

iPad app shows promise in strengthening the reading skills of young children

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An experimental iPad application is showing promise as being a valuable tool for teachers in building on the reading skills of young children. An interdisciplinary team of researchers representing the UC College of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning (DAAP) and the College of Education, Criminal Justice, and Human Services (CECH) will present early results of their pilot study on July 14, at the 19th annual meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Reading in Montreal, Canada.

The application, SeeWord Reading, is a digital, interactive tool that uses visual communication principles to provide graphic cues so that young learners can link sounds to letters in the [alphabet](#).

“It is a way of teaching what sound belongs to what letter,” explains

SeeWord Reading creator Renee Seward, a UC assistant professor of digital design and principal investigator on the project. “It engages auditory, visual and aesthetic senses to help children remember letters.”

The [iPad](#) digital tool for teachers operates on three levels:

Level 1 – Teaches sound-to-letter correspondence.

Level 2 – Teaches students to understand these sounds on a word level.

Level 3 – Teaches students to understand sounds and words within a connected text.

The project was tested on 42 children in kindergarten and first grade as part of a 10-week, UC-coordinated, federally-funded after-school program – 21st Century Community Learning Center – at Mt. Washington School and Academy of World Languages (both Cincinnati Public Schools). UC graduate students in education, trained on the reading tool, worked with small groups of children two-to-three times per week. The training included 23 sounds corresponding to letter forms.

In a randomized study, student performance on word identification improved to a greater extent using the SeeWord Reading training program, compared with groups that were not trained in the program. The researchers say their findings demonstrate the effectiveness of the SeeWord Reading tool as a means to advance early word [reading skills](#) and support its use as an engaging supplement for teaching letter/sound correspondence to at-risk, beginning readers.

The research team in Montreal is represented by Seward; Beth O’Brien, an assistant professor of early childhood education; Allison Breit-Smith, a UC assistant professor of education; Pamela Williamson, assistant professor of education; and Benjamin Meyer, assistant professor of

design. The after-school 21st Century Community Learning Center is coordinated by Rayma Waters, co-director of UC's Partner for Achieving School Success (PASS) Center in the College of Education, [Criminal Justice](#), and Human Services.

Seward says the SeeWord Reading tool is still in the early testing stages. "It needs to fit like a glove in the hands of both the student and the teacher," Seward says.

Seward says she originally developed the design concept as a way for educators to support children aged 9 to 11 who were challenged by dyslexia. "The more I spoke about the project at reading conferences, the more specialists were telling me that this wasn't just an approach for dyslexics – it's a new approach to reading that people have been waiting for," says Seward.

The project was supported by part of a grant from the Verizon Foundation. The PASS Center's 21st Century Community Learning Center – funded by the U.S. Department of Education and led and coordinated by PASS – provides academic enrichment opportunities during non-school hours for children at Mt. Washington Elementary and Academy of World Languages. The researchers thank the UC PASS Center, Debra Klein, principal of Mt. Washington Elementary and Jackie Rowedder, principal of Academy of World Languages, as well as Cincinnati Public Schools for serving as community partners in the study.

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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