

Letterland Results, Research

Letterland aligns closely with the findings of decades of research about the need to explicitly teach phonemic awareness and phonics, and the best instructional practices to do so.

The National Reading Panel (2000) not only identified the same instructional practices used in Letterland as the most effective ways to teach phonemic awareness and phonics, it actually cited the Letterland program. Here are some excerpts from the National Reading Panel report:

“In a study by Ehri, Deffner and Wilce (1984), children were shown letters drawn to assume the shape of familiar objects, for example, s drawn as a snake, h drawn as a house (with a chimney) ...Memory for the letter-sound relations was mediated by the name of the object. Children were taught to look at the letter, be reminded of the object, say its name, and isolate the first sound of the name to identify the sound...With practice they were able to look at the letters and promptly say the sounds. Children who were taught letters in this way learned them better than:

- Children who were taught letters by rehearsing the relations with pictures unrelated to the letter shapes...
- Children who simply rehearsed the associations without any pictures.”

The NRP reported, "application of this principle can be found in Letterland (Wendon, 1992), a program that teaches kindergartners letter-sound associations". Not only did the NRP cite Letterland as a program where the use of mnemonics is prominent, but they also said:

- “The motivational value of associating letters with interesting characters or hand motions and incorporating this into activities and games that are fun is important for promoting young children’s learning...
- Techniques to speed up the learning process are valuable in helping kindergartners prepare for formal reading instruction.”

Implementation Results

A number of quasi-experimental studies have been conducted related to Letterland’s effectiveness in U.S. schools. Here is a summary of some of the results:

- Florida Center for Reading Research, 2005-08. Study of Letterland use in a large, Title I school in Florida. The number of students classified as at risk decreased significantly over the course of the intervention. Prior to Letterland, 19% of students were identified as high risk, 39% as at risk, and 42% at or above target performance. After Letterland, that changed to 3% at high risk, 12% at risk, and 85% at or above target performance.
- Wake County Public School System, NC, 2013-14. Study of impact of Letterland in a large district (110 elementary schools) compared to matched students in a comparison school district. Results: A significantly higher percentage of Letterland kindergarten students were at or above benchmark mid-year on Phoneme Segmentation and Nonsense Word Fluency-Correct Letter Sound DIBELS assessment than the matched students, and remained significantly higher on the end-of-year assessments. Letterland had a significant positive effect for limited English proficient, Asian, Black, and Hispanic/Latino kindergarten students. Results were consistent across years.
- Davidson County School, NC, 2014-17. Comparison of pre- and post-Letterland use in eight elementary schools. Results: In kindergarten, significant increase in percentage of students at or above proficiency measured by DIBELS rose from 19% to 71%. In first grade, significant increase from 41% to 66%.
- Grayson County Schools, VA 2014-15. Comparison of pre- and post-Letterland Kindergarten use in four schools using I-Station assessment data. Results: School #1 increase from 20% to 42%. School #2 increase from 38% to 86%. School #3 increase from 52% to 61%. School #4 increase from 38% to 58%.
- Newton Conover City Schools, NC 2012-2015. Comparison of pre- and post-Letterland use in three elementary schools. Results: School #1 increased proficiency on DIBELS from 44% to 79% in after year one of using Letterland, to 82% in year two, and to 91% in year three. School #2 increased proficiency from 46% to 68% after one year of using Letterland and to 93% in year two. School #3 increased proficiency from 40% to 89% after year one of using Letterland.

Letterland Academic Testimonials

LINNEA EHRI, Ph.D. Distinguished Professor, The Graduate School, City University of New York and National Reading Panel Member:

"You have uncovered some important principles of learning supported by research findings in your efforts to develop Letterland as an effective instructional tool. I am very impressed."

SALLY SHAYWITZ, M.D. Professor of Pediatrics and Child Study, Yale University School of Medicine and National Reading Panel Member, author of *Overcoming Dyslexia* (2003), Alfred a. Knopf:

"Another engaging and helpful phonics program ... is Letterland ... in which animate characters take on the names and shapes of the letters they represent as in Fireman Fred and Sammy Snake".

DR DENNIS MOLFESE, Ph.D. Distinguished University Scholar, Chair & Professor, Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences, University of Louisville, Kentucky, Editor-in-Chief of *Developmental Neuropsychology*:

"Very clearly, Letterland offers a systematic program of instruction for alphabetic and phonological knowledge that is critical for the early stages of reading development. The materials are well designed and highly attractive to children, serving to motivate them to spend more and more time learning to recognize and name the letters of the alphabet as well as learn the letter sounds AND develop their rhyming and rime skills. Researchers across the world have repeatedly found that these components are the literal building blocks that lead to reading success."

REBECCA H. FELTON Ph.D. Reading Consultant, Author, Dyslexia Researcher and former Faculty member, Neuropsychology Department, Bowman Gray School of Medicine:

"Many children who are at risk for reading difficulties have serious problems learning the names and sounds for the letters of the alphabet. Letterland, with its engaging characters, stories, songs, gestures for each letter, provides a rich and effective system of cues for letter-sound associations. Use of these multiple cues as part of the Letterland reading program should ensure that all students develop mastery in this critical component of reading."

BOB SCHLAGAL Ph.D. Professor of Reading, Graduate Faculty and Senior Clinician, Department of Language, Reading, & Exceptionalities Appalachian State University USA, Board Member, North Carolina Branch of the International Dyslexia Association:

"Letterland is the most effective of all the synthetic phonics programs for children that I have observed or worked with. This program is not only extremely well-thought out, it is highly imaginative and distinctly and usefully memorable. As a result, teachers and children alike take pleasure in carefully exploring the terrain in which letters and groups of letters live and interact. As a long term student of young children's writing and spelling development, I have been singularly impressed at the early start that children get with the aid of Letterland instruction. (This is something that teachers comment on with regularity.) I have consistently observed earlier, more accurate and more complete phonemic analysis in children's spelling under this system — Letterland's dramatic "live spelling" may be a powerful help in this--as well as a willingness to write among even the most shy and least secure children. Although I have focused my comments on children's writing, I see the same kind of excitement and progress in their reading".

LUANNE MCFARLANE, MSc Associate Professor, Speech Pathology & Audiology, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada (extracts from the *Journal of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology* Vol 22, No. 4, Dec 1998):

"Letterland is a comprehensive teaching system designed to increase reading success ... for use with children ages three to seven plus... All aspects of reading are taught through metaphors, stories, ... songs, ... narrative and natural experience... The materials are economical and have a multitude of uses... Letterland is a structured, exciting method for introducing early literacy skills and continuing the instruction through the early school years..."