

Flaws in the Denton Study Reviewed by What Works Clearinghouse

The Carolyn Denton study, "The Effects of Two Tutoring Programs on the English Reading Development of Spanish-English Bilingual Students" was published in the Elementary School Journal in 2004. **This study's assessment tools and process were incongruous with the objectives of the Read Naturally strategy.**

Denton Study Assessments Flawed

The Denton study used two programs in its study: Read Naturally and Read Well. Read Naturally is regarded as the best fluency building program on the market that also improves comprehension and vocabulary, yet **the Denton study did not assess fluency.**

The Denton study did assess phonemic decoding, which is not part of the Read Naturally strategy. Using phonemic decoding as an assessment measure benefitted Read Well and negatively impacted Read Naturally. Clearly, the Denton study was designed to measure the effects of Read Well.

One of the authors of the study, **Dr. Jan Hasbrouck**, acknowledges these flaws. Hasbrouck states: "The measures used to evaluate the effectiveness of the instruction did not include measures of fluency. Since Read Naturally is an intervention targeted at fluency, *the measures used did **not** match the specific purpose and intent of the Read Naturally instruction* given to the students in that group."

Denton Study Process Flawed

Even if the Denton study had assessed fluency, its process would have produced an inaccurate evaluation of the Read Naturally strategy. The Denton study did not follow Read Naturally's recommended process. Specifically:

- The Denton study's inclusion of oral discussion sessions of vocabulary and comprehension in the process would have **reduced the time spent reading.**

The Denton study's inclusion of vocabulary activities such as flash cards and pre-reading in the process would also have **reduced the time spent reading.**
- The students in the Denton study were **not held accountable to Read Naturally's four criteria to pass** (reach goal rate, make three or fewer errors, read with good expression, and answer all of the questions correctly). Students were not required to go back and master any of the criteria they failed on the first pass attempt. Achieving mastery in all four of the pass criteria is a critical element to success in the Read Naturally process.
- The Denton study's **use of audio tapes was inconsistent.** Variability of reading rates would have resulted from having tutors—volunteer undergraduate students—read to the students. Rates on the audio tapes increase by a specific percentage between read alongs, which tutors would not have been able to replicate.
- The students in the study only had 22 sessions over a 10-week period. Read Naturally recommends a minimum of three sessions per week to be successful.

Clearly, the results of the Denton study cannot be used to accurately evaluate the effectiveness of Read Naturally. WWC's review of this study as though it does evaluate Read Naturally provides the public with inaccurate information.

