



SUMMATIVE EVALUATION OF SUPER WHY!

OUTCOMES, DOSE, AND APPEAL

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We would like to thank the talented and dedicated efforts of the staff and students who helped with this project. A special thank you goes to Carrie Whitworth for her hard work and dedication to all data collection efforts.

In addition, we would like to thank the children and families who we were fortunate enough to work. Without their time, energy, and enthusiasm, this project would not have been completed.

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Abstract

Decades of research support our understanding that, created with the intent to teach, educational television can go far toward supporting a child's academic and prosocial development (Fisch & Truglio, 2001; Singer & Singer, 2001). The newest addition to the educational television landscape is *SUPER WHY!*, a program that uses a narrative framework, participatory requests, and pseudo-contingent feedback to solve problems through storybook reading, modeling of key early literacy skills, and fun, interactive games. In total, 171 preschool children were randomly assigned to a *SUPER WHY!* viewing group or a Control viewing group. Parents were asked to have their children view 20 episodes of their assigned program twice and were asked to keep detailed logs reflecting who was viewing, which episodes were viewed, and how many times each episode was viewed. Children's early literacy skills as measured using both program-specific content learning and normative performance were evaluated prior to viewing, after viewing all episodes at least one time, and after viewing all episodes a second time. Children who viewed *SUPER WHY!* over an 8-week period (i.e., at least 20 hours of viewing) outperformed their Control group peers on nearly all indices of program-specific learning as well as the majority of normative outcomes. Learning was most pronounced for letter knowledge and phonological and phonemic awareness skills, key early precursors to conventional reading success. To produce meaningful change on the outcomes of interest, children typically needed to view fewer than 10 episodes and generally closer to 3 or 4 episodes. Not only did children's early literacy skills demonstrate significant and sustained growth associated with watching *SUPER WHY!*, they also loved the program and its characters. This high level of appeal suggests that *SUPER WHY!* has been successful in supporting learning in a highly engaging environment that is likely to maintain children's interest.

Introduction

Decades of research support our understanding that, created with the intent to teach, educational television can go far toward supporting a child’s academic and prosocial development (Fisch & Truglio, 2001; Singer & Singer, 2001). Since the creation of the foundational program *Sesame Street* in the late 1960s, television shows continue to be developed, tested, revised and improved in order to extend the role of broadcast television as an in-home instructor. This formative and summative evaluation process has provided program developers with an understanding of the way in which educational material must be presented in order for a program to capture a child’s attention, engage him cognitively and ultimately to foster his learning (Anderson, Bryant, Wilder, Santomero, Williams & Crawley 2000; Rice, Huston & Wright, 1982). The most recent addition to television’s educational landscape is a program called *SUPER WHY! (SW)*. This series is aimed at viewers 3 to 6 years of age and focuses on the development of critical early literacy skills including alphabet and word family knowledge, spelling, comprehension, vocabulary and story structure. What makes *SW* unique is its incorporation of interactive features similar to those found to be successful in engaging viewers in the program *Blue’s Clues* (Anderson, 2000). The on-screen “teachers” in *SW* speak to and ask questions of at-home viewers in order to connect with them and direct their learning. By using relatable characters, familiar stories, interactive games, humor, and a sense of adventure in each story, *SW* encourages kids to approach the literacy curriculum in an engaging way. Each episode of *SW* exposes viewers to the elements of literacy that are fundamental to later, successful reading: stories, characters, language development, vocabulary, letter identification, letter sounds, rhyming, word families, comprehension, and text.¹ The foundation of the curriculum is that, through interactivity and practice, preschoolers will both learn to read and love to read.

Purpose

This study was undertaken with the dual purposes of determining the ability of the children’s educational television program *SUPER WHY!* to effectively help children acquire key early literacy skills (i.e., language development, letter knowledge, phonological and phonemic awareness, and print conventions) as well as evaluating the appeal of *SUPER WHY! (SW)* for preschool children. Specifically, did the program produce positive changes in the acquisition of these early literacy skills; how much *SUPER WHY!* did it take to produce meaningful changes; and did children like the program? An experimental research design was used to answer these questions. Children were randomly assigned to one of two groups: a *SUPER WHY!* viewing group and a control group (i.e., viewed an alternate program). This approach allowed us to answer basic questions about the program’s ability to produce growth in early literacy skills over time. Specific program objectives evaluated included:

- ✧ **Objective 1: Did children learn the actual content demonstrated on *SUPER WHY!*?**
- ✧ **Objective 2: Did program-specific content learning produce changes on standardized measures of early literacy that are predictive of conventional reading success?**
- ✧ **Objective 3: How much exposure to *SUPER WHY!* does it take to produce meaningful change?**
- ✧ **Objective 4: Did children like *SUPER WHY!*?**

¹ Information about the program’s educational philosophy was obtained from the *Super Why!* website.

Method

Participants

A total of 171 children and families (Mean age = 58.79 months, SD = 7.62; 56.1% boys) participated in this research project. Children and families were recruited from preschools located in a large Pacific Northwestern city. After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Pennsylvania, children with parental consent participated in the assessments and viewing sessions in their homes ($n = 133$) or schools ($n = 38$)². Table 1 describes the participants in more detail. The children and families in this study ranged from lower socioeconomic status (SES) to higher SES.

Table 1. Child and Family Demographic Characteristics Overall and By Group

	All	<i>SUPER WHY</i>	Control
Sample Size	171	106	65
Child Characteristics			
Gender	56.1% boys	58.5% boys	52.3% boys
Age	58.79 months	60.20 months	56.59 months
Birth Order	1.60	1.60	1.61
Family Characteristics			
Parental Education	15.69 years (SD = 4.52)	15.80 years	15.53 years
Mother's Education	15.49 years (SD = 1.96)	15.58 years (SD = 1.88)	15.35 years (SD = 2.09)
Father's Education	15.89 years (SD = 2.21)	16.02 years (SD = 2.10)	15.70 years (SD = 2.37)
Family Income (Real)	\$15K - \$400K	\$15K - \$400K	\$19K - \$300K
Family Income (Adjusted)	\$8K - \$223K	\$8K - \$223K	\$10K - \$167K
Income-to-Needs	0.60 to 12.70	0.60 – 7.94	0.62 – 6.06
Family Size	4.08 (SD = 0.98)	4.11 (SD = 0.99)	4.03 (SD = 0.97)
Parental Age	38.93 (SD = 4.52)	39.00 (SD = 4.23)	38.84 (SD = 4.99)

² There were no systematic differences associated with where children's testing occurred.

Study Design

A four-tiered approach to gauge the impact of *SUPER WHY!* was used. First, program-specific content learning was assessed through a variety of tasks that measured children's learning of actual and similar program content. Although learning program-specific content is a necessary pre-condition, a more critical evaluation of the strength of a program is whether children demonstrate more generalized gains on standardized assessments of early literacy skills (Fisch, Kirkorian, & Anderson, 2005). Third, after establishing that Super Why helps children acquire early literacy skills, it was important to determine just how much exposure was needed to produce meaningful change on the outcomes of interest. Fourth, when children participate in an experimental study, the researchers are able to manipulate the content that children view. When gauging the overall impact of a program, it is essential to not only demonstrate learning but also demonstrate appeal (Fisch, 2004). If children like a program, they will be more likely to continue to view that program outside of the experimental setting, learn that program's specific content, and transfer program-specific learning to more generalized gains. The fourth tier of assessment involved an evaluation of how much children like a program and its characters including how likely they are to continue watching that program on their own.

- ***First, did children learn the actual content demonstrated on the show?***

We answered this question in two ways. Four different program-specific tasks were created to measure language development (i.e., symbol and word identification); letter knowledge (i.e., upper and lower case letter identification); and phonological and phonemic awareness (i.e., aural/print referent matching and blending). It was also important to determine whether program-specific content was generalizable to program-similar content. For instance, children were asked to identify picture symbols (i.e., rebus) used in episodes of *SUPER WHY!* Then, children were asked to identify similar picture symbols not used in *SUPER WHY!* episodes. In this way, we were able to determine whether children learned actual content and whether they could use this knowledge to complete identical tasks with similar content.

- ***Second, did program-specific content learning produce changes on standardized measures of early literacy that are predictive of later reading success?***

Program-specific content learning is essential. Without this learning, the likelihood of obtaining more generalized gains is low. Transfer of learning, or generalization of skills learned from program-specific content, is the ultimate goal in education and often challenging to obtain (Fisch et al, 2005). Learning transfer was evaluated using 11 indices of early literacy skills that corresponded to the skills featured in *SUPER WHY!* Ten of these indices measured early literacy skills individually: alphabet knowledge (2 tests); phonological awareness (1 test); phonemic awareness (3 tests); oral language knowledge (1 test); and print conventions (3 tests) while one test measured these skills collectively.

- ***Third, how much exposure to Super Why does it take to produce meaningful change?***

Once the efficacy of viewing *SUPER WHY!* was established, the next set of questions related to the amount of exposure or the dose of *SUPER WHY!* needed to produce meaningful change on the outcomes of interest. Performing a dose analysis provides media creators with a sense of the skills that develop quickly as a result of exposure to *SUPER WHY!* as well as the skills that may need more exposure or changes to content in order for meaningful change to occur.

- ***Fourth, did children like the program?***

Creating programs that teach young children various content or skills is a fairly straightforward process. There are many examples of learning tools or curricula (i.e., televised programs, games, books, computer software, internet sites, or toys) that effectively teach children new skills. The larger challenge when creating these learning tools is to create them in such a way that children like them, want to continue to use them, and subsequently evidence transfer of learning. Preschoolers participated in an extensive assessment of the appeal of *SUPER WHY!*

Taken together, this four-tiered evaluation model provides information about the depth of impact (from specific content to general reading ability), the amount of viewing necessary for impact, and whether and what children liked about *SUPER WHY!*.

Socioeconomic Status

While educational television has been found to be a particularly powerful intervention for all children (see Fisch, 2004), some of the largest effects have been noted for children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g., Linebarger, Kosanic, Greenwood, & Doku, 2004). Socioeconomic status (SES) provides an index of the financial, human, and social capital or resources that a family has. In past research, SES has been measured in a variety of ways that typically encompass, either individually or as a composite, family income, parental education level, parental occupation, and family size. Children from families with more financial, human, and social capital often have access to more and varied print materials, are read to more often, have more cognitively stimulating toys and materials available, visit libraries and bookstores more frequently, and have more and higher-quality positive interactions with their parents and other caregivers (e.g., Hart & Risley, 1995). In contrast, children whose families have less capital or fewer resources often live in neighborhoods with little access to high-quality print (e.g., fewer and lower quality books in school and public libraries or for purchase, signs with graffiti that makes them illegible; Neuman & Celano, 2001), attend schools that are predominantly low-achieving, and have parents who may lack time, energy, education, and resources to provide their children with adequate early childhood experiences key to fostering their children's early language and literacy skills (Smith, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1997).

In this study, SES categories were formed using a metric derived from combined family income and family size. This metric, called an income-to-needs ratio, was created by dividing family income by the US poverty threshold for a particular family's size (e.g., the 2008 poverty threshold for a family of 4 was \$21,200). Families were recruited from an urban location in the Pacific Northwest. The cost-of-living in this region was higher than the United States national average. As a result, actual incomes were inflated, suggesting that families had more financial, human, or social capital than they really did. Cost-of-living adjustments were made to equate each family's annual income to the United States' average cost-of-living, defined as 1.0. Then, using the US Bureau of Labor Statistics' guidelines, families with income-to-needs ratios below 2.0 were classified as low-income because they were living in or near poverty (i.e.

LOW); ratios between 2.0 and 3.0 were classified as lower middle-class/working-class (i.e., WC); and ratios above 3.0 were classified as middle to upper SES (i.e., MID). See Table 2.

Table 2. Family Characteristics by Socioeconomic Status (SES)

Variable	Low SES (n = 38)	Working-Class SES (n = 48)	Middle/Professional SES (n = 85)	F (2, 170)
Family Income (Real)	\$53,753	\$102,056	\$153,997	71.84***
Family Income (Adjusted)	\$30,047	\$57,049	\$86,083	
Mother's Education	14.61	14.84	16.25	15.19***
Father's Education	15.14	15.84	16.25	3.47*
Mother's Occupation	6.26	7.33	7.95	6.34**
Father's Occupation	7.00	7.63	8.56	6.32**
Income-to-Needs	1.33	2.47	4.30	95.57***
Family Size	4.35	4.56	3.69	16.30***

Note. All family characteristics differed by family SES.

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$

Measures

Four basic types of data were used to generate the present report: (1) parent report of family demographics and the home environment; (2) program-specific content measures; (3) standardized early literacy skills measures; and (4) an appeal measure.

Child and Family Characteristics

Questionnaires were hand delivered to parents during data collection sessions with their children or were delivered to parents through the daycare center attended by the child. The survey collected a variety of information from parents. For this report, the following information was used: home media environment; media use; and family demographic information.

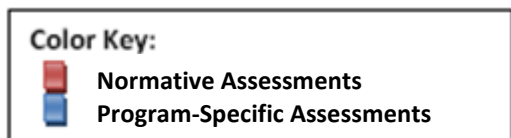
Program-Specific Content Assessments

Program-specific, researcher developed measures assessed whether children learned the actual content featured in the 20 *SW* episodes used in this study. Four different tasks were created to evaluate children's learning of the underlying literacy skills modeled by each of the main characters in *SW*. Each character, each character's skill focus, and the assessments used to measure preschoolers' learning of each skill are detailed below. Children were presented with tasks that featured actual program content (e.g., words or letters featured in different episodes). After completing each of these tasks, children

completed the same type of task with content that was not found in any of the programs. For instance, children were asked to identify a rebus found in the Humpty Dumpty episode (i.e., horses). This rebus symbol was taken directly from the Humpty Dumpty episode. After answering all program-specific rebus items, children were asked to identify other rebus symbols not found in any SW episodes (e.g., fruit). While the skills and the task were the same, the content in the latter items was not found in any of the SW episodes. In this way, we were able to examine whether children were able to complete program-similar assessments using knowledge or skills gained while watching SW.

Normative Assessments

Normative or standardized assessments were selected to evaluate whether viewing SW could help preschoolers generalize any specific program content learning to standardized assessments of early literacy skills. As with the program-specific assessments, the normative tasks were selected to evaluate the literacy skills uniquely supported by each of the 4 main characters.



Rationale for Measurement Strategy

Measures were selected or developed to assess targeted skills demonstrated throughout SW and to reflect the key early literacy skills as described by Neuman and Roskos (2005). These skills were language development, letter knowledge, phonological and phonemic awareness, and print conventions. Both program-specific and normative measures tapped into each of these domains using multiple indices.

Indicators of Language Development

Program-Specific: Rebus Reading Tasks

A *rebus* may be a pictorial, geometric, or completely abstract symbol that represents words or parts of words. Research has shown that rebuses reduce the learning or cognitive load for a child just beginning to read (Woodcock, 1968). This particular assessment was modeled after SW segments that displayed sentences with pictures above some words in the sentence (i.e., when Super Why reads the featured story). In this task, children were shown a picture with a sentence below it. The data collector read the sentence aloud and, when the word with a rebus appeared, the data collector requested that the child “read” the rebus word. Children were scored based on the accuracy of the responses provided. A child received 2 points for providing the exact word; 1 point for providing a word that was similar in meaning or in spelling; and 0 points for providing an incorrect answer. Five scenes depicted words, rebuses, and sentences from randomly selected SW episodes while an additional 5 scenes depicted words, rebuses, and sentences taken from early literacy workbooks. Because the total number of rebuses at each measurement occasion (i.e., pre-test, mid-test, post-test) varied, any analyses done with these tasks used scores that had been converted to standard scores (e.g., children could receive a maximum score of 42 points at pre-test, 38 points at mid-test, and 34 points at post-test).

Program-Specific: Word Knowledge Tasks

These tasks were modeled after the segments in SW where the Super Readers and the story characters encounter a problem and Super Why comes to the rescue by changing a word or short phrase. Super

Why “saves the day!”. In this task, the child was read a short story and was then provided with a picture that had a sentence below it (e.g. “Tom Thumb is very small. He is stuck in a haystack and cannot get out! What should he do to get out? With the power to read, we can change the story and save the day. Let’s change the word “small” in this sentence so we can get Tom Thumb out of the haystack. Which word will help Tom out of the haystack? Quiet or Tall”). In order to “save the day,” the data collector pointed to and repeated the highlighted word in the story that needed to be changed. A visual word bank was presented and read aloud to the child and s/he was asked to identify which word should be used to change the story (similar to the *SW* segment). The data collector then showed the child a new picture depending on what word the child had chosen meant. When necessary, the child was given a prompt to choose a different word. This measure contained 4 items at each testing point. Using episode screenshots, two of the items featured content from a randomly selected episode (i.e. program-specific assessment). Two additional items were created using picture books that mimicked the literacy goal of the *SW* segment (i.e. program-similar assessment). Children were scored based on the answers provided. If the child provided a correct answer right away, s/he was given two points for that item. If the child required a prompt before providing the correct answer (i.e. s/he provided an incorrect answer first, but then provided the appropriate word after being prompted by the data collector), s/he was given 1 point for that item. Items that were not answered correctly were scored zero. Children could receive a maximum of 4 points for the program-specific items and 4 points for the program-similar items.

Normative: IGDI Picture Naming Task

Generalized vocabulary knowledge was evaluated using the *Picture Naming Task*, a tool that measured children’s expressive language knowledge (PNT, Missall & McConnell, 2004). The PNT is an Individual Growth and Development Indicator (IGDI) used to track preschoolers’ vocabulary acquisition on a regular basis over time. Children were presented with images of objects familiar to preschoolers one at a time and asked to name the pictures as fast as possible for one minute. Categories of objects used included animals, food, people, household objects, games and sports materials, vehicles, tools, and clothing. Psychometric properties for this measure were adequate. Specifically, alternate forms reliability ranged between .44 and .78 while test-retest reliability over a two-week period was .69. Concurrent validity estimates with the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test – 3rd Edition (Dunn & Dunn, 1997) and with the Preschool Language Scale – 3 (Zimmerman, Steiner, & Pond, 1992) were adequate, .53 to .79. The PNT was also sensitive to developmental status and growth over time. Children identified 21.4 pictures at the pretest ($SD = 6.7$). Benchmarking norms were provided by the authors: scores at 59 months averaged 16.97 for typically developing children; 16.51 for children from low income backgrounds; and 14.13 for children with identified disabilities (Missall & McConnell, 2004).

Indicators of Letter Knowledge

Program-Specific and Normative: PALS-PreK - Alphabet Knowledge

The PALS PreK Alphabet Knowledge Task (Invernizzi, Sullivan, & Meier, 2004) was used to evaluate both program-specific and normative alphabet letter knowledge. Although this task is a standardized one, the component parts of the task could be used simultaneously to evaluate both program-specific learning of alphabet letters as well as any transfer of specific alphabet letter knowledge to more sophisticated measures of alphabet knowledge (e.g., fluency). While each episode of *SUPER WHY!* has at least one segment specifically focused on letter identification, the letters identified ranged from several per episode to a recitation of all 26 letters. Because the quality of data generated when working with young

children can be impacted by a variety of situational factors, the best course of action was to use measures that could potentially provide multiple indices of each domain assessed. As such, using this particular assessment reduced the data collection time and provided a continuum of letter knowledge from identification of upper case letters to rapid letter naming fluency.

The developers of the PALS included three different tasks that tapped into various components of letter knowledge: 1) identification of the 26 Upper Case letters; 2) identification of the 26 Lower Case letters; and 3) identification of the sounds associated with 23 letters and 3 digraphs. Children are first presented all 26 Upper Case letters in a random order. To be eligible to proceed to the second task, identification of all 26 Lower Case letters, the child must correctly identify 16 Upper Case letters. To be eligible to proceed from Lower Case letters to Letter Sounds, the child must correctly identify 9 Lower Case letters. Psychometrics are adequate with reported reliabilities ranging from .74 to .94.

With this task, we derived three types of scores: 1) the number of letters or sounds a child could correctly identify; 2) the number of children in each viewing group who were able to identify *any* Lower Case letters or Letter Sounds (i.e., only children who reached a certain cut-off were able to proceed to Lower Case letters and Letter Sounds); and 3) fluency scores (i.e., the number of seconds it took to identify one letter or sound). Program-specific indicators of letter knowledge included the number of Upper Case and the number of Lower Case letters correctly identified as well as the percentage of children in each viewing group who were able to identify any lower case letters. Normative indicators of letter knowledge included the number of seconds it took to identify one Upper or Lower Case letter used as an index of letter naming fluency. Finally, the Letter Sounds task was used as an indicator of phonological and phonemic awareness (see below).

1. **Number of Letters or Sounds Correctly Identified.** The average child named 20.1 Upper Case letters at the pretest ($SD = 7.4$). If children correctly identified 16 or more Upper Case letters, they were eligible to take the Lower Case letter task. The average child (including those receiving a score of zero) identified 15.4 Lower Case letters at the pretest ($SD = 5.4$) while the average child who was eligible for the task identified 21.0 Lower Case letters ($SD = 4.7$). If a child was able to accurately identify at least 9 Lower Case letters, the child was eligible to take the Letter Sounds task. The number of sounds correctly identified by the average child (including those who were given a (0) score) was 10.1 letter sounds ($SD = 5.8$) while the average child who was eligible for the Letter Sounds task identified 14.2 letter sounds ($SD = 7.5$) at the pretest. The PALS PreK manual reports a Spring Developmental Range (similar to a benchmark) between 12 and 21 Upper Case letters and between 9 and 17 Lower Case letters for PreKindergarten (or approximately 4-year-olds) children.
2. **Identification of Any Lower Case Names or Letter Sounds.** Children were presented with these tasks if they were able to 1) identify 16 or more Upper Case letters and 2) 9 or more Lower Case letters. Using these criteria, 75.0% of children were eligible to try the Lower Case task and 70.7% of children were eligible to try the Letter Sounds task.
3. **Fluency Scores.** Children's performance on each of the 3 subscales (i.e., Upper Case, Lower Case, Letter Sounds) was timed. Then, the number of letters or sounds accurately identified was divided by the number of seconds it took the child to complete each task. This produced a letter or sound identification per second rate. All children were administered the Upper Case task; therefore, all children had a fluency score associated with Upper Case Letter Knowledge. Only those children eligible to complete the Lower Case Letter Knowledge and the Letter Sounds tasks were included in those analyses. The average child took 2.3 seconds to identify one Upper

Case letter; 3.2 seconds to identify 1 Lower Case letter; and 7.7 seconds to identify one Letter Sound at the pre-test.

Indicators of Phonological and Phonemic Awareness

Program-Specific: Blending Tasks

The blending task was created to evaluate children's understanding that the sounds of spoken language can be blended together to form words. Items were randomly ordered and included syllable blending (i.e., ability to blend syllables together to form a word when the syllables are presented individually) and phoneme blending (i.e., ability to blend individually presented sounds together to form words). While pointing to each picture, the data collector labeled each of 4 pictures on the picture card and asked the child to point to the picture that depicted the onset and rime presented by the evaluator (i.e. the target word). The words/pictures selected for this measure were based on the word families used in the Wonder Red segments. For each item, three additional non-target words/pictures were given as options – two words belonged to the same word family as the target word and one word had the same onset as the target word. At least one non-target word was selected from the database of words appearing onscreen in the program. Program-similar content used the same set of criteria to select words; however, none of the words were found in any SW episodes. Children were given a score of a (1) for every correct answer provided and a (0) for every incorrect answer provided, with a maximum score of 8 on each task at each testing point.

Program-Specific: Speech to Print Matching Tasks

This task evaluated children's understanding of the one-to-one correspondence between printed words and spoken words. Children acquire this skill as they are exposed to words during read alouds or when adults point to words in other contexts (e.g., at the grocery store). Over time, this exposure leads children to understand that words are composed of letters and that sentences are composed of words. Children were shown 20 cards with 3 words printed on each card and asked to point to the word that the examiner said. Cards contained words that were featured in SW episodes and words that were not found in any episodes. Word selection was based on the following criteria, with the level of difficulty increasing from beginning to end: (1) Different initial/final single consonants, different middle vowels; (2) Different initial/final single consonants, different middle vowels (add in a 4-letter word); (3) Same initial single consonants, different middle vowels, different final single consonants; (4) Same initial single consonants, two vowels (with target vowel) the same, one vowel different, different final single consonants; (5) Same initial and final consonants (can introduce two initial blends with the target word having one of these blends), two vowels (with target vowel) the same, one vowel different; (6) Same initial blend for two of the words, one initial blend different (blends: ch, cl, tr, etc.), same final consonant, different middle vowels; (7) Same initial and final single consonants, different middle vowels; (8) Same initial and final single consonants, different middle vowels; (9) Same initial consonants, different middle vowels,[can introduce silent 'e' into two of the words or introduce 'oo' vs. 'ou']; and (10) Same initial consonant, add in one blend , same final phoneme/sound, same middle vowel. There were 10 words based on SW content and an additional 10 words not found in SW. Children were given a score of a (1) for every correct answer provided and a (0) for every incorrect answer provided, with a maximum score of 20 at each testing point.

Normative: PALS-PreK - Rhyme Awareness

Rhyme awareness is one aspect of beginning phonological awareness, or an ability to attend to and manipulate sound units within spoken words (Invernizzi et al., 2004). Children were asked to identify a picture name that rhymed with a target word. Acceptable responses could be verbal or nonverbal (e.g., pointing to the correct picture). This PALS PreK subtest is designed to provide an appropriate level of difficulty for preschool children (neither too difficult nor too easy) and has demonstrated a strong predictive relationship with later reading achievement. Children were given a score of (1) for every correct answer provided and a (0) for every incorrect answer provided, with a maximum score of 10 at each testing point. Children correctly identified 7.5 rhymes at the pretest ($SD = 2.2$). The PALS PreK manual reports a Spring Developmental Range (similar to a benchmark) between 5 and 7 rhymes.

Normative: PALS-PreK – Alphabet Knowledge

A description of this task was detailed above. Only the indices that were derived from this measure to represent Phonological and Phonemic Awareness are discussed below.

1. **Identification of Any Letter Sounds.** The percentage of children in each viewing group who were eligible to take the Letter Sounds task was recorded. On the whole, 70.7% of children at the pretest were eligible to try the Letter Sounds task.
2. **Number of Sounds Correctly Identified.** The number of letter sounds a child was able to identify correctly was recorded. The average child including those who were given a (0) score identified 10.1 letter sounds ($SD = 5.8$) while the average child who was eligible for the task identified 14.2 letter sounds ($SD = 7.5$) at the pretest. The PALS PreK manual reports a Spring Developmental Range (similar to a benchmark) between 4 and 8 letter sounds.
3. **Letter Sounds Fluency.** Children's performance on the Letter Sounds subscale was timed. Then, the number of items accurately identified was divided by the number of seconds it took the child to complete each task. This produced a sound identification per second rate. Only those children eligible to attempt the Letter Sounds task were included in those analyses. The average child took 7.7 seconds at the pre-test to identify one letter sound.

Indicators of Print Conventions

Normative: Print and Story Concepts Tasks

This assessment was adapted from the Head Start FACES Survey (information available online: http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/hs/faces/instruments/child_instru02/language_story.html) to examine children's understanding of basic story concepts including book knowledge, print knowledge, and reading comprehension. Although Print Conventions were modeled onscreen, we measured these skills using only normative tasks.³ Book knowledge examined children's familiarity with storybooks and

³ Typically, print conventions are evaluated using story books. The data collector and the child read a book together. During the book-reading, the data collector asks a series of questions to evaluate children's understanding of book knowledge (i.e., title, author, first page, orientation of the book); print knowledge (i.e., mechanics of reading including from left to right, top to bottom, and word by word); and story comprehension (i.e., identification of actual story events and inferences from these events to content not presented in a story). The normative task averaged 15 minutes per child. Because we had concerns about child fatigue and disinterest

print conventions such as where the front of the book is, where to begin reading, and differentiating print from pictures. Print knowledge examined children's knowledge of the mechanics of reading including reading from left to right, top to bottom, and word-by-word pointing. Reading comprehension measured children's knowledge of a story plot and required them to answer questions based on presented story content (e.g., what is said goodnight to in *Goodnight Moon*) and well as to generate inferences (e.g., how does a character feel) and to make predictions (e.g., what do you think happens next in this story?). Different books were used at each testing point: *Goodnight Moon* by Margaret Wise Brown was used at Pre-Test, *Where's My Teddy?* by Jez Alborough was used at Mid-Test, and *Big Red Barn* by Margaret Wise Brown was used at Post-Test. While most questions were based on a scoring system of (0) incorrect and (1) correct, some of the comprehension questions were worth up to 3 points. Each print and story construct was summed to form three scores for analysis: book knowledge, print knowledge, and reading comprehension. At the pretest, Book Knowledge scores averaged 4.02 of 6.00 ($SD = 1.54$); Print Knowledge scores averaged 2.39 of 4.00 ($SD = 1.53$); and Reading Comprehension scores averaged 6.82 of 9.00 ($SD = 2.58$).

Combined Early Literacy Skills

Normative: Get Ready to Read! Screener

This screener, consisting of 20 items, assessed print knowledge (i.e., knowledge of the letters of the alphabet); book knowledge (recognition of how books work including the difference between words and images); phonological awareness (i.e., understanding that spoken words are composed of individual sounds); phonics (i.e., recognition of the sounds letters make); and writing (i.e., understanding how text should look: letters grouped together into words). Each item required the child to select a response from a group of four pictures (or four letters, words, etc.). Example: "These are pictures of a book. Find the one that shows the back of the book." Example: "Find the letter that makes a *tuh* sound." Example: "Some children wrote their name. Find the one that is written the best." Children were given a score of a (1) for every correct answer provided and a (0) for every incorrect answer provided, with a maximum score of 20 points. The average pretest score was 15.90 ($SD = 3.50$). Scores greater than 11 are predictive of reading success by 2nd grade.

resulting from the use of two different books (i.e., one using SW content and the other not doing so), we only used the normative index.

Procedure

Children were randomly assigned to either a *SW*-viewing group or a Control-viewing group. The control stimulus was a science-based preschool program with no specific focus on literacy (i.e., *Zoboomafoo*). Prior to viewing any television episodes, all children were pre-tested on all program-specific and normative indices. For the first round of viewing, children were instructed to watch 20 episodes of their assigned program over the course of 4 weeks (equivalent to the first season of *SUPER WHY!*). Parents were given viewing logs to complete at each round. The viewing logs asked parents to (1) record who their child watched an episode with (alone, with a friend or sibling, or with a parent) and (2) how many additional times the child viewed that episode. After four weeks of viewing, data collectors administered mid-test assessments to all children. The second round of viewing began after the mid-test point and DVDs were redistributed to the participants⁴. After another 4 weeks of viewing, children were administered post-test assessments along with a program appeal assessment.

Analytical Approach

Simple descriptive statistics (i.e., mean, standard deviation, percentages) are reported to describe the children and their families. Further analyses using cross-tabs, t-tests, and chi-squares were used to test for differences by Group (i.e., *SW* viewers vs. Control viewers); Gender (i.e., boys vs. girls); and SES level (i.e., low SES vs. working-class SES vs. middle to upper SES).

Four covariates were constructed to extract relevant variance associated with both viewing and outcomes as well as to remove possible effects associated with pre-existing child and family characteristics. A child composite was formed by z-score transforming and summing child's birth order, age, and gender. A family composite was formed by z-score transforming and then summing parental age, parental years of education, number of persons living in the home, and yearly income⁵. Finally, two composites representing the child's initial ability were constructed. First, a normative composite was formed by z-score transforming and summing all normative assessment scores minus the measure evaluated in a particular analysis (e.g., for the PALS Upper Case measure, the normative composite consisted of PALS Lower Case, PALS Letter Sounds, PALS Rhyme Awareness, Print and Story Concepts, IGDI Picture Naming, and Get Ready to Read). Second, a researcher-developed composite was formed by z-score transforming and summing all researcher-developed scores minus the measure evaluated in a particular analysis.

Repeated-measures Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) is a procedure that can be used to statistically control for initial group differences (as measured by the child composite, the family composite, and the child's pre-test literacy ability) when evaluating control/viewing effects on outcome measures. Two different models were used to evaluate each outcome. The first set of analyses involved testing the effects of viewing group only. That is, did children who watched *SW* outperform children who watched an alternate program on both program-specific and normative assessments of early literacy? Next, the role of family socioeconomic status (SES) was examined. In these models, both Viewing Group and Family SES were included as factors. Family SES included 3 levels (i.e., low, working-class, middle SES). When multiple tests were conducted for each set of outcomes, Bonferroni adjustments of the alpha level were made to reduce Type 1 error rates (i.e., finding a significant difference when one does not

⁴ The episode presentation was randomized. Participants received a set of randomly ordered episodes to view prior to midtesting. After midtesting, participants received a new set of randomly ordered episodes.

⁵ For analyses involving Family SES, yearly income was deleted from this family composite.

exist). For these analyses, only significant effects associated with Group are reported in the text (i.e., Group; Wave by Group). Along with the statistical significance tests, effect sizes were also reported. Finally, when the sphericity assumption was violated, we used a Huynh-Feldt correction to adjust the degrees of freedom for the within-subjects contrasts.

Contextualizing the Results: Contrasting Statistical Significance with Practical Significance

The significance of a research study and its findings can be evaluated in two ways: statistical and practical. Statistical significance indicates the likelihood or probability that a finding is due to chance and is examined using p-values. For instance, a p-value of 0.05 indicates that a particular effect would occur by chance in 5 of 100 cases or, alternatively, that if a researcher conducted the exact same study under the same conditions 100 times, 5 of those times the observed group differences would not be significant. Practical significance provides an indication of the effectiveness of the intervention by quantifying the magnitude of the differences between groups.

A major goal of any experimental study is to evaluate the statistical significance of various comparisons between groups. In this study, we were interested in evaluating whether the differences between *SW* viewers and Control viewers were significantly different and we used traditional statistical tests (e.g., F-tests, t-tests, Chi-Square) to do so.

Statistical Significance

When researchers communicate the findings of their studies, there is often a focus on whether or not some intervention had the intended effect and less attention to how much of an effect the intervention had. Evaluating whether the intervention had an effect is accomplished using statistical significance testing (SST). SST reflects the odds or the probability that findings were not the result of chance or, alternatively, that these findings are likely to be found again and again if the study were repeated. For instance, when examining group differences, a p-value of 0.05 tells the researcher that the obtained results are expected to occur by chance just 5 times out of 100. Group differences resulting in a p-value of 0.001 would be expected to occur by chance one time out of 1000, increasing our confidence that the differences between groups is real rather than random (i.e., by chance). At times, researchers mistakenly suggest that p-values are representative of the magnitude of an effect (i.e., how big a particular effect is) and that very small p-values (e.g., 0.001) are somehow more meaningful or of greater consequence than effects where a p-value is just 0.05. SST confounds sample size with the magnitude of an effect particularly with large samples. That is, an effect may achieve statistical significance simply because the sample was quite large; however, statistical significance is not equivalent to practical significance. Therefore, statistical significance tests should not be used as a sole measure of how much an intervention “matters.”

Practical Significance

Unlike SST, practical significance reflects the magnitude, or size, of group differences and is referred to as an effect size (Hedges, 2008). This type of information can help researchers determine whether a particular difference is big and meaningful or whether the difference is actually an artifact of a large sample size. Effect sizes provide objective, standardized, and metric-free values that reflect the magnitude of the differences between two groups and are calculated to reflect one of two types of

information: a simple effect size or a standardized effect size. A simple effect size is the raw difference between the means of two groups. Investigators may use this type of effect size when the metric associated with a particular finding is easily interpretable. Standardized effect sizes, on the other hand, measures the difference between groups relative to a pooled standard deviation; that is, the differences between groups are presented as the number of standard deviation units that separate each group. A standard deviation reflects the dispersion of children’s scores around a group mean by providing an index of the expected variation around a mean. A small standard deviation indicates that children’s scores are closely clustered around the mean value while a large standard deviation indicates that the spread of their scores is relatively wide. About 68% of children’s scores will fall between one standard deviation above and one standard deviation below the mean while 95% of children’s scores will fall between two standard deviations above and two standard deviations below the mean. See Figure 1.

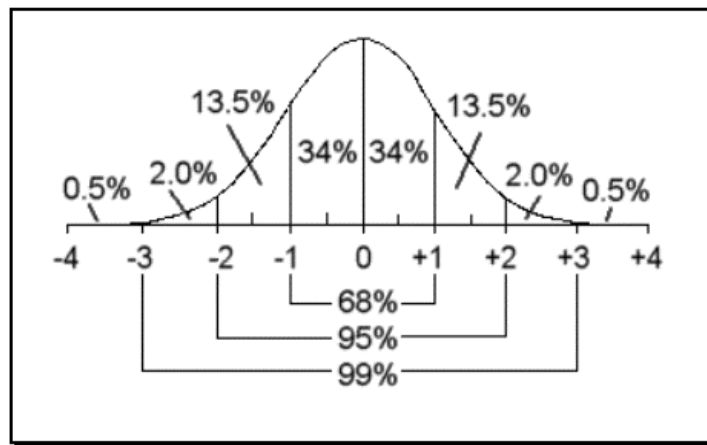


Figure 1. Interpretation of Means and Standard Deviations

In this study, standardized effect sizes are reported as a way to contextualize the magnitude of differences in an equivalent fashion across measures or participants. Cohen’s *d* (Cohen, 1988) was selected because there are suggested benchmarks to aid interpretation and because it is one of the most widely used effect size indices in the literature. When making comparisons involving two groups of children who watched different educational TV programs (i.e., Program A or Program B), obtaining an effect size of 1.0 (with Program A viewers outperforming Program B viewers) indicates that Program A viewers would be expected to score, on average, a standard deviation higher than Program B viewers.

An Example

In this study, the average *SW* viewer from a low SES home obtained a score of 8.63 (out of 10) on the normative Rhyming task while the average Control-Group viewer from a low SES home obtained a score of 7.36. The standard deviation or average variation around the means for each group was 2.11; that is, 68% of the *SW* group’s scores fell between 6.52 and 10.74 while 68% of the Control group’s scores fell between 5.25 and 9.47. The Cohen’s *d* effect size for this comparison is 0.60; that is, the average child in the *SW* group will score 0.60 standard deviation units higher than the average Control group viewer. Whether or not this difference is meaningful depends upon the research base grounding a study, the calculated numerical difference (i.e., 0.60), and a set of benchmarks associated with these numerical

differences. In the behavioral and social sciences, effect sizes tend to be relatively small. As such, Cohen (1988) has offered benchmarks that help researchers interpret the practical significance of an effect and contextualize that effect in the larger scientific realm, although he cautions against blanket use of these benchmarks. Effect sizes associated with previous research examining children’s learning from television content average 0.50, a medium effect. In sum, statistical significance indicates the likelihood or probability of any observed group differences occurring by chance whereas practical significance estimates the magnitude of these group differences.

In sum, statistical significance indicates the likelihood or probability of any observed group differences occurring by chance whereas practical significance estimates the magnitude or size of these group differences.

Effect Size ⁶	Interpretation
< 0.20	Trivial
0.20 to 0.49	Small Effect
0.50 to 0.79	Medium Effect
≥ 0.80	Large Effect

⁶ Please note that effect sizes, like correlation coefficients, should be interpreted for both magnitude and direction. Specifically, magnitude of an effect size indicates the strength of the relationship while direction refers to which of the two groups or mean scores being compared is larger. In this report, a negative effect size indicates that the control group has outperformed the Super Why viewing group while a positive effect size indicates that the Super Why viewing group outperformed the control group. An effect size of -0.64 indicates a medium effect in favor of the control group while an effect size of 1.24 indicates a large effect in favor of the Super Why viewing group.

Overall Results

Home Media Environment

All analyses documenting the home media environment were checked for Gender and Family SES differences. Only when significant differences by one of these 2 factors were found are they presented below; otherwise, results were aggregated across all participants.

Access to Print Materials in the Home

The majority of parents reported having regular subscriptions to both child (51.5%) and parent magazines (61.5%); a dictionary or encyclopedia (82.1%); newspapers (76.9%); and catalogs (58.9%). About one-third of children had comic books (32.1%) while 37.1% had access to religious texts. About 12% had 25 or fewer children’s books (12.3%); 12.8% had between 26 and 50 books available; 40.4% had between 51 and 100 books; 34.5% had more than 100 books.

SES differences were found for the percentage of families with subscriptions to child magazines⁷; subscriptions to parent magazines⁸; and ownership of religious texts⁹. See Figure 2. There were no differences found by Gender.

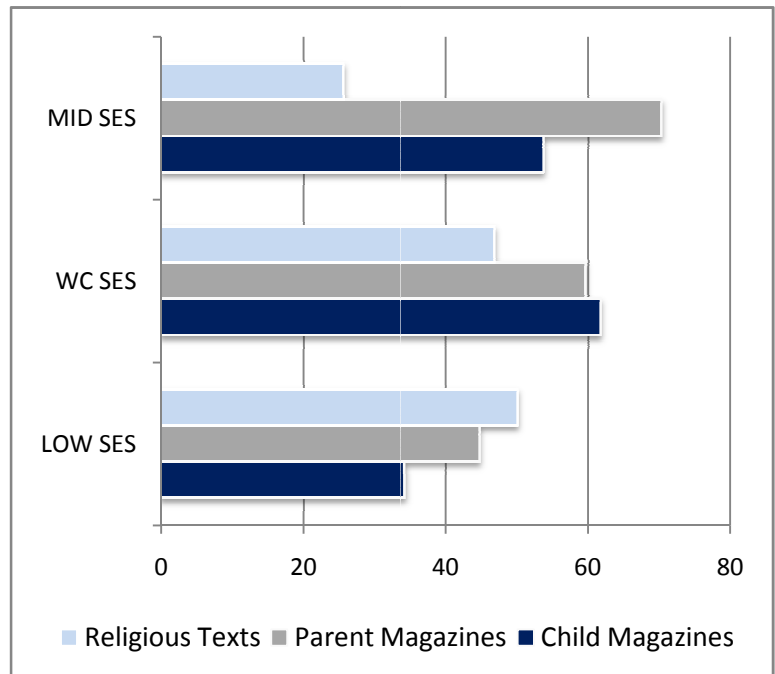


Figure 2. Percentage of Families with Access to Print Materials by Family SES

Note. LOW= low SES; WC = working-class SES; MID = middle to upper SES

Media Access

All families reported owning at least 1 television set ($M = 1.87, SD = 1.21$) and 1 DVD player ($M = 1.62, SD = 1.21$). There were, on average, 1.09 VCRs; 2.48 radios; 1.67 computers; 0.32 Game Boys; and 0.40 video game consoles per home. The majority of families reported having a radio (i.e., 97.1%); a computer (i.e., 97.7%); and internet access (i.e., 97.9%). Nearly two-thirds of children had electronic literacy toys (i.e., 47.4%); 22.3% had video game console systems; and 19.3% had hand-held video games.

SES differences were significant for a number of different media. Families from working-class SES backgrounds had more TVs, DVDs, computers, computers with internet access, and electronic toys than their peers from low SES families. Middle to upper SES families reported owning more computers than their peers from low SES families and fewer electronic toys and DVD players than their peers from working-class SES families. See Table 2.

⁷ $X^2 = 6.66, p < .05$

⁸ $X^2 = 7.30, p < .05$

⁹ $X^2 = 9.25, p < .01$

Bedroom Media

Over half of the children had no media in their bedrooms (i.e., 60.8%) while 28.7% had just one medium in their rooms (usually a radio) and 10.5% had 2 or more media in their rooms. There was a maximum of 6 types of media in a child's bedroom. Specifically, 7.6% of the children had bedroom TVs; 4.1% had VCRs; 5.8% had DVD players; 32.2% had radios; 1.8% had video game console systems; 2.9% had computers; and 1.8% had internet access.

No boys and 4.6% of girls had internet access in their rooms¹⁰. There were no other significant differences in the presence of bedroom media by gender or family SES.

Children's Media Use

Children watched 5.61 hours of on-air television and 2.90 hours of DVD/videos per week. Book reading took up 3.00 hours per week while children spent 25.5 minutes per week playing with electronic literacy toys. Children spent 47.87 minutes per week playing on the computer and an additional 31.43 minutes on the internet. Console video game use averaged 23.65 minutes per week while hand held video game use averaged 15.14 minutes per week. Children spent 11.25 hours per week playing inside with toys and 5.94 hours per week playing outside with toys.

Boys spent marginally more time watching television (i.e., 6.13 hours per week) and playing video games (i.e., 32.08 minutes per day)¹¹ compared with girls who watched TV for 4.89 hours per week and played video games about 14.76 minutes per week¹². Boys also played hand held video games for about 28 minutes per day while girls played just 1.2 minutes¹³. Children from low SES families watched more DVDs and videos (i.e., 3.78 hours) when compared with children from working-class SES (i.e., 3.21 hours) and middle SES families (i.e., 2.37 hours). Boys living in low and middle SES homes spent more time playing outside than their working-class SES peers while girls living in working-class SES homes spent more time playing outside than their peers from low or middle SES families. See Table 2. There were no group differences in children's media use.

¹⁰ $X^2 = 4.10, p < .05$

¹¹ $F(1, 170) = 3.41, p < .10$

¹² $F(1, 170) = 3.47, p < .10$

¹³ $F(1, 170) = 4.73, p < 0.05$

Table 2. Differences in Media Availability and Use by Socioeconomic Status

	Number Available				% Who Use or Do Each Week				Hours Used Per Week				
	LOW	WC	MID	F(2, 170)	LOW	WC	MID	X ² (169)	LOW	WC	MID	F(2, 170)	
Television	1.59 ^a	2.41 ^a	1.56	5.75**	76.3	91.7	90.6	5.93 ⁺	5.92	5.01	5.60	0.53	
DVD/Videos	1.40 ^a	2.08 ^{ac}	1.24 ^c	5.54**	92.1	95.8	84.7	4.39	3.78	3.21	2.37	3.47*	
Books	104.17	109.60	106.15	0.05	100.0	91.7	92.9	3.13	3.23	3.18	2.82	0.86	
Playing Inside					86.8	93.8	85.9	1.94	12.62	12.48	9.72	2.42	
Playing Outside					89.5	93.8	83.5	3.11	5.30	5.88	6.03	0.31	
									Boys' Outside Hours	6.59	4.75	6.89	3.34* ¹⁴
									Girls' Outside Hours	4.00	7.01	5.18	
									Minutes Used Per Week				
VG Console	0.66	0.54	0.31		28.9	31.3	36.5	0.80	35.36	14.70	20.21	1.44	
Hand Held VG	0.27	0.37	0.23		13.2	14.6	23.5	2.65	25.87	7.21	10.79	0.71	
Computer Only	1.37	1.70	1.49		60.5	64.6	52.9	1.84	54.47	56.46	38.89	1.35	
Internet Only					34.2	45.8	43.5	1.32	39.20	37.82	22.11	1.40	
Electronic Toys	0.35 ^a	0.63 ^{ab}	0.40 ^b	5.53**	36.8	50.0	51.6	2.18	20.02	31.56	24.85	0.49	

Note. LOW = Low SES based on income-to-needs ratio between 0.0 and 2.0; WC = Working Class SES with income-to-needs ratio between 2.0 and 3.0; MID = Middle to Upper SES based on income-to-needs ratio at or above 3.0.

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; + $p < 0.10$

¹⁴ The main effect of family SES was not significant; however, there was a significant interaction between a child's gender and family SES. The F-value reported for outside hours is associated with the interaction term.

Objective 1: Did children learn the actual content demonstrated on SUPER WHY!?

The analytical approach for Objective 1 involved two steps: 1) ANCOVAs that tested group differences and 2) ANCOVAs that tested the moderating role of Family SES. All tests evaluating group differences are reported below regardless of statistical significance. Tests evaluating whether a family's SES moderated group differences (i.e., are group differences the same or different by each level of family SES) are reported below only when these tests were statistically significant. A moderated effect is present if one or both of the following interactions are significant: the 3-way interaction among Group, SES, and Wave or the 2-way interaction between Group and SES. A moderator is a variable that affects the strength of the relationship between the treatment and outcome. In this regard, children from low SES families may be more powerfully affected by the intervention when compared with children from higher SES families.

Indicators of Language Development

Symbolic Representation Using Rebus Symbols

The majority of preschoolers are unable to read print fluently. Adding pictures (or rebuses) above key content words (e.g., see Figure 3, a castle picture was placed above the word 'castle') facilitates the development of children's early literacy skills by supporting their understanding that visual symbols are linked to print forms. Children are able to use this pictorial or visual information to link a symbol to its print referent as well as integrate this information with its place and relevance in the story.

Because the total scores for each rebus assessment differed by wave of assessment, the total scores were transformed into standard scores (i.e., z-scores).¹⁵ Rebus scores featuring program-specific content were significantly higher for SW viewers (i.e., z-score = 0.13) in comparison with Control viewers (i.e., z-score = -0.21)¹⁶. In addition, the SW viewers' scores significantly increased over time, resulting in higher scores at both the mid-test and the post-test when compared with Control viewers' performance over time¹⁷. See Figure 4. Overall, SW viewers scored 38.1% higher than their Control viewing peers. Rebus scores also significantly improved over time for SW viewers (i.e., from pretest to post-test, SW viewers' scores improved) and significantly declined for Control viewers.



Figure 3. Rebus Example (A picture of a castle above its printed referent)

¹⁵ Standard scores allow researchers to place scores across tests or assessment occasions on the same metric thereby making any comparisons across wave equivalent. Standard scores convert actual scores to a standard scale with a mean equal to (0) and a standard deviation of (1).

¹⁶ $F(1, 166) = 12.30, p < 0.001$

¹⁷ $F(1.95, 323.7) = 21.37, p < 0.001$

Children’s rebus performance for words and pictures not found in SW episodes did not differ by group¹⁸ (i.e., z-scores: SW = -0.01, Control = 0.01).

- Family SES did not moderate the relation between this indicator (i.e., Rebus Symbols) and a child’s viewing group.

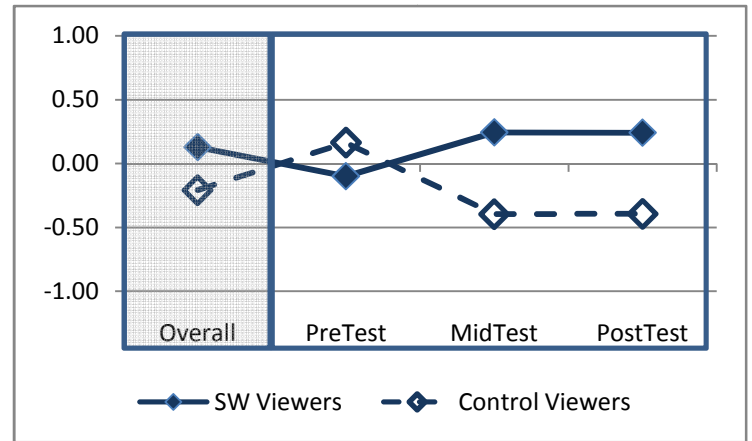


Figure 4. Program-Specific Rebus Z-Scores Overall and Across Wave by Group

Word Knowledge

The word knowledge task evaluated children’s understanding of the story as well as key content words associated with the story problem. Children were encouraged to ‘change the story’ by selecting an appropriate word to replace the current story word in order to solve a storybook character’s problem.

Word Knowledge scores featuring program-specific content were significantly higher for Control viewers (i.e., 3.53) in comparison with SW viewers (i.e., 3.71)¹⁹. Overall, Control viewers scored 5.1% higher than their SW viewing peers.

Children’s word knowledge scores for words not found in SW episodes did not differ by group²⁰ (i.e., SW = 3.52, Control = 3.63) although, similar to the program-specific results, scores favored Control viewers.

- Family SES did not moderate the relation between this indicator (i.e., Word Knowledge) and a child’s viewing group.

¹⁸ F(1, 166) = 0.04, n.s.

¹⁹ F(1, 166) = 6.76, p < 0.01

²⁰ F(1, 166) = 2.37, n.s.

Indicators of Phonological and Phonemic Awareness

Speech-to-Print Matching

The speech-to-print matching tasks evaluated how well children were able to match spoken words to their print equivalents. Children are presented with three words and asked to point to the word they think the examiner said. As the test unfolds, the discriminations to be made across the three words become substantially more subtle. Figure 5 displays scores for program-specific content and program-similar content.

Speech-to-Print Matching scores featuring program-specific content were significantly higher for *SW* viewers (i.e., 5.46) in comparison with Control group viewers (i.e., 4.56)²¹, a difference of 19.7%. There was also a significant 2-way interaction between Group and Wave²². *SW* viewers outperformed Control group viewers at the pretest and mid-test while there were no differences at the post-test. Given these initial differences and the lack of differences at the post-test, these results should be interpreted with caution.

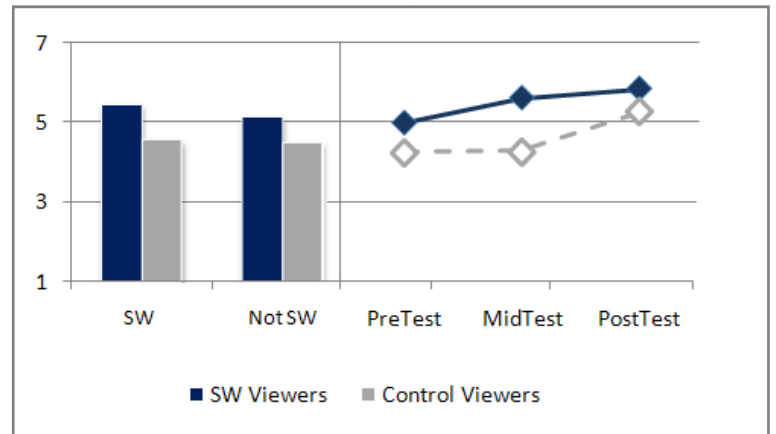


Figure 5. Speech-to-Print Matching Scores for Both SW and Not SW Content by Group Alone and SW Content Scores by Group Across Wave

Children's speech-to-print matching scores for words not found in *SW* episodes also differed significantly by group²³. *SW* viewers outperformed their Control viewing peers by 14.0% (i.e., *SW* = 5.14; Control = 4.51). There were no significant pretest differences between groups.

- Family SES did not moderate the relation between this indicator (i.e., Speech-to-Print Matching) and a child's viewing group.

Blending

The blending tasks evaluated how well children were able to recombine syllables or phonemes when presented in isolation (e.g., high [pause] chair) by selecting the corresponding picture from a set of 4. As the test unfolded, the words shifted from onset/rime splits (e.g., show me /b/ [pause] /air/) to phoneme splits (e.g., /b/ [pause] /a/ [pause] /g/). Figure 6 displays scores for program-specific content.

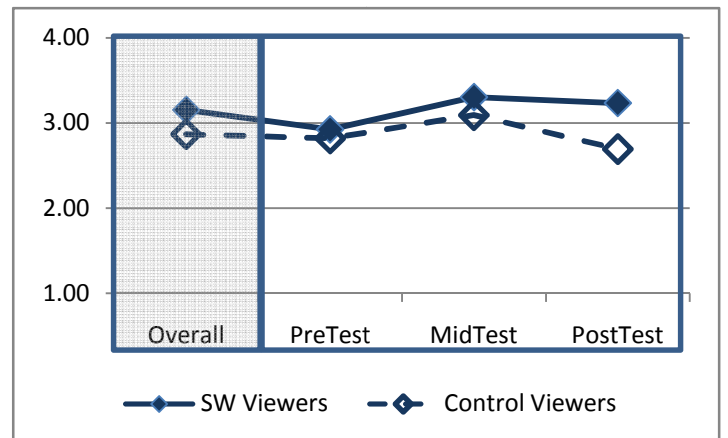


Figure 6. Program-Specific Blending Scores Overall and Across Wave by Group

²¹ $F(1, 166) = 16.70, p < 0.001$

²² $F(1, 166) = 3.51, p < 0.05$

²³ $F(1, 166) = 8.09, p < 0.005$.

Blending scores featuring program-specific content were significantly higher for SW viewers in comparison with Control viewers²⁴. In addition, the SW viewers' performance significantly increased over time, resulting in higher scores at both the mid-test and the post-test when compared with Control viewers' performance over time²⁵. Overall, SW viewers scored 9.9% higher than their Control viewing peers at the post-test and grew 10.6% from pretest to post-test compared with Control viewers who declined slightly (i.e., by 4.4%) from pretest to post-test.

Children's blending scores for words not found in SW episodes did not differ by group (i.e., SW viewers = 3.06; Control viewers = 2.94)²⁶

- *Family SES did moderate the relation between this indicator (i.e., Blending) and a child's viewing group for SW-related content.*

Both the 3-way interaction among Group, Family SES, and Wave²⁷ and the 2-way interaction between Group and Family SES²⁸ were significant. At all levels of Family SES, SW-viewing preschoolers outperformed their Control-viewing peers. Differences were statistically significant for Low and Working-Class children while the difference for children from Middle SES families was marginally significant ($p < .06$). See Figure 7.

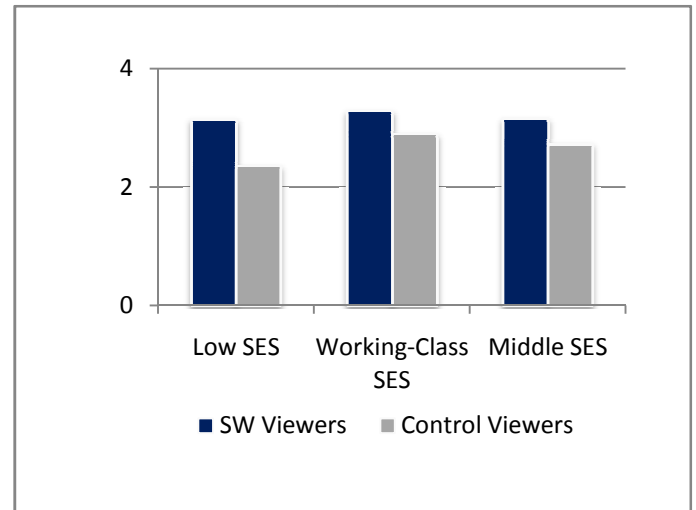


Figure 7. SW-Related Blending by Group and Family SES

Indicators of Letter Knowledge

Alphabet Knowledge

Alphabet Knowledge was composed of three scores: how many of the 26 Upper Case letters children identified; how many of the 26 Lower Case letters children identified; and the percentage of children in each group who were eligible to try the Lower Case assessment.

Upper Case Knowledge (out of 26): SW viewers' performance significantly increased over time, resulting in higher scores at the mid-test and the post-test when compared with Control viewers' performance over

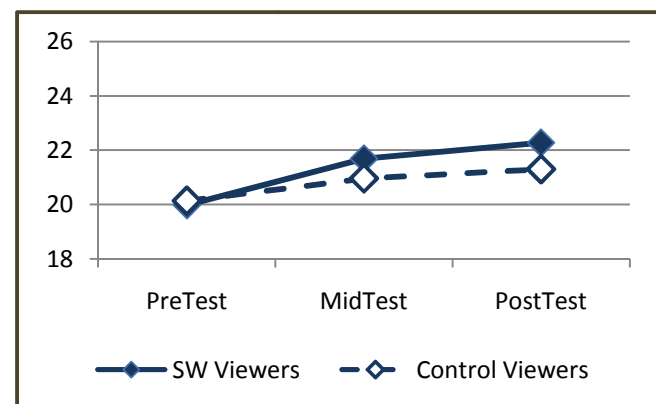


Figure 8. Upper Case Letter Knowledge Over Time

²⁴ $F(1, 166) = 9.78, p < 0.05$

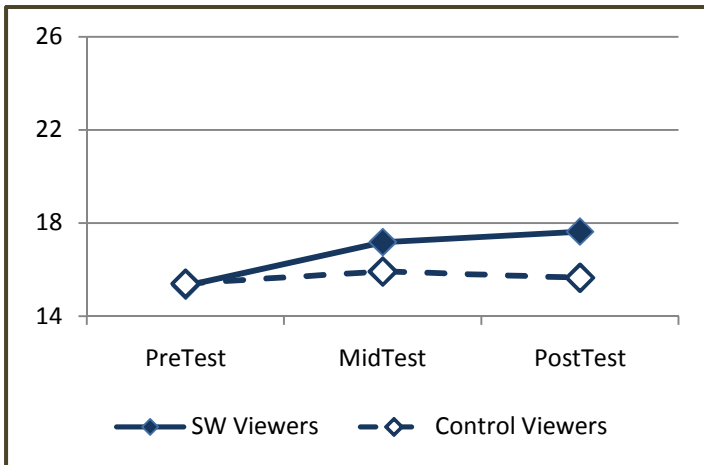
²⁵ $F(2, 165) = 3.62, p < 0.002$

²⁶ $F(1, 166) = 1.39, n.s.$

²⁷ $F(4, 324) = 2.92, p < 0.05$

²⁸ $F(2, 162) = 3.89, p < 0.05$

time²⁹. At the post-test, the SW group correctly identified 22.28 Upper Case letters compared with 21.29 Upper Case letters for the Control Group viewers. See Figure 8. Overall, SW viewers scored 4.7% higher than their Control viewing peers and grew 11.5% from pretest to post-test while Control viewers grew just 5.8%.



Lower Case Knowledge (out of 26): The same pattern for Upper Case letters was also found for Lower Case letters. SW viewers' performance significantly increased over time, resulting in higher scores at both the mid- and the post-test when compared with Control viewers' scores over time³⁰. At the post-test, the SW group correctly identified 17.63 Lower Case letters compared with 15.65 Lower Case letters for the Control Group viewers. See Figure 9. Overall, SW viewers scored 12.7% higher than their Control viewing peers and grew 15.2% from pretest to post-test while Control viewers grew just 1.6%.

Figure 9. Lower Case Letter Knowledge Over Time by Group

Identification of Any Lower Case Letters: The percentage of children in the SW Group who were eligible to try the Lower Case Letter Knowledge task at the post-test was significantly higher than the percentage of children in the Control Group who were eligible at the post-test: 87.7% of SW viewers compared with 72.3% of Control Group viewers³¹.

- *Family SES did not moderate the relation between this indicator (i.e., Alphabet Knowledge) and a child's viewing group.*

²⁹ Upper Case: $F(1.95, 323.40) = 4.39, p < 0.02$

³⁰ Lower Case: $F(1.96, 325.41) = 4.02, p < 0.02$

³¹ $\chi^2 = 6.46, p < 0.02$

Conclusions Based on Program-Specific Performance

Did children learn the actual content demonstrated on SUPER WHY!?

The short answer is yes, preschoolers watching *SUPER WHY!* did learn the content delivered in the episodes. Specifically, preschool children who watched *SUPER WHY! (SW)* scored higher on nearly all measures of program-specific curricular content including Indicators of Language Development, Letter Knowledge, and Phonological and Phonemic Awareness. For Language Indicators, Symbolic Representation favored *SW* viewers while Word Knowledge favored Control group viewers. To estimate the magnitude of these differences (i.e., the practical significance), effect sizes were calculated. For comparisons favoring *SUPER WHY!*, the average effect size was 0.35 (ranging from .04 to .59) while the effect size for the Word Knowledge tasks that favored Control group viewers was -0.74. Recall that effect sizes under 0.20 are trivial; between 0.20 and 0.49 are small; between 0.50 and 0.79 are moderate; and above 0.80 are large. See Figure 10 for all effect sizes associated with program-specific and program-similar tasks.

Language development was evaluated by testing children's ability to link visual symbols with their print referents (i.e., Symbolic Representation) and by testing whether children were able to select an appropriate word that would alter the events in a story and solve a problem. *SW* viewers were able to identify more of the symbols found in *SW* episodes when compared with Control group viewers. This effect was medium in size (i.e., 0.57); however, knowledge of symbols that children directly viewed did not help children identify unfamiliar rebus symbols. One thought is that seeing each rebus within the context of a *SW* episode restricted the pool of potential meanings for a particular rebus, while symbols viewed for the first time as part of our evaluation could represent a variety of words or constructs. Without any prior familiarity or context to support symbol identification, both groups of children scored similarly. The Word Knowledge findings proved to be quite interesting. Children in the Control group outperformed the *SW* viewers. These results were initially puzzling, particularly since this task was created by taking screen shots of the relevant parts of episodes where Super Why asked the viewers to change the story. One possibility is that *SW* viewers may have mimicked this sequence of actions and actually chosen the wrong word first just like Super Why does onscreen and then selected the correct word. To examine this possibility, post-test scores for both the *SW*-specific and the *SW*-unrelated content were correlated with a child's total exposure to *SW*. Finding that more exposure was related to poorer performance would support this possibility. *SW*-specific word knowledge scores did decline as the number of *SW* episodes viewed increased (i.e., $r = -.19, p < 0.05$). The relation between *SW*-unrelated content and number of *SW* episodes viewed was in the same direction but not significant (i.e., $r = -0.11, p < 0.17$).

Letter knowledge was measured by asking children to identify all Upper Case and Lower Case letters as part of the PALS PreK assessment. While the differences between viewing groups achieved statistical significance, the effect sizes indicated that the magnitude of these differences was trivial. Pretest scores on both measures were relatively high suggesting that there was little room for growth. We also calculated the percentage of children in each viewing group who were able to identify at least one Lower Case letter finding that nearly 88% of *SW* viewers could identify at least one Lower Case letter compared with 72% of Control viewers, a significant difference.

Indicators of Phonological and Phonemic Awareness involved children's ability to match aural presentations of words with their print forms (i.e., Speech-to-Print Matching) and to successfully identify an object or person by accurately blending aurally-presented syllables or phonemes together (i.e.,

Blending). Both indicators involved the presentation of words that were found in *SW* episodes as well as similar words that were not found in any *SW* episodes. Statistical significance was found for both tasks using content found in *SW* episodes. The magnitude of the effect for the Speech-to-Print Matching was medium (i.e., 0.59) and large for the Blending task (i.e., 0.87). For content not found in *SW* episodes, only Speech-to-Print Matching achieved statistical significance while effect sizes for both tasks were in the small range (i.e., 0.33 for Speech-to-Print Matching and 0.29 for Blending). The results for the *SW*-specific Blending task were further moderated by family SES. Children from low SES and working-class families obtained scores that were significantly higher than their Control group peers while *SW* viewers from middle SES families actually did slightly less well than their Control group peers. The magnitude of the differences was relatively large for the working-class children; watching *SUPER WHY!* resulted in an effect size of .54, a medium effect. In contrast, while in opposite directions, the magnitude of the differences for children from low and middle SES families was, at best, small (i.e., an effect size below ± 0.20 is trivial while an effect size between ± 0.20 and ± 0.49 is small; Cohen, 1988). Although there were no statistically significant differences by group for the program-similar blending tasks, the effect sizes for each of the different SES categories suggests practical or meaningful differences. *SW* viewers from all three SES categories scored higher than their Control group peers. The size of the effect was roughly 3 times as large for the lowest SES category compared with the highest SES category. Further, as SES increased, the effect size decreased by roughly 0.30 standard deviation units (i.e., a third of a standard deviation).

In sum, children who viewed *SUPER WHY!* were able to learn much of the content featured in the program. Although scores on program-similar assessments favored *SW* viewers, most of these tests were not significant. It is likely that children performed well on the program-specific content tasks because they were familiar with the content and the presentation of that content while the program-similar tasks contained content that was unfamiliar. It is also possible that the tasks used to evaluate program-specific and –similar content were challenging in and of themselves (e.g., children were presented with three words and asked to select the word that matched a verbal presentation of that word). During the program-specific tasks, children were able to process the task complexity because they did not need to use as many cognitive resources to process the content (i.e., word, phrase) used in a particular task. In contrast, task complexity coupled with unfamiliar content may have overloaded the child's cognitive resources, resulting in more difficulty and no differences between the groups. The normative assessments are tasks that are quite familiar with preschoolers (e.g., naming letters, making rhymes) and demand little in the way of task complexity. That is, the increased familiarity associated with the tasks allowed preschoolers to use their resources to process content more successfully.

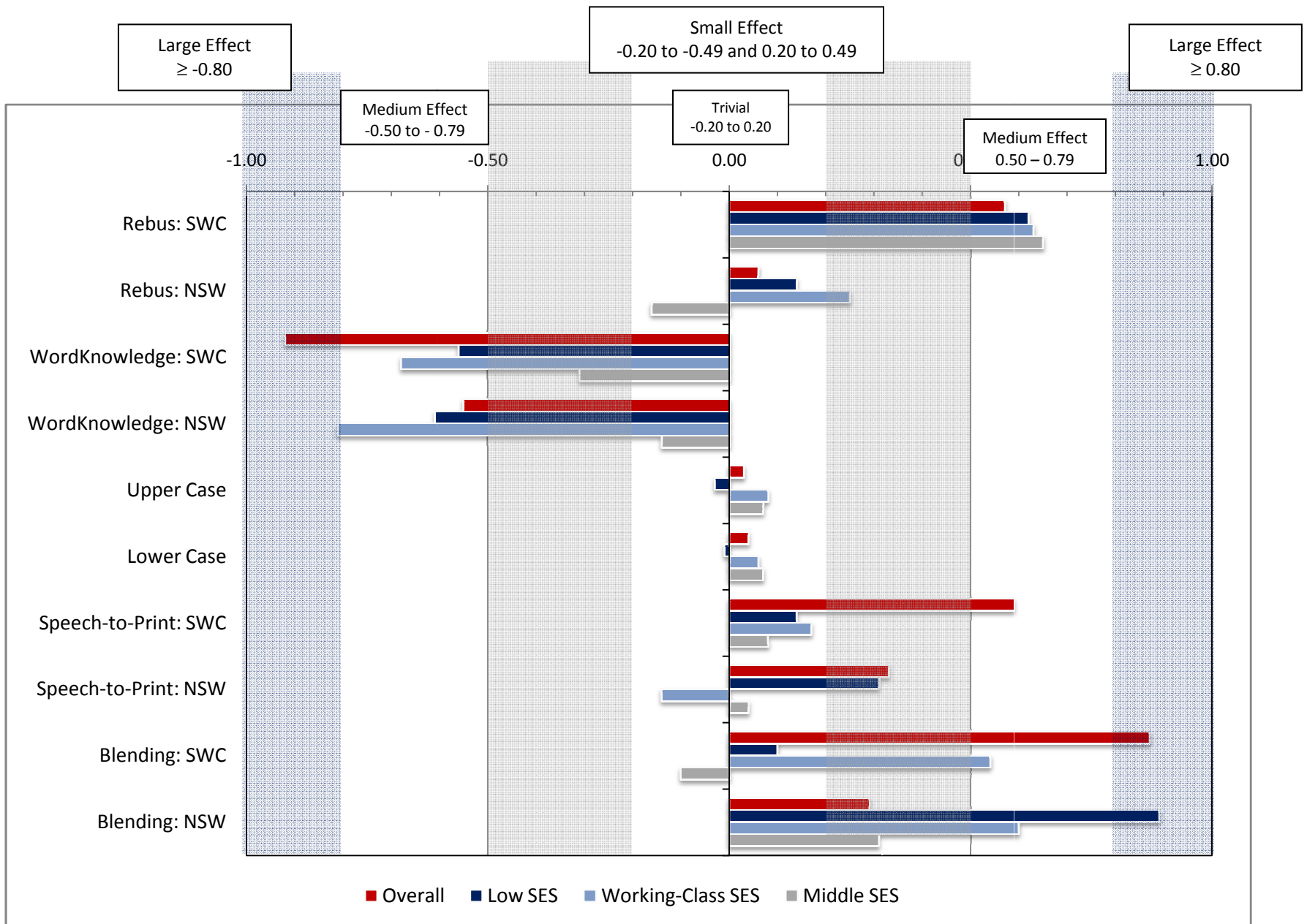


Figure 11. Effect Sizes (i.e., Cohen's *d*) for Program-Specific and Program-Similar Outcomes by Group and Family SES

[SWC: Super Why Content; NSW: Not Super Why Content]

Objective 2: Did program-specific content learning produce changes on standardized measures of early literacy that are predictive of later reading success?

Transfer of learning is the ultimate goal in any educational television program (Fisch, 2004). Transfer refers to a child's ability to encode, store, and retrieve skills associated with program-specific content and apply those skills to successfully complete unrelated tasks (Fisch et al., 2005). As described above for program-specific content, the evaluation plan involved a two-step process: 1) group differences were tested and 2) the impact of a family's SES on each indicator was evaluated. All tests involving group differences are reported below regardless of statistical significance. Tests evaluating whether a family's SES moderated group differences (i.e., are group differences the same or different by each level of family SES; low, working-class, and middle/upper SES) are reported below only when these tests are statistically significant. A moderated effect is present if one or both of the following interactions are significant: the 3-way interaction among Group, SES, and Wave or the 2-way interaction between Group and SES. A moderator is a variable that affects the strength of the relationship between the treatment and outcome. In this regard, children from low SES families may be more powerfully affected by the intervention when compared with children from higher SES families.

Indicators of Language Development

IGDI Picture Naming

The Picture Naming task evaluates young children's vocabulary knowledge. Children were asked to name as many picture cards as they could in one minute. Performance on this task did not differ by viewing group: SW viewers identified 23.11 pictures and Control viewers identified 23.18 pictures³².

- *Family SES did not moderate the relation between this indicator (i.e., Picture Naming) and a child's viewing group.*

Indicators of Letter Knowledge

Alphabet Letter Naming Fluency

Alphabet Naming Fluency was examined by timing the administration of both the Upper Case and Lower Case letter knowledge subscales of the PALS PreK Alphabet Knowledge task. See Figure 11.

³² $F(1, 166) = 0.01, n.s.$

Upper Case Fluency: Children in the SW Group identified Upper Case letters more quickly than children in the Control Group: 2.2 seconds per Upper Case letter for SW viewers compared with 2.9 seconds per letter for Control viewers³³.

Lower Case Fluency: Children in the SW Group identified Lower Case letters more quickly than children in the Control Group: 2.4 seconds per Lower Case letter for SW viewers compared with 3.3 seconds per letter for Control viewers³⁴.

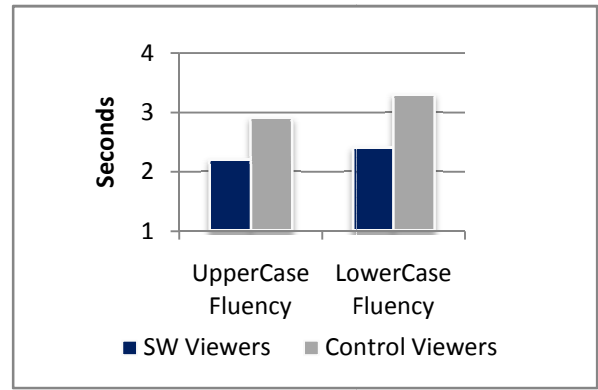


Figure 13. Average Time (Seconds) to Identify One Letter

- Family SES did not moderate the relation between these indicators (i.e., Upper Case Fluency, Lower Case Fluency) and a child’s viewing group.

Indicators of Phonological and Phonemic Awareness

Rhyming Task

Children’s phonological awareness was measured using the PALS PreK Rhyme Awareness Task, a standardized rhyming task. Children in the SW Group identified more rhymes at the post-test compared with Control Group viewers³⁵. Out of 10 rhymes, SW viewers identified 8.34 at the post-test while Control viewers identified only 7.63 rhymes, a difference of 9.3%.

- Family SES did moderate the relation between this indicator (i.e., Rhyming) and a child’s viewing group.

There was a 3-way interaction among Group, Family SES, and Wave³⁶. SW-viewing preschoolers living in Low SES families and in Middle SES families outperformed their Control-viewing peers while SW-viewing preschoolers living in Working-Class families scored similarly to their Control-viewing peers. See Figure 12.

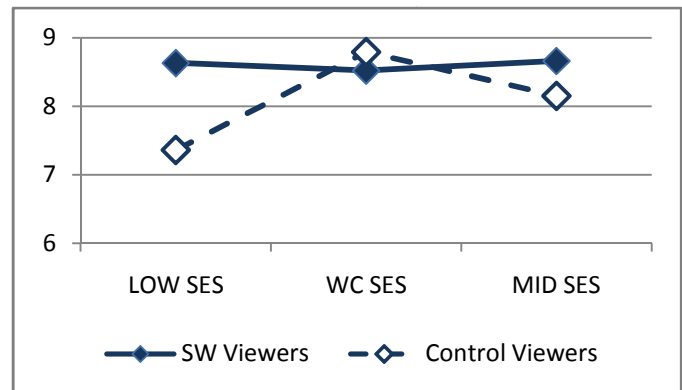


Figure 14. Rhyming Scores at the Post-Test by Family SES and Group

³³ $F(1, 166) = 6.79, p < 0.01$

³⁴ $F(1, 166) = 9.27, p < 0.01$

³⁵ $F(1, 166) = 5.93, p < 0.02$

³⁶ $F(4, 324) = 3.24, p < 0.05$

Letter Sounds Knowledge

Phonemic awareness skills were measured using three different scores derived from the PALS PreK Letter Sounds subscale: differences in the percentage of children in each group who were eligible to try this task; the total number of letter sounds that children were able to identify; and the rate or fluency with which children were able to name letter sounds.

Identification of Any Letter Sounds: The percentage of children in the SW Group who were eligible to try the Letter Sounds task (i.e., to be eligible, children needed to identify at least 16 Upper Case letters and 9 Lower Case letters) at the post-test was significantly higher than the percentage of children in the Control Group who were eligible to try this task at the post-test: 81.1% of SW viewers compared with 61.5% of Control Group viewers³⁷.

Letter Sounds Knowledge (out of 26): Children in the SW Group knew more Letter Sounds at the post-test when compared with Control Group viewers³⁸. In addition, the SW viewers' performance significantly increased over time, resulting in higher scores at the mid-test and the post-test when compared with Control viewers' performance over time³⁹. Figure 13 provides the overall letter sounds mean scores as well as the scores across the 3 waves of assessment.

Letter Sounds Fluency: Children in the SW Group identified letter sounds more rapidly than children in the Control Group: 4.5 seconds per letter sound for SW viewers compared with 6.6 seconds per sound for Control viewers⁴⁰. See Figure 14.

- *Family SES did not moderate the relation between these indicators (i.e., % Eligible for Letter Sounds, Number of Letter Sounds, Fluency) and a child's viewing group.*

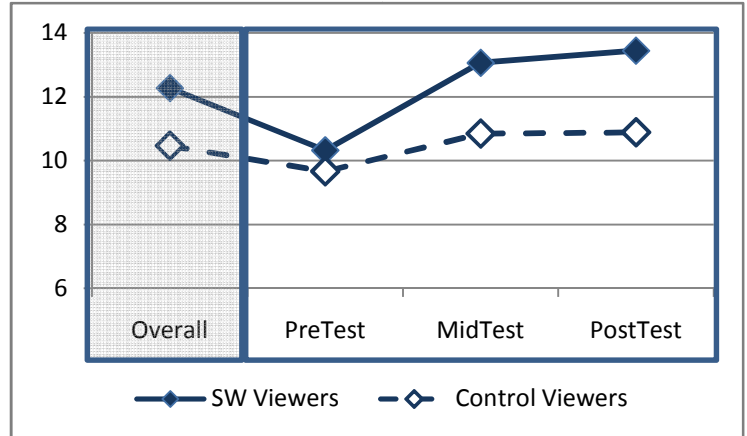


Figure 15. Number of Letter Sounds Overall and Across Wave by Group

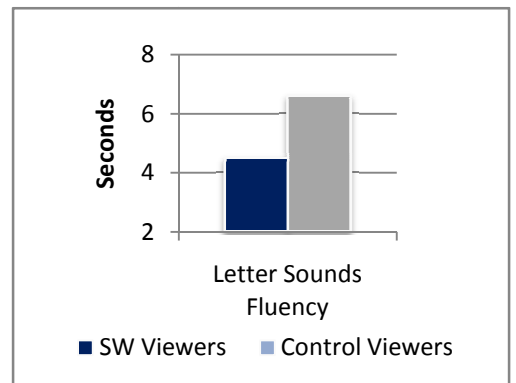


Figure 16. Average Time (Seconds) to Identify One Letter Sound

³⁷ $X^2 = 7.98, p < 0.01$

³⁸ $F(1, 166) = 4.23, p < 0.05$

³⁹ $F(2, 331.2) = 3.02, p < 0.05$

⁴⁰ $F(1, 166) = 6.79, p < 0.01$

Indicators of Print Conventions

Print and Story Concepts

Three different components of children’s knowledge of print conventions were evaluated. Book knowledge measured familiarity with books and other elements of text construction (e.g., orienting the book, pointing out the title). Print knowledge measured understanding of the mechanics of reading (e.g., left to right; top to bottom). Story comprehension measured identification of presented content and an ability to generate inferences about that content.

Differences between *SW* and Control viewers were non-significant for Book Knowledge⁴¹ (i.e., *SW* = 4.52; Control = 4.59) and Story Comprehension⁴² (i.e., *SW* = 6.43; Control = 6.50).

Print knowledge was significantly higher at the mid-test for *SW* viewers compared with Control viewers⁴³. While *SW* viewers’ scores remained constant from mid- to post-test, Control viewers’ post-test scores caught up to the *SW* viewers’ post-test performance. See Figure 15.

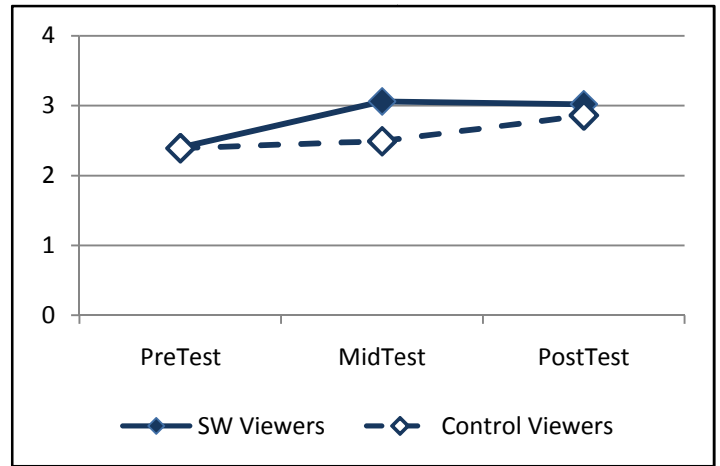


Figure 17. Print Knowledge Over Time by Group

- Family SES did not moderate the relation between these indicators (i.e., Book Knowledge, Print Knowledge, and Story Comprehension) and a child’s viewing group.

Combined Early Literacy Skills

Get Ready to Read! Screener

Children’s print knowledge, emergent writing, and linguistic awareness skills as measured by the *Get Ready to Read!* screener were significantly higher for *SW* viewers compared with Control group viewers, a difference of 4.4% at the post-test⁴⁴.

- Family SES did not moderate the relation between this indicator (i.e., *Get Ready to Read*) and a child’s viewing group.

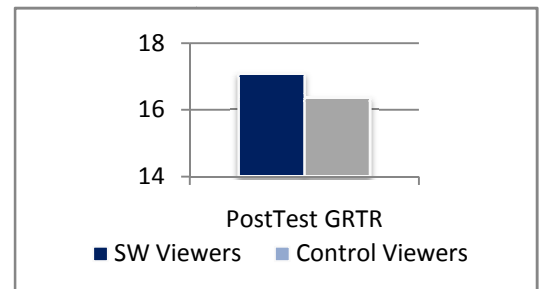


Figure 18. Get Ready to Read! Scores by Group

⁴¹ $F(1, 166) = 0.21, n.s.$

⁴² $F(2, 165) = 3.19, p < 0.05$

⁴³ $F(1, 166) = 0.10, n.s.$

⁴⁴ $F(1, 166) = 5.78, p < .02$

Conclusions Based on Normative Performance

Did program-specific content learning produce changes on normative, standardized measures of early literacy?

For the most part, the answer to this question is also yes. *SUPER WHY!* (*SW*) viewers outperformed their Control group peers on the majority of the normative literacy measures. Statistically significant results were found for Indicators of Letter Knowledge, Phonological and Phonemic Awareness, and a combined measure of early literacy skills. There were no differences for Indicators of Language and some inconsistent differences for Print Conventions. The magnitude of these differences (i.e., the practical significance) averaged 0.51, a medium effect (Range: -0.003 to 1.75). For comparisons favoring *SW*, the average effect size was also of medium size, 0.64 (ranging from .003 to 1.75). See Figure 17 for effect sizes across all normative outcomes by group and family SES.

Children's language or vocabulary knowledge was not significantly related to either viewing group. While children who viewed *SW* did learn program-specific language content, this content was more a function of familiarity with symbols and would not necessarily lead to higher general vocabulary scores. There is evidence that educational television as a whole positively predicts gains on standardized assessments of vocabulary for children as young as 15 months to children in early elementary school (Anderson, Huston, Schmitt, Linebarger, & Wright, 2001; Linebarger & Walker, 2005; Wright et al., 2001). The role of program format in supporting vocabulary development has also been examined. Narrative programs like *SUPER WHY!* and expository programs like the control viewing stimulus (i.e., *Zoboamafoo*) have both been found to support the acquisition of vocabulary (Linebarger & Piotrowski, 2006; Wright et al., 2001). One way to evaluate whether both educational programs viewed in this study supported vocabulary is to examine whether there was significant growth for all children from pretest to post-test. All children's scores significantly grew from 21.37 names per minute to 24.66 names per minute⁴⁵ during the 8-week intervention period and was similar across all levels of family SES. There is research suggesting that vocabulary gains might take time to surface (Biemiller & Boote, 2006) which would help to explain why vocabulary gains have been documented in several longitudinal investigations (Anderson et al., 2001; Linebarger & Walker, 2005; Wright et al., 2001) but not in short-term experimental studies (e.g., Linebarger et al., 2004).

Children's letter knowledge for both program-specific and normative performance was evaluated using different scores derived from the normative Alphabet Knowledge test (i.e., PALS PreK). Program-specific performance was based on the number of Upper Case and Lower Case letters accurately identified. To determine whether children's knowledge of specific letters associated with watching *SW* repeatedly was generalized to another metric of letter knowledge, we included a measure of the length of time it took for children to complete both the Upper Case and the Lower Case subscales. These two pieces of information (i.e., total score and length of time) were combined to form fluency scores. Letter naming fluency refers to a child's ability to recognize random letters automatically or effortlessly and is a powerful predictor of later reading proficiency (Daly, Wright, Kelly, & Martens, 1997; Stanovich, Feeman, & Cunningham, 1983; Torgeson, Wagner, Simmons, & Laughon, 1990). Fluency has been linked to later reading success in several ways. Quick and effortless letter naming frees up cognitive resources that can be used to engage in more sophisticated reading skills (e.g., encode and store words). To become fluent, children must have multiple opportunities to see and hear letter names. With repetition,

⁴⁵Picture Naming: growth from pretest to post-test? $F(2, 165) = 17.62, p < 0.001$

children strengthen these connections between print and its aural referent and are able to direct attention to more cognitively complex tasks (Adams, 1990; Ehri, 1998).

Indicators of Phonological and Phonemic Awareness evaluated children's ability to detect rhyming patterns and to identify individual letter sounds. Rhyming is one of the easiest and earliest indicators of phonological awareness. With rhyming practice, children will progress to hearing and isolating individual sounds in words (e.g., cat is composed of 3 sounds, /k/ /ă/ /t/). One character's super power is word play of which rhyming is key (i.e., Wonder Red). *SW* viewers were able to benefit from Wonder Red's production of rhymes. Across the spectrum of phonological and phonemic awareness skills, identifying letter sounds is considered a more sophisticated skill fundamental to the acquisition of phonemic awareness.

Print conventions were evaluated using a story book task that measured children's understanding of text rules (e.g., how to orient a book, what a title and author represent and where that information can be found, discriminating between print and pictures); their understanding of the mechanics of print (e.g., reading left to right and top to bottom, sweeping left at the end of a line of print, distinguishing between individual words); and their ability to comprehend the story at both a concrete and an inferential level. Preschoolers who possess these skills have more developed logical reasoning skills and possess a readiness to learn word level skills (Venn & Jahn, 2004). In this study, significantly different effects favoring *SW* viewers were confined to mid-test differences. By the post-test, means across viewing groups were similar. To investigate this a bit further, children who scored perfectly on the print knowledge subscale were contrasted with those who did not (but may have gotten all but one item correct, may have gotten no items correct, or fell somewhere between). More *SW* viewers answered all print knowledge questions correctly compared with Control group viewers (i.e., 55.7% for *SW* viewers vs. 40.0% of Control group viewers)⁴⁶. Analyzing the 4 individual items on this scale indicated that more *SW* viewers were able to identify the sweep back to the left after finishing a line of text when compared with Control group viewers' ability to identify the sweep left (i.e., 81.1% of *SW* viewers compared with 67.7% of Control group viewers).

Normative Performance As a Whole

The acquisition of early literacy skills occurs within the everyday environments where preschoolers spend their time. Children whose environments are richly filled with language- and literacy-based materials and whose daily interactions with parents, caregivers, siblings and peers are also infused with frequent high-quality language- and literacy-promoting interactions often have little difficulty navigating a path to conventional reading success. In contrast, those children whose daily environments are characterized by few language and literacy materials and impoverished interactions are at a substantial disadvantage. By formal school entry, these children are typically far behind their more advantaged peers. Even at this early age, it is often extremely difficult to catch up without intensive remedial instruction. Even with this remediation, these children will always be at increased risk for reading-specific as well as general academic failure (e.g., Hart & Risley, 1995; Juel, 1988; Stanovich, 1986; Walker, Greenwood, Hart, & Carta, 1994).

SUPER WHY! provided all preschoolers in this study with language- and literacy-learning opportunities that translated into literacy gains across most of the early literacy indicators (i.e., alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, and knowledge of the mechanics of reading). The

⁴⁶ $\chi^2 = 3.95, p < 0.05$

acquisition of these specific skills also contributed to *SW* viewers' stronger performance on a general early literacy screener. While all *SW*-viewing preschoolers in this study significantly improved their early literacy skills, when there were interactions between viewing group and family SES, children from lower SES families who watched *SW* always outperformed their control group peers while children whose families were from middle SES backgrounds often already had these skills prior to the intervention. In these cases, both viewing groups performed similarly.

The most impressive set of findings from this study involved children's alphabet knowledge skills. Across the board, *SW* viewers were able to identify more upper and lower case letters and their corresponding letter sounds. Letter and sound naming skills are foundational skills that represent major landmarks in the acquisition of literacy skills and that are predictive of conventional reading success (Burgess & Lonigan, 1998; Foulin, 2005; Rathvon, 2004). Watching *SW* not only improved letter and sound identification but, perhaps more importantly, improved preschoolers' letter and sound naming speed or fluency. Fluencies in letter and sound identification are critical precursors to the acquisition of phonological sensitivity, the alphabetic principle (i.e., letter-sound correspondence), and visual word recognition. Phonological sensitivity refers to the ability to detect and manipulate the sound structure of oral language (includes skills such as rhyming, alliteration, blending, segmenting). As children's skills develop, their ability to discriminate the sounds of speech becomes finer and eventually leads to phonemic sensitivity or the ability to discriminate the smallest units of sounds in words (i.e., phonemes). The largest gains (i.e., effect sizes) across all early literacy skills measured in this study were the effects found for *SW*-viewing preschoolers' letter and sound naming speed (i.e., Cohen's *d* ranged from 1.51 to 1.94; Cohen (1988) reports that effect sizes above 0.80 are large effects). While identifying letters and sounds are important skills, children's speed in doing so is also closely linked to later reading achievement. Faster naming is indicative of greater automaticity (i.e., little processing needs to be devoted to identifying letters or sounds) and ultimately frees up preschoolers' limited cognitive processing skills, making them available for more sophisticated cognitive processing. The likely path of effects proceeds from letter recognition to letter-sound knowledge and phonological sensitivity, further discriminations representing phonemic sensitivity that ultimately supports the acquisition of the alphabetic principle and conventional reading and spelling skills (Foulin, 2005). Watching *SW* resulted in universally large effects on all aspects of letter knowledge ranging from the easiest skill (i.e., Upper Case Letter Identification) to the more complex (i.e., faster rates of sound identification). The mechanisms linking letter knowledge to conventional reading success operate through a combination of reduced processing resources needed to name letters and sounds and enhanced phonological and phonemic sensitivity. Over time and with more exposure, these skills will contribute to conventional reading and spelling success (Burgess & Lonigan, 1998; Foulin, 2005).

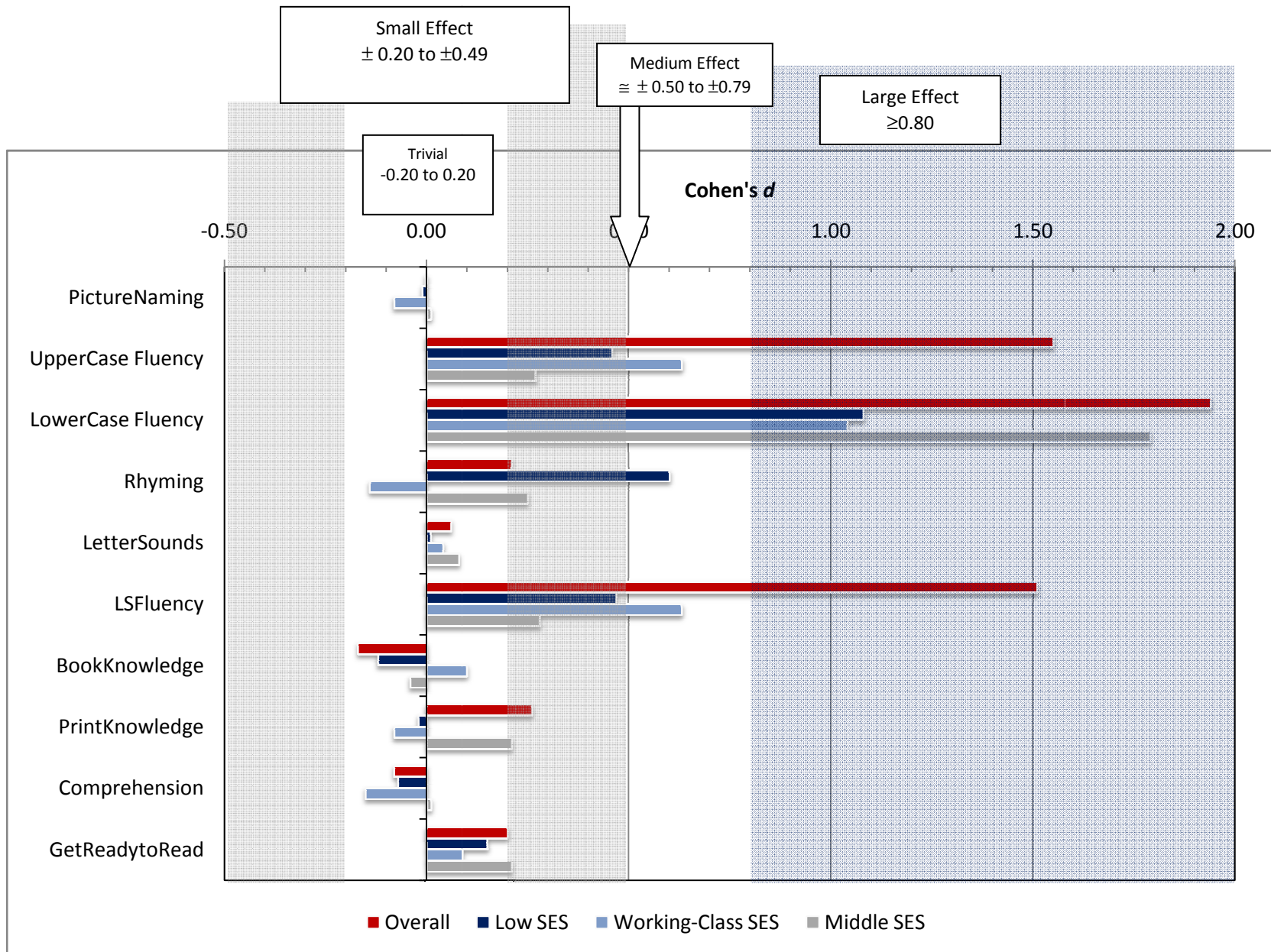


Figure 19. Effect Sizes for Normative Outcomes by Group and Family SES

Objective 3: How Much Exposure to SUPER WHY! Does it Take to Produce Meaningful Change?

Children assigned to the *SUPER WHY!* group obtained higher scores on language development, letter knowledge, and phonological and phonemic awareness indicators for both program-specific and normative assessments when compared with their Control-viewing peers. These comparisons were made using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) models. ANOVAs test for statistically significant group differences. Recall that statistically significant findings rely on a p-value that reflects the odds or probability that findings were not the result of chance or, alternatively, that these group differences are likely to be found again and again if the study was repeated. These analyses do not, however, provide information about the role that exposure plays in the viewing-outcomes process. Exposure measures the amount of *SUPER WHY!* that children viewed. In contrast, ANOVAs can only indicate that children who watched *SUPER WHY!* did better than children who watched an alternate program.

The analyses presented in this section use exposure to predict post-test performance on all outcomes. Modeling the relations between exposure and outcomes answers questions about just how much Super Why exposure it takes to produce meaningful change on the outcomes of interest. Recall that effect sizes were computed for all outcomes. Effect sizes indicate the magnitude or size of an effect that resulted from assignment to group and participation in the experiment. These values ranged from trivial (i.e., little or no effect; both groups performed equally well) to large (i.e., the difference between viewing groups favored *SW* viewers and was substantial) with most effects falling in the moderate range.

There were 11 different indicators of both program-specific and normative performance (i.e., 22 indicators in all). Program-specific performance favored *SW* viewers on 7 of 11 indicators; favored Control group viewers on 1 of 11 indicators; and was equivalent for 3 of 11 indicators. Normative performance also favored Super Why viewers on 7 of 11 indicators; did not favor Control group viewers on any of the 11 indicators; and was equivalent on 4 of 11 indicators.

Defining Exposure

Families were first randomly assigned to a viewing group. As part of their initial enrollment into the study, parents were told that they would need to have their child watch a new episode each day for a total of 20 days⁴⁷. During that time, parents kept detailed viewing logs. Once the first set of 20 episodes was viewed, our research team collected the round one diaries, delivered a new diary, and asked the families to view each of the first 20 episodes a second time. Diaries contained spaces to record which episode they watched on a given day, how many times they watched that episode, who was present during the viewing, and what the child and/or parent did while viewing a particular episode. In addition to the assigned episode, many families allowed their children to watch episodes previously viewed. For the next set of analyses, exposure refers to the total number of episodes each child viewed over the course of the project. Tables 2 and 3 detail the relations between exposure and outcomes.

⁴⁷ At the time of the study, there were 20 episodes of Super Why available

Model Definitions

1. Linear: Linear models indicate that as exposure increases by one unit, outcome scores increased by one unit.
2. Quadratic: Quadratic functions indicate that, as the number of episodes viewed increases, the outcome scores increase. However, the actual change between each additional episode viewed is slowing down (e.g., at episode 1, the change might be 0.04 while at episode 16, the change may be as small as 0.008). This declining rate of change is provided in the column identified as "Change per Episode Viewed." At a particular number of episodes, children's outcome scores will begin to get smaller. The point at which this occurs is provided in the last cell of the table row and is reported using the following text: The maximum score is associated with 26.0 episodes and represents a positive change of 1.04.
3. Cubic: A cubic function contains curves where outcome totals are accelerating or decelerating as a function of the amount of exposure. For instance, there may be a rather steep acceleration in a skill for children who viewed Super Why between 1 and 30 times followed by a period of no gains or even slight declines for those who viewed Super Why between 31 and 50 times, followed by another steep acceleration for those who viewed Super Why between 51 and 100 times.

Table 3. Exposure as Predictor of Program-Specific Performance

Total Exposure (Mean = 38.9 episodes viewed; SD = 32.3)					
	Model Type	Change per Episode Viewed	Episodes Needed for 1 Point Change	Standard Deviation (SD)	Episodes Needed for SD Change
Language Indicators					
Rebus Symbols: SWC	Linear	.36	2.8 episodes	2.87 symbols	8.0 episodes
Rebus Symbols: NSW	No relation between viewing and outcome				
Word Knowledge: SWC	Linear	-0.03	33.3 episodes ⁴⁸	0.67 words	22.3 episodes
Word Knowledge: NSW	Cubic	Scores are higher through 2 episodes	Flat from 9 – 58 episodes	Growing again from 59 episodes forward	Achieves 0.67 SD by 97 episodes
Letter Knowledge Indicators					
Upper Case: SWC	Linear	0.31	3.23 episodes	6.40 letters	20.7 episodes
Lower Case: SWC	Linear	0.40	2.5 episodes	9.70 letters	24.3 episodes
Phonological and Phonemic Awareness Indicators					
Speech-to-Print: SWC	Quadratic	0.94/1.26	-0.9/-1.15	2.40 words matched	
Speech-to-Print: NSW	No relation between viewing and outcome				
Blending: SWC	Linear	0.07	14.3 episodes	1.07 blends	15.3 episodes
Blending: NSW	Quadratic ^c	0.039 (1 episode) to 0.008 (16.6 episodes)	16.6 episodes	The maximum score is associated with 26.0 episodes and represents a positive change of 1.04	

Note. SWC = Super Why-Specific Content; NSW = Non-Super Why Content

⁴⁸ For every 33.3 episodes viewed, SW viewers' scores declined by 1 point.

Table 4. Exposure as Predictor of Normative Performance

Total Exposure (Mean = 38.9 episodes viewed; SD = 32.3)					
	Model Type	Change per Episode Viewed	Episodes Needed for 1 Point Change	Standard Deviation (SD)	Episodes Needed for SD Change
Language Indicators					
Picture Naming	No relation between viewing and outcome				
Letter Knowledge Indicators					
Upper Case Fluency ^a	Quadratic	0.008 (1 episode) to 0.005 letters/sec (9.2 episodes)	9.2 episodes	The fastest letter-naming rate is with 29.3 episodes (1.4 sec/letter), increasing from there	
Lower Case Fluency ^a	Quadratic	0.012 (1 episode) to 0.010 letters/sec (3.8 episodes)	3.8 episodes	The fastest letter-naming rate is with 25.0 episodes (1.7 sec/letter), increasing from there	
Phonological and Phonemic Awareness Indicators					
Rhyming	Linear	0.10 rhymes (of 10)	10 episodes	2.40 rhymes	24.0 episodes
Letter Sounds	Quadratic	0.276 (1 episode) to 0.275 (1.4 episodes)	1.4 episodes	The highest letter-sound score is found with 5.7 episodes (15.7 sounds), dropping from there	
Letter Sounds Fluency ^a	Quadratic	0.013 (1 episode) to 0.012 (2 episodes)	< 1 episode	The fastest sound rate is with 25.0 episodes (2.2 sec/sound) dropping from there	
Print Conventions Indicators					
Book Knowledge	No relation between viewing and outcome				
Print Knowledge	Quadratic	0.384 (0 episode) to 0.355 (1 episode)	< 1 episode	The highest print knowledge score is with 23.0 episodes (3.48 points), dropping from there	
Comprehension	No relation between viewing and outcome				
Combined Early Literacy Task					
Get Ready to Read	Linear	0.18 points	5.6 episodes	2.78 points	13.3 episodes

^aFor fluency scores, 1 point is equivalent to 1 second.

Dosage Conclusion

While previous sections examined whether assignment to viewing group differentiated children's literacy skills, this set of analyses evaluated just how many episodes of *SW* it took to produce meaningful change in outcome scores. Meaningful change was defined as the number of episodes it took to increase a child's score by 1 point⁴⁹ and to increase a child's score by a standard deviation⁵⁰.

Dosage for Program-Specific Outcomes

For outcomes favoring *SW* viewers, the average number of episodes it took to move a child's score by one point was about 8 episodes, while moving scores by a standard deviation took about 19 episodes. Language development and letter identification required the least number of episodes: 2.8 for language and 2.9 for letter identification. In contrast, the relation between exposure and speech-to-print matching was curvilinear (scores increased with exposure through 5 episodes and then declined slightly with more exposure) while blending scores needed the most episodes for change (15.5 episodes).

Dosage for Normative Outcomes

As with program-specific outcomes, normative outcomes favoring *SW* viewers also shifted by one point relatively easy; however, almost all relations between normative outcomes and exposure were curvilinear (i.e., quadratic functions). Curvilinear relations indicated that as exposure increased initially, outcome scores increased. At a particular point in exposure, the benefits of watching more episodes were not found. That is, the change associated with each additional episode viewed became smaller and smaller. We have noted in Table 3 how much exposure was associated with the maximum change per episode and the maximum outcome score. On average, the maximum outcome score was achieved after viewing 20.8 episodes with diminishing gains after that point (and, in some cases, scores began to decline as children's exposure level increased). One explanation for this relationship may be that children who have these skills were not interested in watching the program after a certain point while those children who did not have all of the featured skills continued to watch the program more frequently than was asked by the evaluators. To examine this possibility, correlations were computed among total exposure and parent-reported indices of child's initial reading ability. Children watched fewer episodes if, at the start of the study, they knew more alphabet letters (-0.16); knew more letter sounds (-0.24); or were better readers ($r = -0.28$). Given these correlations, it is likely that children who watched more episodes of *SW* needed more exposure to evidence the same levels of change for children who had more sophisticated skills at the start.

These analyses indicate that generally fewer than 20 episodes were needed to produce meaningful change on the outcomes of interest for both program-specific and normative tasks. Situating these findings with those from Objectives 1 and 2, it is clear that *SUPER WHY!* is a powerful intervention for young children. The effect sizes presented earlier further highlight that, while performance improved nearly universally for children from all levels of SES, the strength of the effects were stronger for children from low SES families.

⁴⁹ For fluency scores, it was how many episodes it took to decrease their naming speed by 1 second.

⁵⁰ Recall that a standard deviation represents the spread around a particular mean where 68% of children's scores fall (e.g., 68% of children's Lower Case Letter Knowledge scores fall between 6.9 and 26). Moving a child's score by a standard deviation represents a substantial shift.

Objective 4: Did children like the program?

Appeal was assessed in two ways. First, children were asked about *SUPER WHY!* as a whole including how much they liked the program, how it compared to a self-identified favorite program, how much they liked the words onscreen or featured in the show, and what some of the new words they learned were. Next, a battery of items targeting each of the 4 main characters was administered.

Program Appeal

How Much Did I Like the Program?

Overall, 96.8% liked *SUPER WHY!* either a little or a lot. There were no significant differences by gender or family SES.

Did I Learn New Words While Watching Super Why?

Overall, 53.2% of children reported learning new words. When asked to list the new words, 47.6% of these children accurately listed words featured in *SUPER WHY!*. Words included: sun, bun, big, cat, rat, power to read, stop, one, bump, change the story, ball, train, and small.

Character Appeal

Character appeal was evaluated by presenting a picture of each of the 4 main characters and asking children to: 1) name the character; 2) tell the data collector about that character; 3) ask the child if s/he would want to be this character's friend; 3) ask why/why not be character's friend; 4) ask how much the child liked the character; 5) ask why or why not; 6) ask the child to identify the character's power.

Super Why

Nearly all children were able to identify Super Why (i.e., 98.9%). When prompted to tell the data collector about Super Why, 35.8% of children who were able to articulate a reason (i.e., 33.3% provided no response) were most likely to mention his "power" (i.e., 9.7%) or that he had the ability to "change the story" and "save the day" (i.e., 25.8%).

Three-quarters of children would be Super Why's friend. Responses were quite varied for the follow-up why prompt ranging from just liking the character (i.e., 11.6%) to he is nice or friendly (i.e., 7.4%), he helps with reading (5.3%), he can change the story (4.2%), and he is helpful (4.2%). Some children made reference to Super Why as a TV show that they enjoyed overall (4.2%) or made a connection between Super Why and themselves (i.e., 4.2%).

Over 90% of children reported liking Super Why a little (i.e., 26.3%) or a lot (i.e., 63.2%). Children reported wanting to be his friend because they like him (13.7%); he's nice or friendly (7.4%), he has a cape, flyer, or Y writer (5.3%); he is helpful (5.3%); and he can read (4.2%).

There were no gender differences found for identifying Super Why, wanting to be his friend, or liking him.

Princess Presto

Nearly all children were able to identify Princess Presto (i.e., 94.1%). When prompted to tell the data collector about Princess Presto, 34.7% of children mentioned that she would spell or write words; 9.5% mentioned her wand and her dress; 6.3% mentioned her appearance; and 5.3% mentioned that she could fly or do magic.

Just over half of children would be Princess Presto's friend (58.2%). Gender-related responses were provided by 13.7% of the children, all but one of these respondents were boys who would not be her friend because she's a girl. Appearance reasons were next at 12.6% of respondents (9 girls and 3 boys) followed by just liking the character (7.4%), liking her wand or dress (6.3%); or she was nice (5.3%).

Just over two-thirds reported liking Princess Presto a little (27.4%) or a lot (43.2%). The follow-up prompt generated similar answers to why a child would or would not be Princess Presto's friend: boys did not want to be friends with a girl (13.7%; 12 boys did not want to be friends because of her gender while 1 girl wanted to be her friend because she was a girl) while girls liked her because she was pretty or beautiful (10.5%; 8 girls liked her because she was beautiful while 2 boys disliked her because she looked like a girl); and 6.3% would be her friend because she could fly and do magic.

Only 28.6% of boys would be friends with Princess Presto while nearly all girls would be her friend (92.9%)⁵¹. In addition to being friends, girls also reported liking Princess Presto more than boys liked her⁵² (i.e., girls: 1.76, boys: 0.64). Nearly 79% of girls and only 15.1% of boys reported liking Princess Presto a lot while 50.9% of boys and 2.4% of girls did not like her. Finally, 34.0% of boys and 19.0% of girls liked Princess Presto a little bit.

Alpha Pig

Nearly all children were able to identify Alpha Pig (i.e., 97.8%). When prompted to tell the data collector about Alpha Pig, 43.2% of children mentioned that he makes, builds, fixes, or sings letters and the alphabet while 16.8% mentioned that he has tools and builds things (with no specific reference to letters or the alphabet).

Over 81% would be Alpha Pig's friend. Nearly 16% wanted to be his friend because Alpha Pig was cool, super, or funny while 9.5% mentioned that he does some activity (i.e., builds, fixes, sings) with letters or the alphabet; 8.4% connected Alpha Pig to themselves (e.g., he builds really fast and so do I, I could help him build a house).

Over 90% of children reported liking Alpha Pig a little (i.e., 26.3%) or a lot (i.e., 65.3%). The follow-up prompt generated similar answers to why a child would be Alpha Pig's friend: because they just like him (15.8%); he has a tool box, a hammer, a helmet, or goggles (8.4%); or he's nice and friendly (7.4%).

⁵¹ $\chi^2 = 38.43, p < 0.001$

⁵² $F(1, 93) = 72.35, p < 0.001$

There were no gender differences found for identifying Alpha Pig, wanting to be his friend, or liking him.

Wonder Red

Nearly all children were able to identify Wonder Red (i.e., 92.5%). When prompted to tell the data collector about Wonder Red, 29.0% mentioned that she changes words or changes the first letter and 10.8% mentioned her rollerblades or skates.

Over two-thirds of the children would be Wonder Red's friend (69.2%). When asked why, children were most likely to connect themselves to Wonder Red; that is, 11.7% mentioned that Wonder Red did or had something they did or had (e.g., "Wonder Red has rollerblades and I have Heelies"). Gender-related responses were provided by 10.6% of the children, all but two of these respondents were boys who would not be her friend because she's a girl. Finally, 10.6% would be her friend because she had roller-skates or some other object that they liked.

Nearly 80% reported liking Wonder Red a little (27.7%) or a lot (52.1%). The follow-up prompt generated a number of different responses with no category identified by more than 8.4% of the children (i.e., 8.4% liked her because she had some object that was usually her rollerblades).

Girls reported liking Wonder Red more than boys⁵³ (i.e., girls: 1.83, boys: 0.90). Nearly 86% of girls and 25% of boys reported liking Wonder Red a lot while 34.6% of boys and 2.4% of girls did not like her. Finally, 40.4% of boys and 11.9% of girls liked Wonder Red a little bit.

Aggregate Character Analysis

Several different aggregate analyses were conducted to evaluate whether a child's gender or family SES moderated the ability to name the four main characters, how many characters children would be friends with, and how much they liked these characters.

Naming. On average, children were able to accurately identify 3.5 of the 4 characters by name⁵⁴.

Friends. Boys would be friends with 2.22 characters while girls would be friends with 3.50 characters⁵⁵.

Likeability. Girls' average likeability rating was 1.70 (out of 2) while boys' likeability rating was 1.14⁵⁶. Girls' ratings were consistent across the four characters while boys' ratings varied in gender-stereotypical ways (i.e., boys liked the female characters much less than the male characters). While girls liked both female and both male characters equally and boys liked both male characters

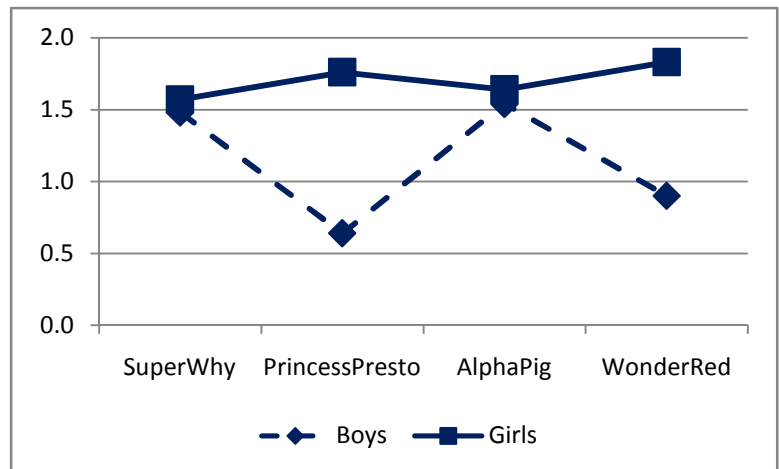


Figure 20. Likeability Ratings (out of 2) for Each Character by Child's Gender

⁵³ $F(1, 93) = 48.15, p < 0.001$

⁵⁴ $F(1, 93) = 0.95, n.s.$

⁵⁵ $F(1, 93) = 27.19, p < 0.001$

⁵⁶ $F(1, 92) = 49.88, p < 0.001$

equally, boys gave different likeability ratings for the two female characters, rating Wonder Red more highly than Princess Presto. See Figure 12.

Super Powers

The Power to Read

When polled regarding which super power Super Why possessed, 82.5% accurately stated “the power to read.” Children were also asked (at a later point in the survey) who they would want to teach them to read. When asked who they would want to teach them to read, 71.6% picked Super Why; 15.8% picked Wonder Red; 6.3% picked Princess Presto; and 4.2% picked Alpha Pig.

The Power to Spell

When polled regarding which super power Princess Presto had, 80.5% accurately identified “spelling power.” Children were also asked (at a later point in the survey) who they would want to teach them to spell: 67.4% picked Princess Presto; 13.7% picked Wonder Red; 9.5% picked Alpha Pig; and 8.4% picked Super Why.

Alphabet Power

When polled regarding which super power Alpha Pig had, 82.6% accurately stated “alphabet power.” Children were also asked (at a later point in the survey) who they would want to teach them the alphabet: 86.3% picked Alpha Pig; 7.4% picked Super Why; 3.2% picked Wonder Red; and 2.1% picked Princess Presto.

Word Power

When polled regarding which super power Wonder Red had, 70.9% accurately identified “word power.” Children were also asked (at a later point in the survey) who they would want to teach them words: 67.4% picked Wonder Red; 13.7% picked Super Why; 9.5% picked Princess Presto; and 6.3% picked Alpha Pig.

Parasocial Interactions

Who would you want to come to your birthday party?

Children picked Super Why (18.1%); Princess Presto (18.1%); and both Super Why and Alpha Pig (18.1%) most frequently. Collectively, 13.8% would invite all 4 characters to their birthday party.

Who would you want to talk with if you were sad?

When sad, children wanted to talk with Super Why (34.7%) followed by Alpha Pig (21.1%); Princess Presto (17.9%); and Wonder Red (13.7%). Around 5% would talk to none of them when sad. Conversely, 4.2% would talk to all of them when sad.

Favorites (and not so favorite)

Who is your favorite character?

Just under 37% picked Super Why as their favorite character (36.8%) while 20.0% picked Princess Presto; 14.7% picked Alpha Pig; 8.4% picked Wonder Red; 6.3% picked all of them; 3.2% picked both boys; and 3.2% picked both girls.

A child's favorite character significantly differed by gender⁵⁷. The majority of boys picked Super Why as their favorite (56.6%) followed by Alpha Pig (18.9%). In contrast, girls selected Princess Presto as their favorite (45.2%) followed by Wonder Red (16.7%), Super Why (11.9%), and Alpha Pig (9.5%).

Who is your least favorite character?

Just over 43% stated that they liked all of the characters (43.2%) while 20% said they disliked Princess Presto (18 boys and 1 girl); 9.5% did not like Alpha Pig; and 8.4% reported disliking both girls. Only 3.2% disliked Super Why.

A child's least favorite character also significantly differed by gender⁵⁸. The majority of boys picked Princess Presto as their least favorite (34.0%). In contrast, girls selected Alpha Pig as their least favorite, although only a small percentage did so (11.9%). Interestingly, 24.5% of boys and 66.7% of girls stated that they liked all of the characters.

What is your favorite part of the program?

The vast majority of children reported that they liked all of the program (43.0%) while 16.1% mentioned solving the story problem and changing the story; 9.7% mentioned a specific episode (e.g., The Ant and the Grasshopper; Little Red Riding Hood; Jack and the Beanstalk); and 8.6% mentioned reading (e.g., jumping into the story to read it, Super Why reading the story).

What is your least favorite part of the program?

When asked to describe their least favorite part of Super Why, 63.2% said they liked all of it while 10.5% reported a specific episode or character (e.g., "the one where the guy had food and the other one didn't"); and 5.3% mentioned anything that Princess Presto did.

How Did SUPER WHY! Compare to My Favorite Show?

Children were first asked what their favorite television show was. This question was then followed up with "How did *SUPER WHY!* compare to your favorite show? Did you like it more, less, or the same?" Six percent of preschoolers said their favorite show was *SUPER WHY!*; 5.3% reported that their favorite program was Dora the Explorer, and 3.2% said they liked George Shrinks best. There were 62 different programs mentioned.

For those who did not choose *SUPER WHY!* as their favorite program, 57.3% of preschoolers said they liked *SUPER WHY!* as much as their favorite show, 12.2% liked *SUPER WHY!* more and 30.5% said they liked it less than their favorite show. Among those who liked *SUPER WHY!* less than their

⁵⁷ $\chi^2 = 55.06, p < 0.001$

⁵⁸ $\chi^2 = 43.11, p < 0.001$

favorite shows, 17 of 25 different programs were either entertainment (with no educational content; *Scooby Doo*) or violence-themed (e.g., *Pokemon*). When asked why, 20% of the children made a reference to some violent theme (e.g., they have better battles). Of those children who ranked Super Why the same as their favorite program, 38.3% said it was because both programs were cool, funny, or good. Finally, for those who liked Super Why more, 20% said that it helped them read or change a story while 10% said that the friends on the show were nice.

Conclusion: SUPER WHY! Viewers Liked the Program and Its Characters A Lot

The preschoolers in this project overwhelmingly liked *SUPER WHY!* and the four main characters in the show. Over half of the children reported that they learned new words while watching and half of these children were accurately able to identify words or phrases found in the show. Nearly two-thirds of children who watched the show reported that they would change nothing about the show.

Children were able to recall almost all of the characters' names. A majority of children were able to articulate why they liked each character, with most responses mentioning the character's specific skills focus or, more generally, reading. Most children were also able to identify a character's 'power' and, when asked later in the survey which character they would have teach them a specific skill, most often selected the character who modeled that skill in the show.

Princess Presto seemed to generate the most disparate comments. While a third of the children mentioned that she spelled or wrote words, other more stereotypical responses trickled into children's comments. Both boys and girls liked Super Why and Alpha Pig equally. Girls liked both Princess Presto and Wonder Red equally. Boys, on the other hand, gave more favorable ratings to Wonder Red when compared with Princess Presto. This finding is not surprising given that Princess Presto is more stereotypically like a girl whereas Wonder Red tends to possess more 'tom-boy' like or gender-neutral characteristics. For instance, girls were more likely to provide appearance-related reasons for liking Princess Presto or wanting to be her friend while no such responses were provided for Wonder Red. Findings such as these have been found in previous evaluations of children's television programs (Linebarger & Piotrowski, 2006). This trend should be further investigated as it is unclear whether Princess Presto's overt girlishness overshadows all that she says or contributes to each episode. Appearance themes were only reported for her and not for either male character or Wonder Red. On the flip side, Wonder Red was positively rated by the boys in this study, with 25% liking her a lot and 34.6% of boys liking her a little (compared with 15.1% who liked Princess Presto a lot and 34% who liked her a little).

OVERALL CONCLUSION

Did children learn from SUPER WHY!?

The most prominent finding in this project was that preschool children who watched *SUPER WHY!* across an 8-week period (i.e., the average *SW* viewer watched *SW* roughly 37 times or for 18.5 hours) performed significantly better on nearly all program-specific measures and most of the standardized measures of early reading achievement when compared with those preschool children who watched an alternate program. More specifically, preschool children demonstrated significant growth on targeted early literacy skills featured in *SW* including indicators of language development, letter knowledge, phonological and phonemic awareness, print conventions, and a combined early literacy skills task. Growth was seen across each type of assessment including growth in program-specific content featured in the different episodes and growth on standardized measures of early reading ability.

Learning to read begins quite early in a young child's life with the precursors to conventional reading success present long before children enter formal schooling. In order for young children to learn to read, they need multiple and sustained enriching experiences with language, storytelling, and early reading. Preliminary evidence suggests that *SW* not only engaged preschoolers (e.g., over 97% reported liking *SW*) but also provided critical instruction through its language- and literacy-enriching activities and lessons. Exposure to these activities and lessons enhanced preschoolers' early literacy skills, resulting in learning the content directly featured in the program. The ultimate goal of learning, however, is to be able to successfully transfer information or skills acquired in one context to another context. The specific skills and content that preschoolers acquired while watching *SW* did substantially transfer to generalized growth on standardized assessments of most of the key early literacy skills measured in this project.

A child's socioeconomic status (i.e., SES; as measured by an income-to-needs ratio that uses family income and family size in combination with poverty thresholds developed by the US Census) moderated several of the results including two program-specific tests and one normative test. *SW* viewers from Low SES families who viewed *SW* obtained significantly higher scores on the two program-specific blending tasks (both *SW* and Unrelated content) and the normative rhyming task when compared with their low SES Control-group peers. Consistent with prior research, effect sizes describing the magnitude of the difference between viewing groups for children from low SES homes were much higher than effect sizes for children living in working class and middle SES families. For the most part, *SW* viewers from low-SES and working-class SES homes demonstrated substantial improvements over their Control viewing peers on tests measuring language and phonological and phonemic awareness skills via both program-specific and standardized tests. The scores that middle- and upper-middle SES *SW* viewers obtained were modestly higher than their Control viewing peers, likely because they had many of these skills at the beginning of the study, leaving little room to capture growth on the various assessments. In cases where family SES did not matter, all *SW* viewers outperformed their Control viewing peers, suggesting that watching *SW* provided universal learning opportunities that were beneficial for *all* children as well as begin to bridge the learning achievement gap between poor and non-poor children in an entertaining and highly desirable form.

Acquiring early literacy skills is a complex and lengthy process. These results suggest that viewing *SW* can play a key role in this process, leading to positive growth in key early literacy skills that, in turn, have been linked to the development of later conventional reading success. These effects emerged after relatively little exposure. That is, meaningful changes were found for both program-specific and

normative outcomes with as few as 2 or 3 exposures and generally no more than 25 exposures (i.e., for more complex literacy skills). The largest effects in this study were found for fluency measures, indicating that watching *SW* over time helped children move from simple identification of letters and sounds to more fluent, automatic processing of letters and sounds. Letter knowledge accuracy and fluency represent foundational skills in the journey to conventional reading success (Burgess & Lonigan, 1998; Foulin, 2005; Rathvon, 2004). By watching *SW*, preschoolers' scores across all indices of alphabet knowledge improved dramatically. In fact, with just under 20 hours of exposure, the magnitude of the differences between *SW* viewers and Control viewers averaged 1.67, a huge effect (Cohen, 1998).

The results also demonstrated that viewing *SW* is universally beneficial as well as particularly powerful for children from low-SES homes. These children by virtue of living in homes with fewer high quality educational materials and experiences are at significant risk for later reading failure. Moreover, they are also likely to spend more time watching television and to report that they value the viewing experience more highly than their peers living in homes with more educational materials and experiences available (Bickham, Vandewater, Huston, Lee, Caplovitz, & Wright, 2003; Knowledge Networks, 2005; Roberts, Foehr, & Rideout, 2005). Given these documented effects on learning as well as the strong appeal of the program and its characters, *SUPER WHY!* affords a unique opportunity to implement a scalable and effective intervention with little cost and much benefit to these children and their families.

Although television is often criticized for promoting intellectual passivity, these findings underscore the educational power of television particularly when a program has been developed using scientifically-based research and has been coupled with entertaining characters and formats. *SUPER WHY!* is the newest addition to the arsenal of high quality, educational television programs (e.g., Sesame Street, Between the Lions, Blue's Clues) that are empirically created; scientifically evaluated; and subsequently found to help young children encode, store, retrieve, and transfer program content, in *SUPER WHY!*'s case, to gains in early literacy skills embedded within an engaging and motivating context.

SUPER WHY! provides preschool children with literacy-rich material and experiences that not only contribute positively to their early literacy skills, but also help to set them on a positive literacy trajectory that will enable them to achieve conventional reading success. Previous research documents a relationship between viewing high-quality educational television when a preschooler and more time spent reading for leisure as well as higher GPAs when a teenager controlling for a number of important demographic characteristics including parent education, age, ability, gender, and birth order (Anderson et al., 2001). Most of the early viewing in that longitudinal study was Sesame Street, a program that is more holistically focused on school readiness (of which literacy, letters, etc. are just a part). The primary curriculum in *SW* targets early literacy skills and, as a result, each episode is heavily layered with learning strategies that deliver literacy-rich content (see Vaala et al., 2009). It is likely that early and extended interactions with *SW*, particularly for children who have few other material or social resources in their homes, will not only provide them with crucial opportunities for language and literacy learning but also help to bridge the achievement gap between children at risk for reading failure and their peers who have more material and social resources available. Purcell-Gates (1996) proposed that early literacy experiences are embedded within the social and cultural milieu surrounding young children. When that milieu is lacking the necessary literacy- and language-rich experiences, television can become an important and unduplicated educational resource (see Mielke, 1994). Children from minority or low SES families spend more time with television, see it as a worthwhile way to spend their time, report a sense of competence at processing its messages, and, as a result, are able to benefit from educational content (Linebarger et al., 2004; Linebarger & Piotrowski, 2009). Further, these children often demonstrate more

substantial learning gains when compared with peers living in middle SES families (e.g., Fisch, 2004; Linebarger et al., 2004).

Did Children Like SUPER WHY!?

Overall, 97% of preschoolers who rated the show and its characters reported liking it. The majority of children liked Super Why and Alpha Pig while girls were especially favorable toward the two female leads. Finally, boys were more favorable toward Wonder Red and less favorable toward Princess Presto. When asked if they would change any parts of the program, children were most likely to comment that they liked all of it. The remaining responses were fairly idiosyncratic and tied to specific SW episodes. Finally, over half of the children reported learning new words from the show and 48% of those children were able to list these words and phrases.

What Limitations Do These Findings Have?

Children who viewed at home were randomly assigned to viewing group while the children who viewed at school were all in the SW group. Despite random assignment, there were some initial differences by group for both an environmental variable (i.e., actual number of books available favored children in the SW group) and a researcher-developed learning outcome (i.e., Speech to Print Matching, Near Transfer). Although we used ANCOVA models to control for unexpected pre-test differences, it is possible that we were unable to control for all variables that might differ between the groups and be responsible for these findings. There is considerable convergence across a majority of the learning outcomes that suggests these pre-test differences did not bias the results in favor of SW viewers.

Second, during the course of the project, *SUPER WHY!* began airing on television. We asked parents to refrain from showing their children the alternate program used in this study (i.e., control group parents were asked to not show their children SW episodes). To determine whether children did see SW episodes despite these efforts, we showed each child a picture of the four SW characters and asked children whether they recognized the television program depicted in the picture. Because preschoolers tend to respond affirmatively to interviewer yes/no questions, we followed this question up with a request for the name of the program. About one-third of the control group viewers said that they recognized SW and were able to correctly label the program. A future report will more closely examine the role of exposure to SW both within the SW group and those children in the control group who recognized and accurately labeled “*SUPER WHY!*” at the post-test.

What Recommendations Would These Findings Suggest?

Only 1 of the 4 program-similar assessments was significantly different by group. Generalizing program content to similar content not found in the program appeared more challenging than generalizing program content to normative assessments. It is possible that the tasks used in this study were either too difficult or too easy resulting in measurement problems rather than a true inability of the child to demonstrate a particular skill. It is likely that it was difficult for children to process both the task structure and the unfamiliar content simultaneously.

SUPER WHY! viewers’ performance on the Word Change task was lower than their Control viewing peers. This task was created using the same format as the SW episode. When Super Why intervenes to ‘change the story’, the screen lists 3 possible word choices. It is possible that SW viewers may purposely not select the correct word on the first try because Super Why selects the wrong word first. Although

this was not the intended effect, this finding reinforces the powerful impact that high-quality educational television can exert on young children. Because the task modeled the steps used in the program to “change the story” and not whether children understood the meaning of the words available to change the story, it is not possible to determine whether the *SW* viewers did know the word meanings and chose not to apply them in this task in an effort to model how Super Why ‘changes the story’ in every episode.

Three different normative outcomes also demonstrated no significant differences by group: vocabulary, book knowledge, and story comprehension. Although there is a sizable body of literature positively linking child educational TV knowledge with vocabulary development, in this study and in another study of literacy skill acquisition from a specific program (i.e., *Between the Lions*), no vocabulary gains were noted. Conversely, programs like *Arthur & Friends* and *Clifford the Big Red Dog* have been associated with larger vocabularies and more expressive language use while playing. If vocabulary is to remain a major focus of this program, then using more explicit vocabulary-learning strategies may be needed. The large number of skills in this program, however, may necessitate a reduction in the total number of educational lessons contained in each episode to avoid overwhelming preschoolers’ limited cognitive capacity. Finally, Biemiller and Boote (2006) note that vocabulary effects may actually become evident later, as children have had time to incorporate the new vocabulary into their existing store.



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The contents of this document were developed under a cooperative agreement between the US Department of Education, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and the Public Broadcasting System for the Ready to Learn Initiative, PR# U295A050003. However, these contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

