johnson–Revised (WJ-R) Letter-Word Identification subtest, the WJ-R Dictation subtest, the Get Ready to Read! screening test, Letters Known, Book Knowledge, and Print Conventions. The study reports significant differences favoring *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® on two measures: the WJ-R Dictation subtest and the Get Ready to Read! screening test. The WWC was unable to confirm statistically significant findings for any outcomes in this domain. Furthermore, the average effect size was neither statistically significant nor large enough to be considered substantively important according to the WWC criteria. According to WWC criteria, these two studies show no discernible effects on print knowledge.

7. The extent of evidence categorization was developed to tell readers how much evidence was used to determine the intervention rating, focusing on the number and size of studies. Additional factors associated with a related concept—external validity, such as the students' demographics and the types of settings in which studies took place—are not taken into account for the categorization. Information about how the extent of evidence rating was determined for *Let's Begin with the Letter People* is in Appendix A6.
8. The level of statistical significance was reported by the study authors or, when necessary, calculated by the WWC to correct for clustering within classrooms or schools and for multiple comparisons. For an explanation, see the WWC Tutorial on Mismatch. For the formulas the WWC used to calculate the statistical significance, see WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook, Appendix C for clustering and WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook, Appendix D for multiple comparisons. No correction for clustering was needed for the study by the PCER Consortium (2008) because its analysis corrected for clustering by using HLM, but a correction for multiple comparisons was needed, so the significance levels in this report may differ from those reported in the original study. In the case of Fischel et al. (2007), a correction for clustering was needed, so the significance levels may differ from those reported in the original study.

Effectiveness *(continued)*

Phonological processing. The PCER Consortium (2008) analyzed the effectiveness of *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® on phonological processing using the Preschool Comprehensive Test of Phonological and Print Processing (Pre-CTOPPP) Elision subtest. The authors report, and the WWC confirms, that differences between the *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® and control groups are not statistically significant or substantively important on any of these measures. According to WWC criteria, this study shows no discernible effects on phonological processing.

Math. The PCER Consortium (2008) analyzed the effectiveness of *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® on math using the WJ-III Applied Problems subtest, the Child Math Assessment—Abbreviated, and Shape Composition task. The authors report, and the WWC confirms, that differences between the *Let's Begin*

with the Letter People® and control groups are not statistically significant or large enough to be substantively important on any of these measures. According to WWC criteria, this study shows no discernible effects on math.

Rating of effectiveness

The WWC rates the effects of an intervention in a given outcome domain as positive, potentially positive, mixed, no discernible effects, potentially negative, or negative. The rating of effectiveness takes into account four factors: the quality of the research design, the statistical significance of the findings (as calculated by the WWC), the size of the difference between participants in the intervention and the comparison conditions, and the consistency in findings across studies (see the WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook, Appendix E).

The WWC found *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® to have no discernible effects on oral language, print knowledge, phonological processing, and math

Improvement index

The WWC computes an improvement index for each individual finding. In addition, within each outcome domain, the WWC computes an average improvement index for each study and an average improvement index across studies (see WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook, Appendix F). The improvement index represents the difference between the percentile rank of the average student in the intervention condition versus the percentile rank of the average student in the comparison condition. Unlike the rating of effectiveness, the improvement index is entirely based on the size of the effect, regardless of the statistical significance of the effect, the study design, or the analysis. The improvement index can take on values between –50 and +50, with positive numbers denoting favorable results for the intervention report.

Based on two studies, the average improvement index for *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® on four measures of oral language is +1 percentile point with a range of –1 to +3 percentile points across findings. The average improvement index for nine

measures of print knowledge is +6 percentile points across the two studies, with a range of +1 to +12 percentile points across findings. Based on one study, the average improvement index for *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® on one measure of phonological processing is –5 percentile points, and the average improvement index on three measures of math is +3 percentile points, with a range of –4 to +8 percentile points.

Summary

The WWC reviewed five studies of *Let's Begin with the Letter People*®. Two of these studies meet WWC evidence standards. Three studies do not meet either WWC evidence standards or eligibility screens. Based on the two studies, the WWC found no discernible effects of *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® on oral language, print knowledge, phonological processing, and math. The conclusions presented in this report may change as new research emerges.

References **Meets WWC evidence standards**

Fischel, J. E., Bracken, S. S., Fuchs-Eisenberg, A., Spira, E. G., Katz, S., & Shaller, G. (2007). Evaluation of curricular approaches to enhance preschool early literacy skills. *Journal of Literacy Research, 39*(4), 471–501.

Preschool Curriculum Evaluation Research (PCER) Consortium. (2008). Doors to Discovery and *Let's Begin with the Letter People*. In *Effects of preschool curriculum programs on school readiness* (pp. 85–98). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Research, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.

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

Assel, M. A., Landry, S. H., Swank, P. R., & Gunnewig, S. (2007). An evaluation of curriculum, setting, and mentoring on the performance of children enrolled in pre-kindergarten. *Reading*

& Writing, 20(5; 5), 463–494. The study does not meet WWC evidence standards because the overall attrition rate exceeds WWC standards for this area.

Hayes, K., Maddahian, E., & Fernandez, A. (2002). *An evaluation of pre-K reading programs* (Planning, Assessment, and Research Division Publication No. 137). Los Angeles: Los Angeles United School District. The study does not meet WWC evidence standards because the intervention and comparison groups are not shown to be equivalent at baseline.

Judkins, D., St. Pierre, R., Gutmann, B., Goodson, B., von Glatz, A., Hamilton, J., et al. (2008). *A study of classroom literacy interventions and outcomes in Even Start* (NCEE 2008-4028). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. The study does not meet WWC evidence standards because the intervention and comparison groups are not shown to be equivalent at baseline.