



# Effective Beginning Reading Programmes

## Educator's Summary

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Last updated June 2009



**Best Evidence** Encyclopaedia  
*Empowering educators with evidence*

During Key Stage 1 most children go through an extraordinary transformation as readers. If all goes well, by the end of Key Stage 1 they should know the sounds of all letters and be able to form them into words, know the most common sight words, and read and comprehend simple texts – all the basic skills of turning print into meaning.

Success at this stage can be crucial to success in later years. As such there has been substantial research in the area, some of which has been highly influential. Recently, there has been a shift in policy and practice towards phonics and phonemic awareness in beginning reading instruction backed by high-profile reports, such as the Rose Review in the UK (2006) and a report by the US National Reading Panel (2000).

This review summarises research on beginning (non-remedial) reading programmes. We looked at *all* available evidence on programmes designed to improve beginning reading achievement, in order to establish what we know works for primary pupils aged 5-7. We examined all studies of beginning reading programmes from all countries, as long as a report was available in English.\* (NB Most studies took place in the US). We were then able to assess and compare the effectiveness of these programmes. Descriptions and ratings for all the programmes are listed further down this summary.

The results of the review show that the most successful programmes focus on changing daily teaching practices, such as the use of co-operative learning methods, and that programmes that combine a focus on phonics with innovative teaching practices work best of all. However, although the review highlighted the importance of using phonics, simply using books with more phonics or doing workshops on phonics is not enough to bring about widespread improvement in children's reading.

The full report (which this review summarises) is available at [www.bestevidence.org](http://www.bestevidence.org)

### **Instructional Process Programmes (IP)**

(Changing the way the teacher teaches, eg co-operative learning)

**Studies of programmes that provide extensive professional development to help teachers use well-specified teaching methods showed relatively positive effects overall.**

The 'mean weighted effect size' across 17 studies was +0.37, which means the difference between the achievement of children who were taught with these methods compared to children who were taught as usual. Particularly positive effects were found for co-operative learning (ES+0.46), phonics-focused professional development (ES=+0.43), and teaching of phonological awareness to 5 and 6 year-olds (ES=+0.22 by the age of 7 or 8).

### **Instructional Technology (IT)**

(Where technology is used to support beginning reading)

**Studies of Instructional Technology found minimal effect sizes.** Mean weighted effect size across 13 studies: +0.09.

### **Reading Curricula (Curr)**

(Textbooks)



Studies of reading curricula also found minimal effects of using particular textbooks. Mean weighted effect size across 7 studies: +0.12.

### **Combined Curriculum and Instructional Process Programmes (Curr + IP)**

(Programmes that both change how the teacher teaches, and include innovative curricula, eg Success for All and Direct Instruction)

Our review found that programmes that combine innovative phonetic materials with extensive professional development for teachers found positive effects overall. In particular, positive effects were found for Success for All (ES=0.29 in 23 studies).

\*Overall, 63 experimental-control comparisons met the inclusion criteria, of which 19 used random assignment to treatments. Effect sizes (experimental-control differences as a proportion of a standard deviation) were averaged across studies, weighting by sample size. Effect sizes of more than +0.20 are considered educationally significant.

## **Programme Ratings**

Listed below are currently available programmes, grouped by strength of effectiveness. Within each group programmes available in the UK are listed first, and then the remainder in alphabetical order. The type for each programme corresponds to the categories above (eg IP = Instructional Process Strategies).

<b>Key to Programme Ratings</b>	
	<b>Strong Evidence of Effectiveness:</b> At least two studies, one of which is a large randomized or randomized quasi-experimental study, or multiple smaller studies, with a sample size-weighted effect size of at least +0.20, and a collective sample size across all studies of 500 students or 20 classes.
	<b>Moderate Evidence of Effectiveness:</b> At least one randomized or two matched studies of any qualifying design, with a collective sample size of 250 students or 10 classes, and a weighted mean effect size of at least +0.20.
	<b>Limited Evidence of Effectiveness: Strong Evidence of Modest Effects:</b> Studies meet the criteria for "Moderate Evidence of Effectiveness" except that the weighted mean effect size is +0.10 to +0.19.
	<b>Limited Evidence of Effectiveness: Weak Evidence with Notable Effects:</b> Studies have a weighted mean effect size of at least +0.20, but do not qualify for 'moderate evidence of effectiveness' due to insufficient numbers of studies or small sample sizes.
	<b>Insufficient Evidence of Effectiveness:</b> One or more qualifying studies did not meet the criteria for "Limited Evidence of Effectiveness".
<b>N</b>	<b>No Qualifying Studies:</b> No studies met inclusion standards



## Strong Evidence of Effectiveness

Rating	Programme	Type	Description	Contact / Website
	Success for All	Curr + IP	Provides schools with a reading curriculum for pupils aged 5-11 that focuses on phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, and vocabulary development, beginning with phonetically-controlled mini-books from the age of 5-7. Co-operative learning is extensively used with all ages. Tutoring is provided to struggling readers, and parent involvement is encouraged.	<a href="http://www.successforall.org.uk">www.successforall.org.uk</a> (Product training provided)
	Reading Reels	IP	A form of multimedia used within the Success for All programme (see above), in which video content is embedded within teachers' lessons. Brief animation, puppet sketches, and live-action segments, about five minutes daily in total, model beginning reading strategies for children and teachers.	<a href="http://www.successforall.org.uk">www.successforall.org.uk</a> (Product training provided)
	Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS)	IP	A technique in which children work in pairs, taking turns as teacher and learner, to learn a structured sequence of literacy skills, such as phonemic awareness, phonics, sound blending, passage reading, and story re-telling.	US website: <a href="http://www.kc.vanderbilt.edu/pals/">www.kc.vanderbilt.edu/pals/</a>

## Moderate Evidence of Effectiveness

None

## Limited Evidence of Effectiveness: Strong Evidence of Modest Effects



Rating	Programme	Type	Description	Contact / Website
	Open Court Reading	Curr	A basal text book series that uses phonetic readers in early years, a focus on direct instruction of specific skills throughout the programme, scripted teachers' manuals, teacher training, and follow-up.	US website: <a href="http://www.sraonline.com/oc_home.html">www.sraonline.com/oc_home.html</a>
	Scholastic Phonics Readers with Literacy Place	Curr	A supplementary phonics instructional programme designed as an optional addition to Literacy Place, Scholastic's basal reading text, which incorporates phonetic texts to provide intensive phonics practice in the context of engaging stories.	US website: <a href="http://www.teacher.scholastic.com/literacyplace/">www.teacher.scholastic.com/literacyplace/</a>
	Direct Instruction	Curr + IP	An approach to beginning reading instruction that emphasises a step-by-step approach to phonics, decodable texts that make use of a unique initial teaching alphabet, and structured, scripted manuals for teachers.	US website: <a href="http://www.nifdi.org/">www.nifdi.org/</a> Contact: <a href="mailto:kengel@nifdi.org">kengel@nifdi.org</a>



## Limited Evidence of Effectiveness: Weak Evidence with Notable Effects

Rating	Programme	Type	Description	Contact / Website
	Early Reading Research	IP	A whole-class reading programme in which children are taught as a whole class, rather than in small reading groups. Teachers are given professional development in structured, systematic methods of teaching phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and oral reading.	E-mail: <a href="mailto:j.e.solity@warwick.ac.uk">j.e.solity@warwick.ac.uk</a>
	Four Blocks	IP	A professional development approach in which teachers of pupils aged 6-9 use non-ability grouped, multi-level instruction.	Available in the UK through <a href="http://www.teachingoffthewall.co.uk/">www.teachingoffthewall.co.uk/</a> US programme website: <a href="http://www.four-blocks.com">www.four-blocks.com</a>
	Phonics-Based Reading ('Foundation Reading' has replaced this product – the content is the same, but the software is updated)	IT	Computer software designed to help beginning readers learn word-attack skills. Pupils work independently at computer stations through an individualised, structured series of activities that progress from words in isolation to sentences and paragraphs.	<a href="http://www.lexiauk.co.uk/">www.lexiauk.co.uk/</a> (Product training available, in person or on-line) Contact: <a href="mailto:info@lexiauk.co.uk">info@lexiauk.co.uk</a>
	Classwide Peer Tutoring	IP	A co-operative learning approach in which pupils regularly work in pairs, engage in structured tutoring activities, and frequently reverse roles.	US contact: Charles Greenwood, University of Kansas, <a href="mailto:greenwood@ku.edu">greenwood@ku.edu</a>
	Ladders to Literacy	IP	A professional development programme for Year 1 that focuses on phonics and phonemic awareness, rhyming, and letter sounds. Teachers receive extensive training and follow-up.	E-mail: <a href="mailto:anotari@wri-edu.org">anotari@wri-edu.org</a> Website: <a href="http://www.wri-edu.org/ladders/about.htm">www.wri-edu.org/ladders/about.htm</a>
	Open Court Phonics Kit	Curr	Provides teachers with extensive training and materials to teach phonics skills.	US website: <a href="http://www.sraonline.com/oc_home.html">www.sraonline.com/oc_home.html</a>



Rating	Programme	Type	Description	Contact / Website
	Orton-Gillingham approach	IP	A structured, phonetic reading approach that uses multisensory teaching, emphasizing visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile teaching strategies.	E-mail: <a href="mailto:ortonacademy@verizon.net">ortonacademy@verizon.net</a> Website: <a href="http://www.ortonacademy.org">www.ortonacademy.org</a>
	Reading and Integrated Literacy Strategies (RAILS)	IP	Provides pupils aged 5-8 with a second reading period each day to supplement normal reading provision, and provides teachers with extensive professional development focusing on explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, and vocabulary.	E-mail: <a href="mailto:RJS15@PSU.EDU">RJS15@PSU.EDU</a>
	Sing, Spell, Read, and Write	IP	A phonetic approach to beginning reading and writing instruction that uses songs, phonetic storybooks, and systematic, step-by-step development of word attack skills.	E-mail: <a href="mailto:k12cs@custhelp.com">k12cs@custhelp.com</a> Website: <a href="http://www.pearsonschool.com">www.pearsonschool.com</a>

## Other Ratings

### Insufficient Evidence of Effectiveness

Destination Reading  
 Headsprout  
 Plato Focus  
 Reading Machine  
 Reading Street  
 Waterford  
 The Literacy Center  
 Writing to Read

### **N** No Qualifying Studies

#### UK programmes lacking qualifying studies:

Big Cat Phonics, Collins [www.collinseducation.com/Primary](http://www.collinseducation.com/Primary)  
 Can Do Cubes, Can Do Education [www.candocubes.com/synthetic-phonics.php](http://www.candocubes.com/synthetic-phonics.php)  
 Code Breakers, Hamilton Trust [www.hamiltoneducation.org.uk](http://www.hamiltoneducation.org.uk)  
 Dandelion Readers, Phonic Books [www.phonicbooks.co.uk](http://www.phonicbooks.co.uk)  
 Debbie Hepplewhite's Online Synthetic Phonics Programme , Phonics International  
[www.phonicsinternational.com](http://www.phonicsinternational.com)  
 Destination Literacy [www.riverdeep-learning.co.uk](http://www.riverdeep-learning.co.uk)



Easyread, Oxford Learning [www.easyreadsystem.com](http://www.easyreadsystem.com)  
EasyTech [www.learnpath.com](http://www.learnpath.com)  
Fast Track Phonics, Success for All [www.successforall.org.uk](http://www.successforall.org.uk)  
Fun with Phonics, BBC Active [www.bbcactivefunwithphonics.com](http://www.bbcactivefunwithphonics.com)  
Rigby Star, Heinemann [www.rigbystar.co.uk](http://www.rigbystar.co.uk)  
Jelly and Bean [www.jellyandbean.co.uk](http://www.jellyandbean.co.uk)  
Jolly Phonics, Jolly Learning [www.jollylearning.co.uk](http://www.jollylearning.co.uk)  
Kar2ouche [www.kar2ouche.com](http://www.kar2ouche.com)  
KnowledgeBox <http://uk.knowledgebox.com/standard.html>  
Letterland, Letterland International [www.letterland.com](http://www.letterland.com)  
Letters and Sounds: Principles and practice of high quality phonics, National Literacy Strategy  
[www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/clld](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/clld)  
Lexia Early, Foundation and Quick Reading Test, Lexia [www.readingsoftware.com](http://www.readingsoftware.com)  
Literacy World , Heinemann [www.heinemann.co.uk/Primary/Primary.aspx](http://www.heinemann.co.uk/Primary/Primary.aspx)  
Nessy Learning Programme, Net Educational Systems  
[www.nessy.com/nessylearningprogramme](http://www.nessy.com/nessylearningprogramme)  
Oxford University Press, Reading Tree [www.oup.co.uk](http://www.oup.co.uk)  
Phonics: A complete synthetic programme, Scholastic [www.teachershop.scholastic.co.uk](http://www.teachershop.scholastic.co.uk)  
POPAT: Programme of Phoneme Awareness Training [www.popat.co.uk](http://www.popat.co.uk)  
Reading Tree, OUP [www.oxfordprimary.co.uk](http://www.oxfordprimary.co.uk)  
Read Write Inc, OUP [www.oxfordprimary.co.uk](http://www.oxfordprimary.co.uk)  
Sound Discovery, Ridgehill [www.syntheticphonics.net/sound-discovery.php](http://www.syntheticphonics.net/sound-discovery.php)  
Sounds-Write, [www.sounds-write.co.uk](http://www.sounds-write.co.uk)  
Step by Step, Galore Park [www.galorepark.co.uk/product/parents/112/step-by-step-reading](http://www.galorepark.co.uk/product/parents/112/step-by-step-reading)  
THRASS: Teaching Handwriting, Reading and Spelling Skills, Thrass UK [www.thrass.co.uk](http://www.thrass.co.uk)  
Wordshark Letters and Sounds, White Space [www.numbershark.co.uk](http://www.numbershark.co.uk)  
Work with Words [www.workwithwords.org.uk](http://www.workwithwords.org.uk)

**If you use programmes which are not listed here, please let us know**

#### **Non-UK:**

100 Book Challenge  
ABD's of Reading  
Academy of Reading  
Accelerated Literacy Learning  
Accelerated Reader  
AfterSchool KidzLit  
Alphabetic Phonics  
Barton Reading & Spelling System  
Be a Better Reader  
Breakthrough to Literacy  
Carbo Reading Styles  
Caught Reading  
CCC  
Charlesbridge Reading Fluency  
Classworks  
Compass Reading  
Comprehension Plus  
Comprehension Upgrade  
Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI)  
Conceptually-Based Strategy Instruction  
Consistency Management Cooperative Discipline (CMCD)



Cross-Aged Literacy Program  
Disciplinary Literacy  
Discover Intensive Phonics for Yourself  
Dolch Reading Program  
Early Reading Intervention (ERI)  
Early Success  
Earobics  
Edmark Reading Program  
Electronic Bookshelf  
Elements of Reading: Comprehension  
Elements of Reading: Fluency  
Elements of Reading: Vocabulary  
Essential Learning System  
Failure Free Reading  
Fast Track Reading  
First Steps  
Fluency First  
Fluency Formula  
Fluent Reader  
FOCUS Reading and Language Program  
Foundations and Frameworks  
Fountas Pinnell Units of Study (Heineman)  
Foundations  
Funnix Reading Programs  
Glass-Analysis method  
Great Books  
Great Leaps  
Harcourt Collections  
Harcourt Signatures  
Harcourt Trophies  
Houghton Mifflin Nation's Choice  
Houghton Mifflin Reading  
Headsprout Early Reading  
Hooked on Phonics®  
Horizons  
HOSTS  
Houghton Mifflin Horizons  
Houghton Mifflin Invitations to Literacy  
Houghton Mifflin Legacy of Literacy  
Imagine It!  
IndiVisual Reading  
Intensive Reading Strategies Instruction (IRSI) Model  
Intensive Supplemental Reading  
Invitations to Literacy  
Irlen Method  
Jacob's Ladder  
Jostens/Compass Learning  
Kaleidoscope  
Kindergarten Works  
K-W-L strategy  
Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling  
Language First!  
Language for Thinking



LANGUAGE!  
LeapTrack Assessment & Instruction System  
Learning Experience Approach  
Learning to Read  
Learning Upgrade  
Lexia  
Lightspan  
Like to Read  
Lindamood-Bell  
LiPS  
LitART  
Literacy by Design  
Literacy Seminar  
Little Books  
Macmillan/McGraw-Hill Treasures  
Making Connections  
McGraw-Hill Reading  
McGraw-Hill Spotlight on Literacy  
McGraw-Hill Treasures/Triumphs  
McRAT  
Merit Software  
My Reading Coach  
Open Book Anywhere  
OpenBook to Literacy  
Pathways  
Phonetics First-Focus on Sounds  
Phonics and Friends  
Phonics First Foundations  
Phonics for Reading  
Phono-Graphix  
PLATO  
Project Read  
Putting Reading First in Your Classroom  
Questioning the Author  
Quicktionary Reading Pen II  
Read Naturally  
Read Now  
READ RIGHT  
Read, Write & Type!  
ReadAbout  
Reading Apprenticeship  
Reading Horizons  
Reading in the Content Areas  
Reading Plus  
Reading Success  
Reading to Learn  
Reading Triumphs  
Reading Upgrade  
Read Well  
Responsive Classroom  
Rigby Reading  
Rosetta Stone Literacy  
S.P.I.R.E. and Sounds Sensible



Saxon Phonics  
Scaffolded Reading Experience  
Schoolwide Enrichment Reading Model (SEM-R)  
Seeing Stars  
SIM-Strategic Instruction Model  
Six Minute Solution  
Slingerland  
Smart Way Reading and Spelling  
Sound Sheets  
Spalding Method  
Spell Read  
SRA Reading  
START-IN  
STEPS (Sequential Teaching of Explicit Phonics and Spelling)  
Strategic Literacy Initiative  
Success in Reading and Writing  
SuccessMaker  
Sunshine  
TeachFirst  
Teaching Reading Essentials  
Text Mapping Strategy  
Text Talk  
The Imagination Station  
Thinking Works  
Transactional Strategies Instruction  
Tune in to Reading  
Visualizing and Verbalizing  
Vocabulary Improvement Program  
Voices Reading  
Voyager Passport  
Voyager TimeWarp Plus  
Voyager Universal Literacy  
Wilson Reading  
Wright Group Literacy  
WriteToLearn

## Review Methods

An exhaustive search considered more than 2000 published and unpublished articles. It included those that met the following criteria:

- Schools or classrooms using each programme had to be compared to randomly assigned or well-matched control groups.
- Study duration had to be at least 12 weeks
- Outcome measures had to be assessments of the reading content being taught in all classes. Almost all are standardised tests or state assessments.
- The review placed particular emphasis on studies in which schools, teachers, or students were assigned at random to experimental or control groups.

## The Full Report



- The full report, which this review summarises, is Slavin, R.E., Lake, C., Chambers, B., Cheung, A., & Davis, S. *Effective beginning reading programs: A best evidence synthesis*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, Center for Data-Driven Reform in Education. The full report is available at [www.bestevidence.org.uk/](http://www.bestevidence.org.uk/).

