

Learning to Label Letters by Names or Sounds



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Background

- Across languages and cultures, the phonics approach is used commonly during literacy instruction
- Letter names knowledge has been identified as the bridge to literacy (e.g., Foulin, 2005)
- Not all children begin literacy with letter names

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Are letter names universally a bridge to literacy?

Labeling Letters

Letter Names

What letters are called during identification

T → /ti/ K → /keɪ/ F → /əf/
Q → /ku/ X → /əks/ Y → /waɪ/

Letter Sounds

How letters are sounded out when reading

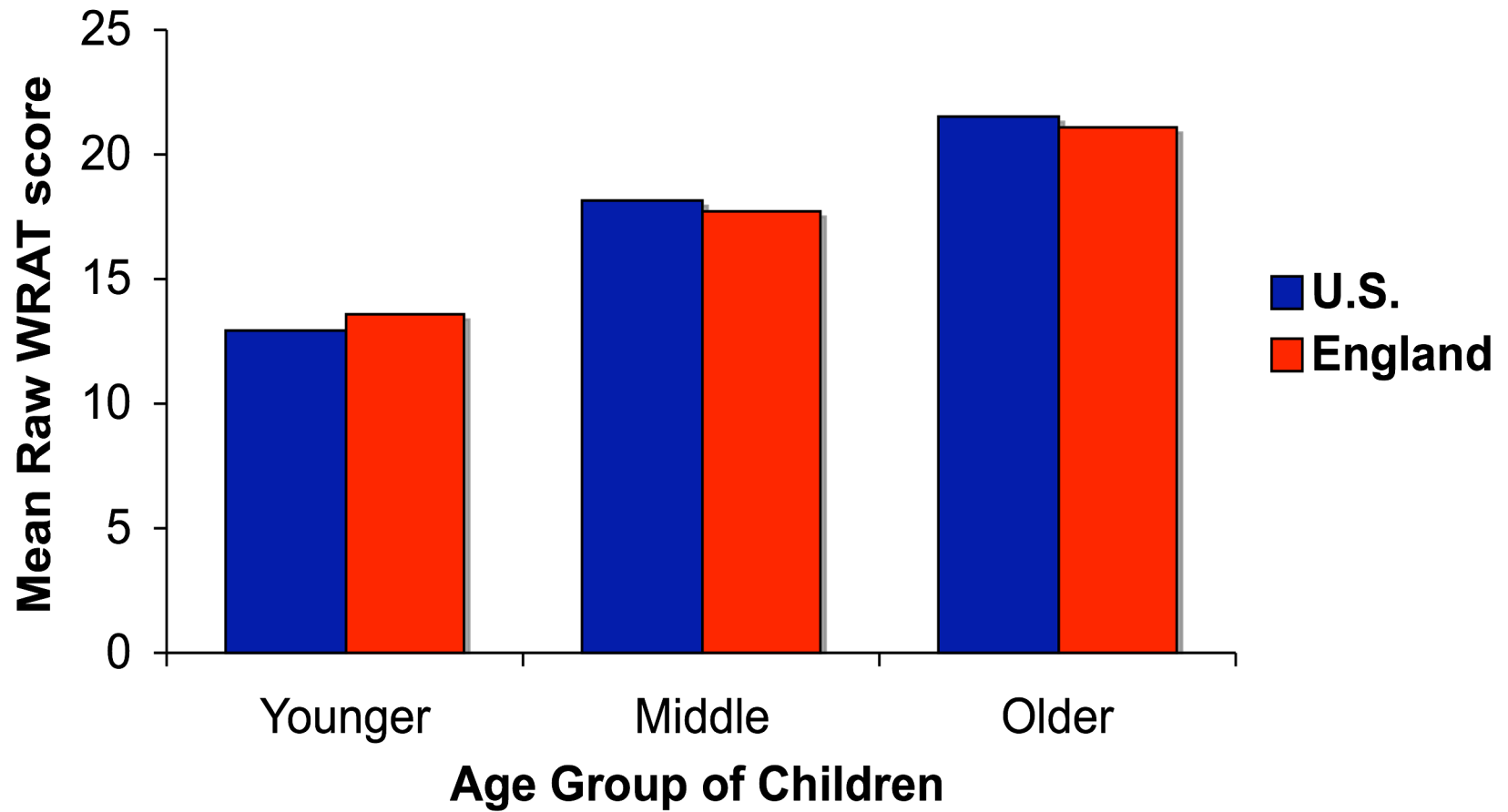
T → /tə/ K → /kə/ F → /f/
Q → /kwə/ X → /ks/ Y → /jə/

Participants

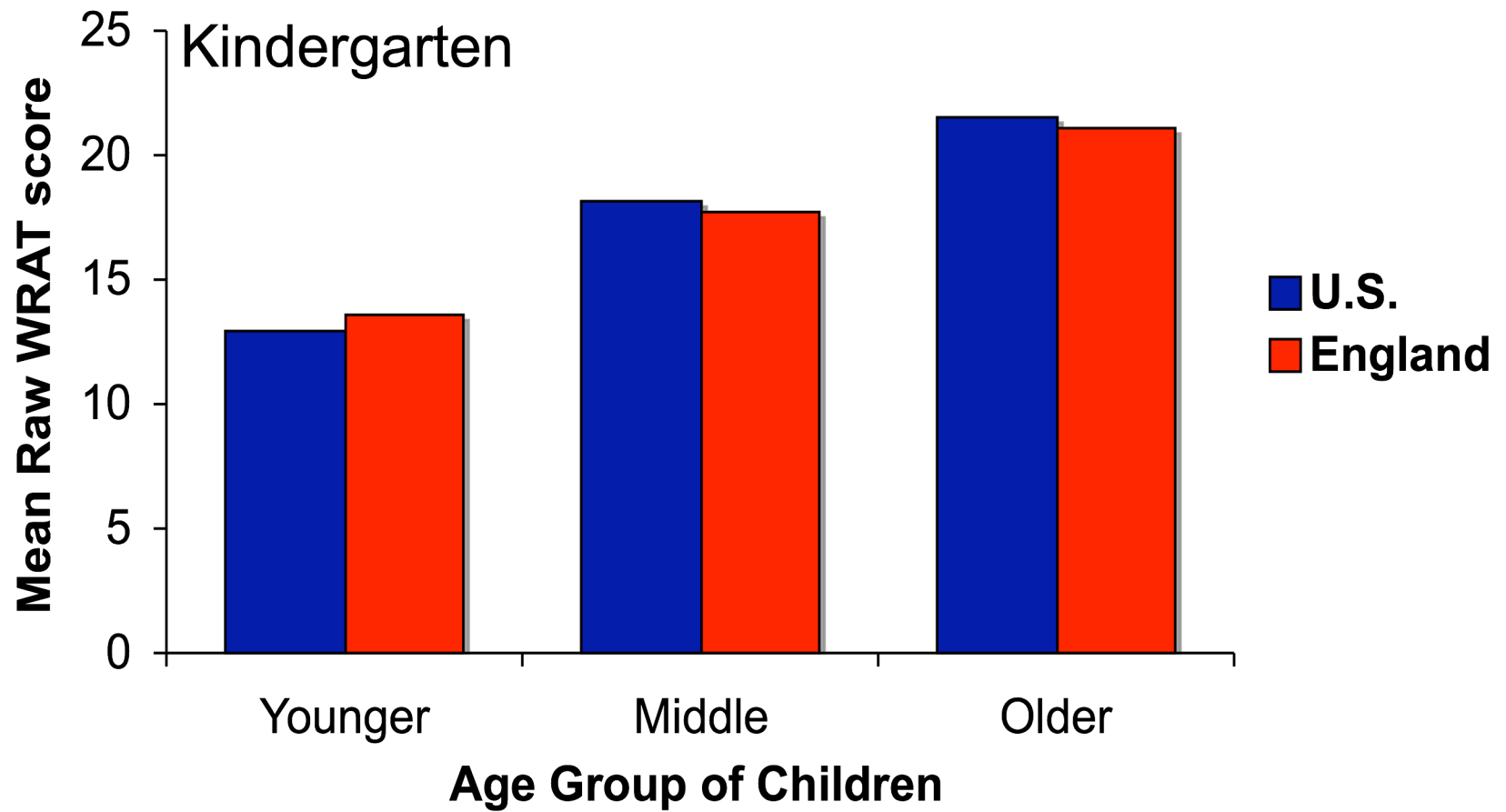
	<u>U.S. Sample</u>			<u>English Sample</u>		
	N	Age	Grade	N	Age	Year
<u>Younger</u>	33	5;5	preschool	30	5;1	reception
<u>Middle</u>	27	6;3	kindergarten	28	5;8	year 1
<u>Older</u>	32	6;11	1st grade	32	6;6	year 2

WRAT Spelling Scores

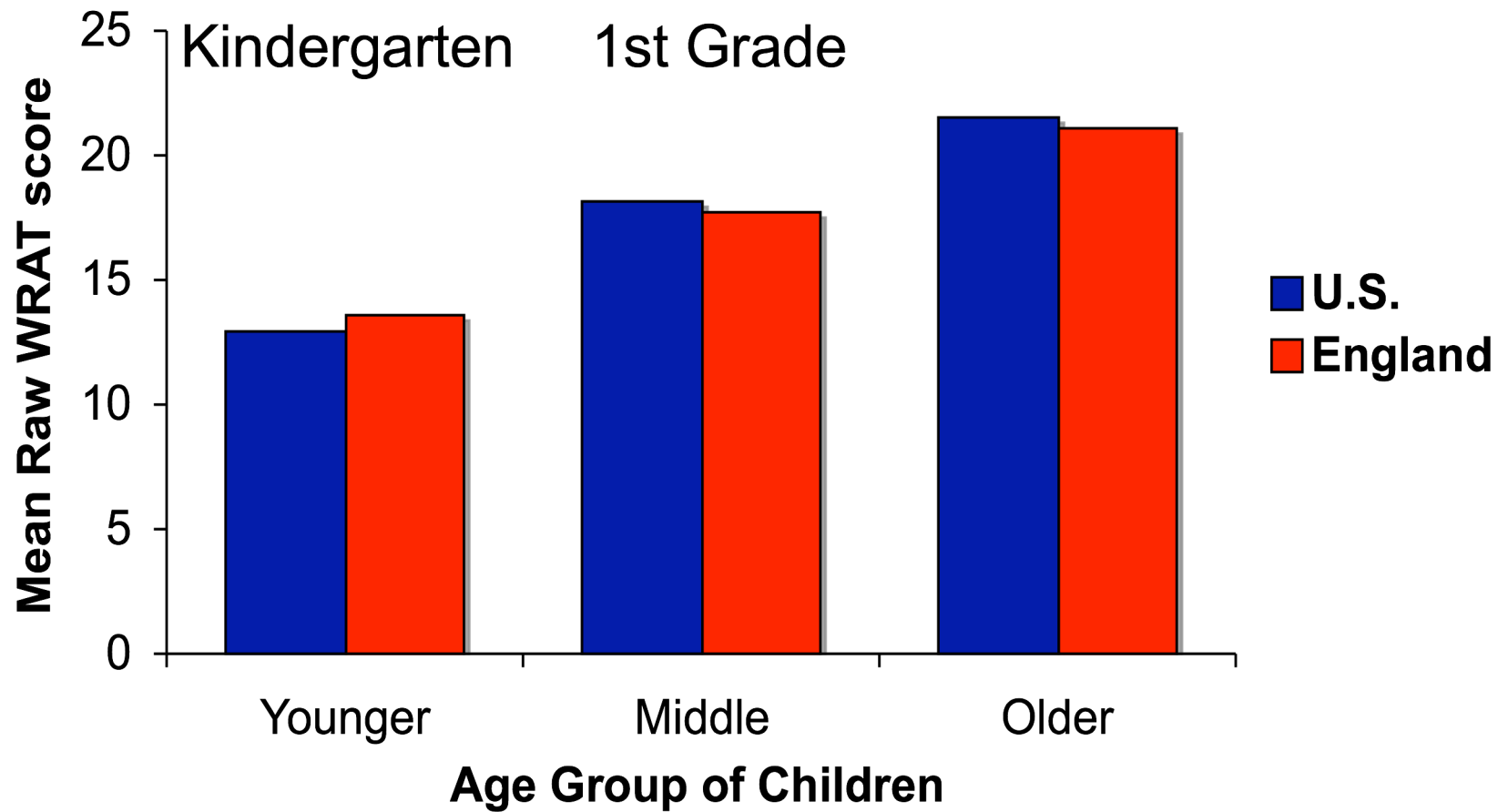
WRAT Spelling Scores



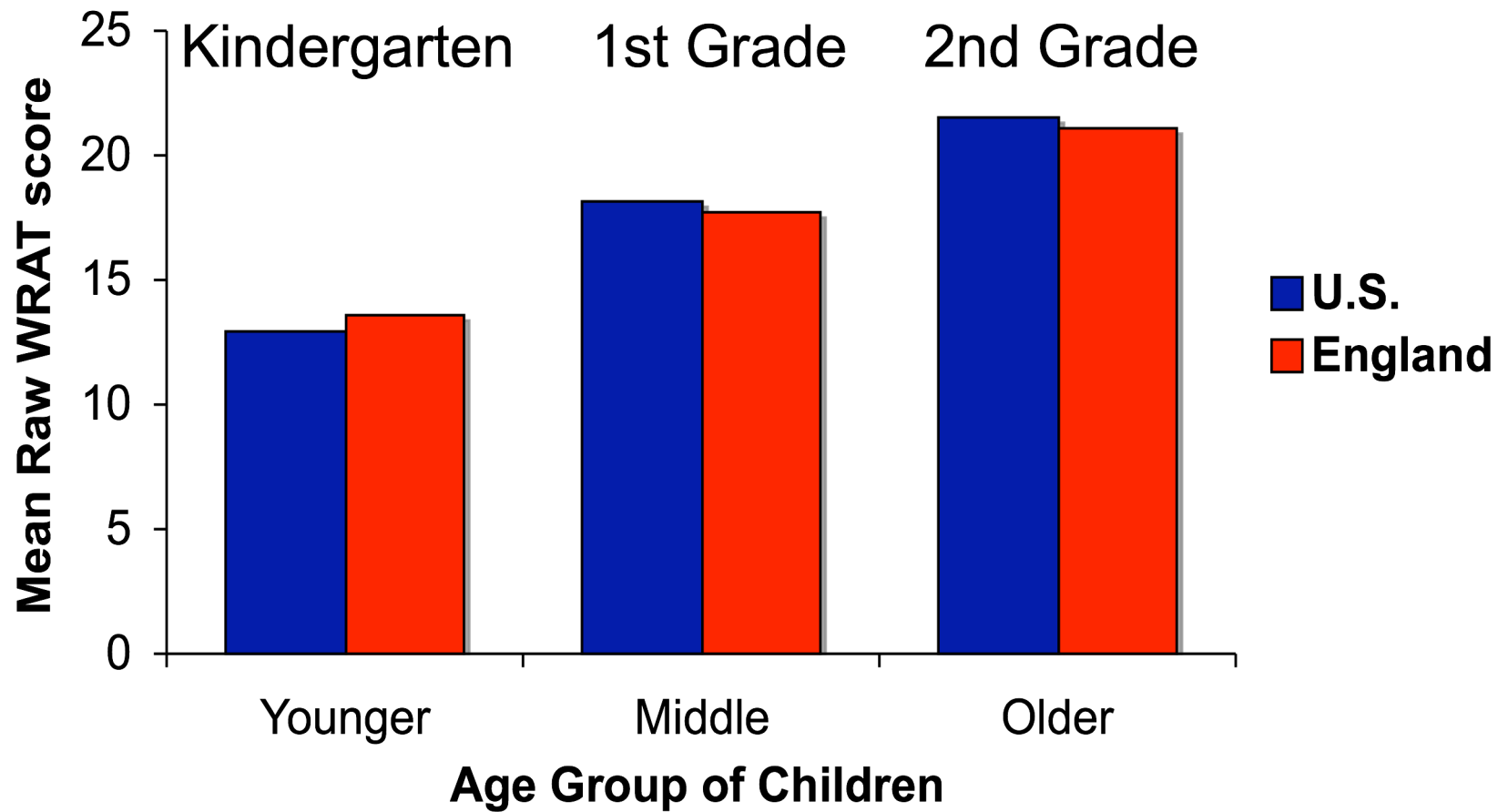
WRAT Spelling Scores



WRAT Spelling Scores



WRAT Spelling Scores



Curriculum Differences

Children in England

- Learn to read under the National Literacy Strategy
- Emphasis on letter sounds over letter names

Children in the U.S.

- Learn to read under a variety of curricula
- Emphasis on letter names before letter sounds

Research Questions

Between the two countries are there differences for ...

- teachers' use of letter names and sounds?
- parents' use of letter names and sounds?
- children's knowledge of letter names and sounds?
- children's spelling strategies?

Parent Practice

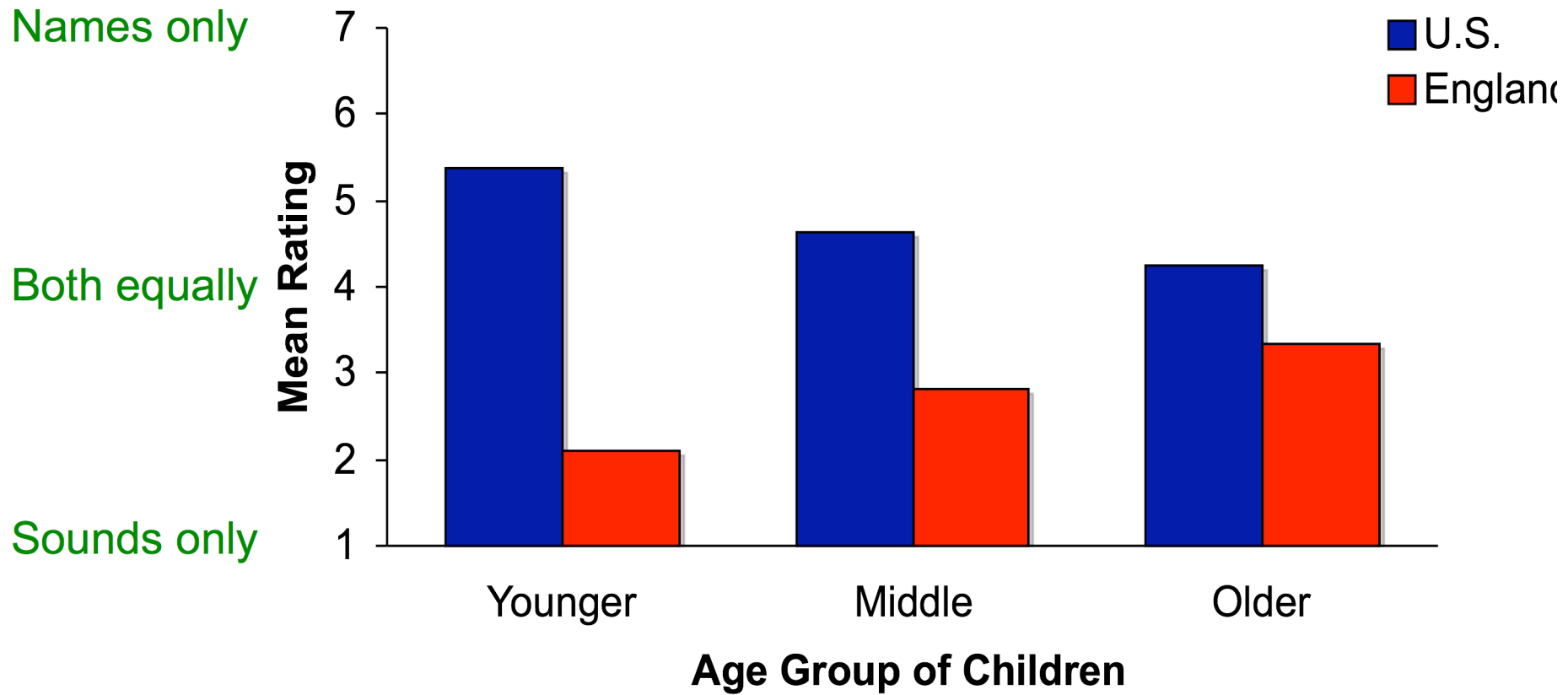
Parent Practice

Parents rated their use of letter names and letter sounds comparatively

Rating Scale

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Sounds Only	Usually Sounds	Sounds More Often	Both Equal	Names More Often	Usually Names	Names Only

Names vs. Sounds, Parents



One parent from the U.S. wrote:

This has been evolving over time, depending on what the boys seemed most ready to do. Earlier this year, they were most interested in letter recognition, so we would find letters on signs and other places in the environment and identify them by name. As they've seemed more interested in sounding out words, we've moved more toward "Tee says tuh" and "Gee says guh", for example.

One parent from England wrote:

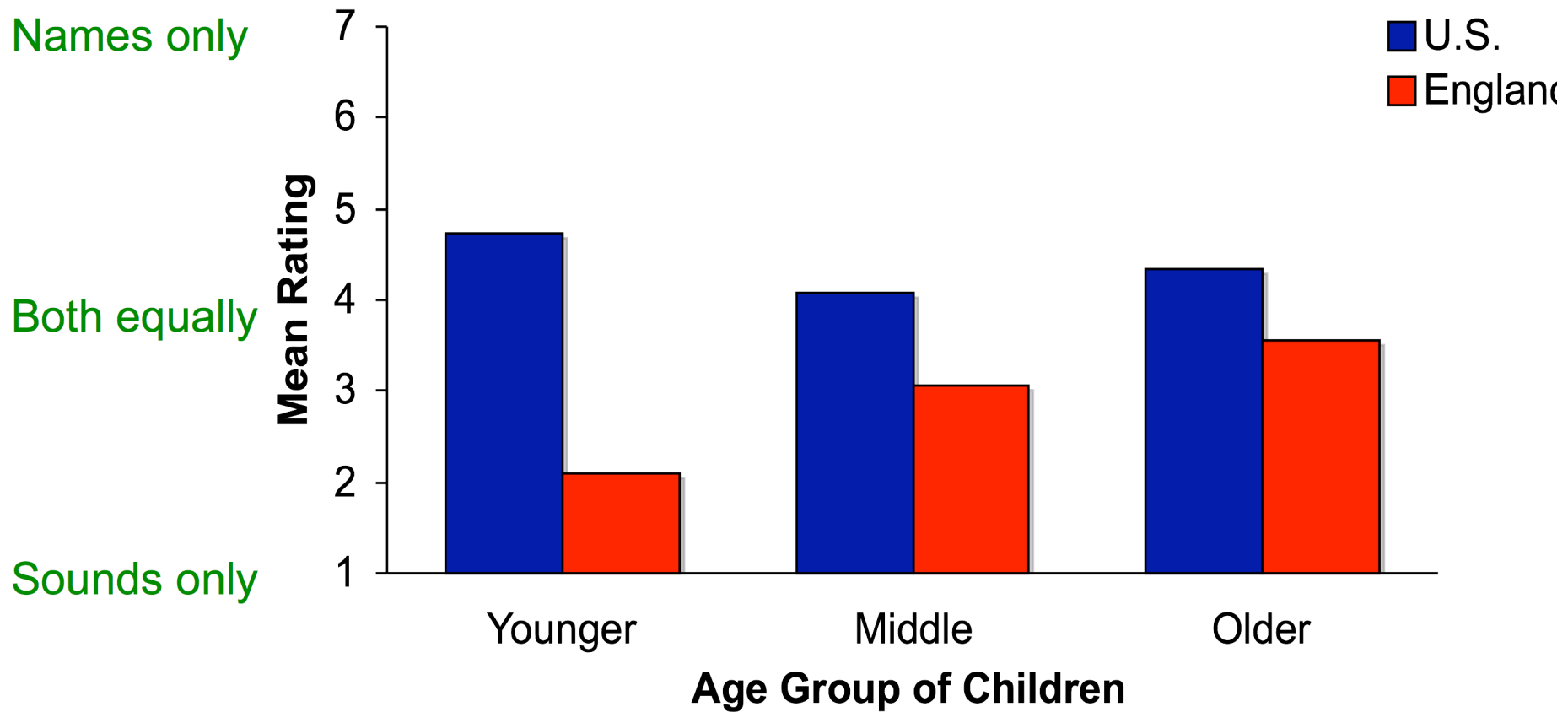
When working one to one with my child to do any form of reading or writing, I always use letter sounds. I only use letter names if necessary for identification e.g. "MFI" - the store, singing the "ABC alphabet song" ...

Teacher Practice

Using the same rating scale, teachers rated their use of letter names and letter sounds while teaching literacy

- Letter identification
- Reading
- Handwriting
- Spelling
- General Practice

Names vs. Sounds, Teachers



One teacher from the U.S. wrote:

Due to the complex nature of sounds that are associated with our alphabet letters, I think it is easier for a young child to identify letters by name rather than sound when trying to write or identify letters in text. Whenever possible however, the letter name and sound should be talked about together so a child will begin to associate a name and a sound to one particular symbol.

One teacher from England wrote:

I believe that letter names versus sounds emphasis should differ not only with task, but also at a child's language development. Early in their reading and spelling experience letter sounds have a greater relevance. Later on this balance will change ... The emphasis on letter names versus letter sounds will naturally change with the child's growth, not only in years, but in experience and competence of the English curriculum. Generally, I think that letter sounds take preference over names ...

Summary

- Teachers and parents in the U.S. use letter *names* more frequently than letter sounds
- Teachers and parents in England use letter *sounds* more frequently than letter names
- Country differences are larger for younger children than for older children

Summary

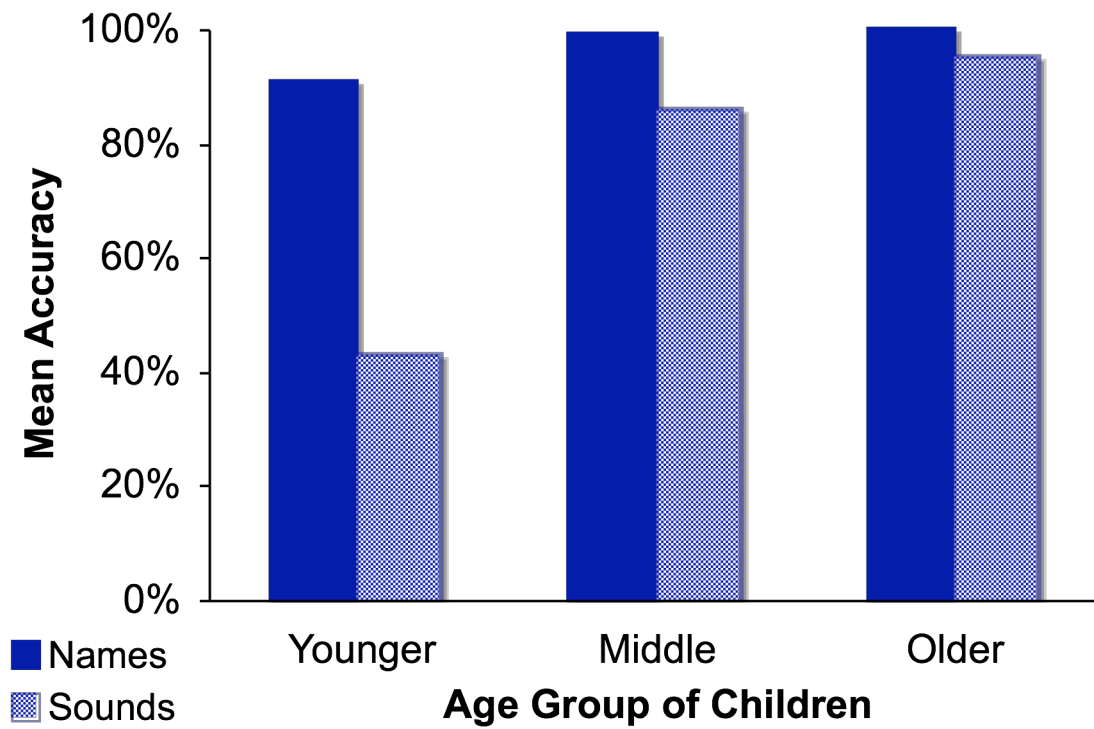
- Teachers and parents in the U.S. use letter **names** more frequently than letter sounds
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Do these formal and informal practices influence children's knowledge of letter names and sounds?

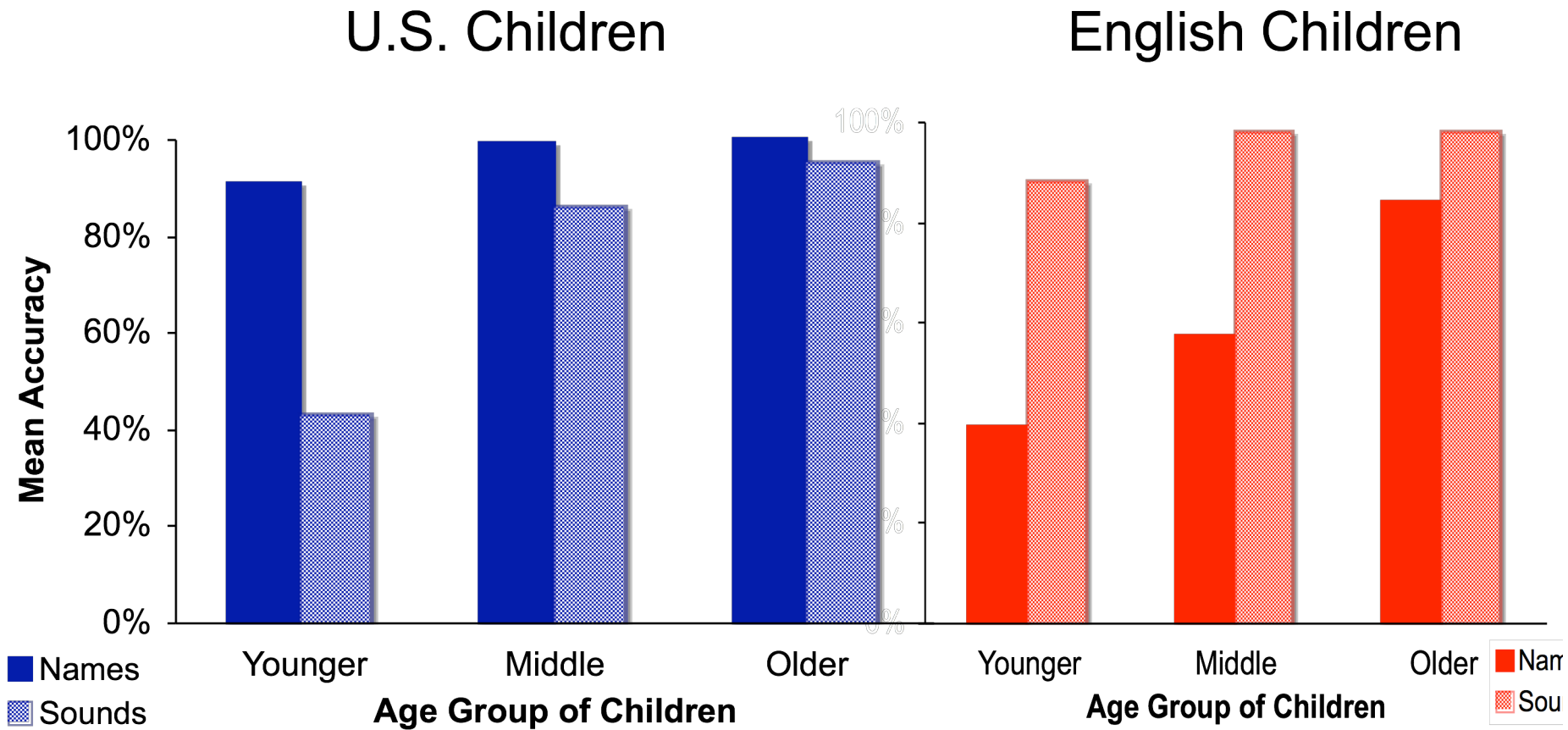
Letter Tasks

Letter Tasks

U.S. Children



Letter Tasks



Letter Types

Acrophonic

Letter name begins with sound that letter represents

e.g., B, D, P, T, V, Z

Nonacrophonic

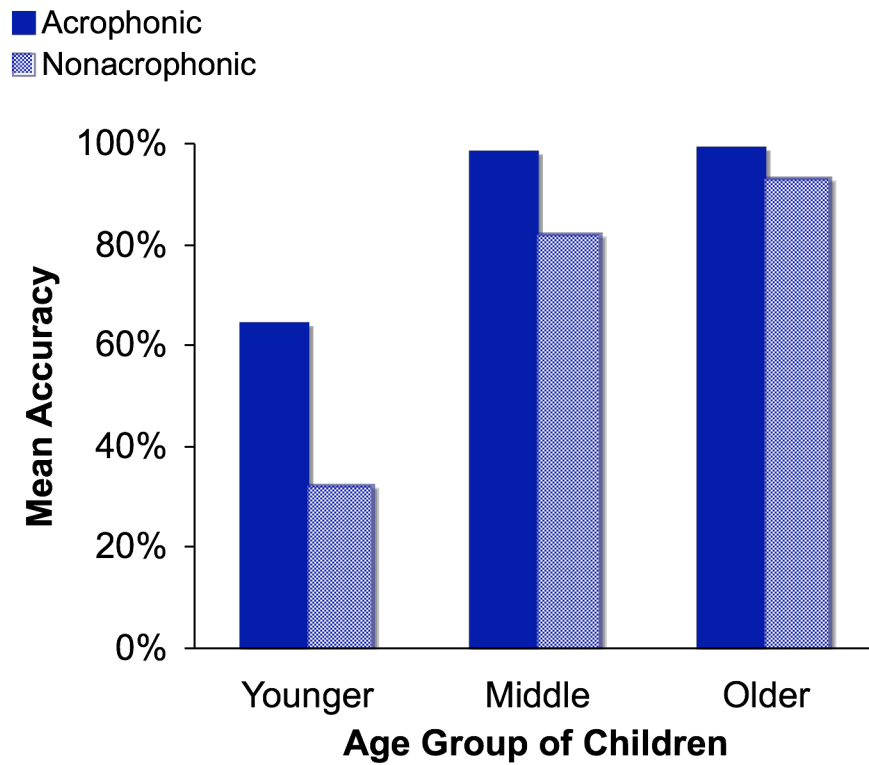
Letter name does not begin with sound that letter represents

e.g., F, H, L, M, W, X, Y

Letter Sounds

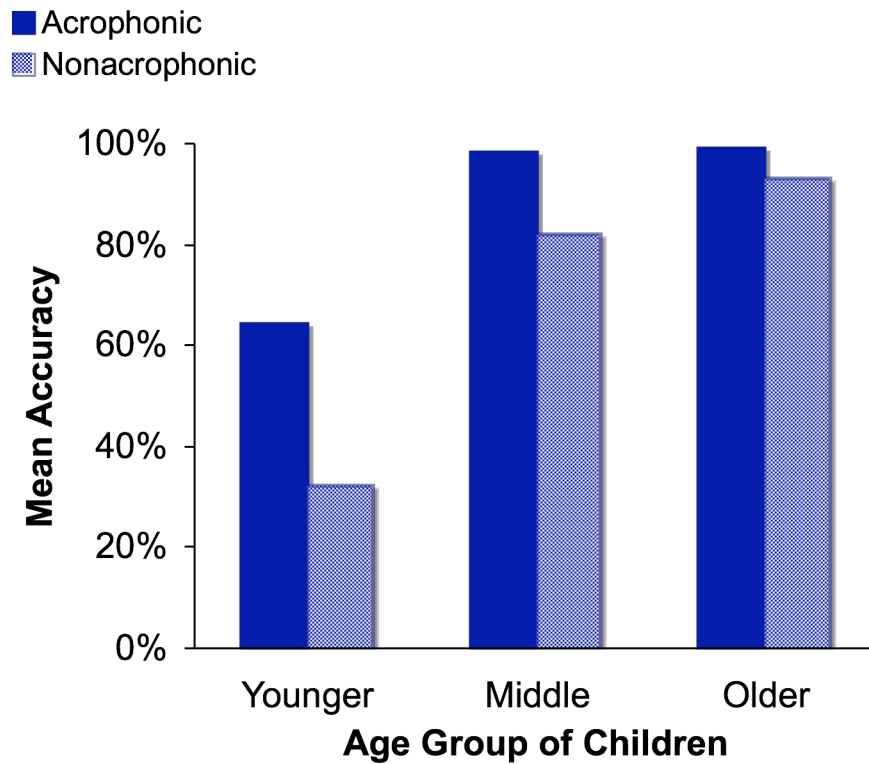
Letter Sounds

U.S. Children



Letter Sounds

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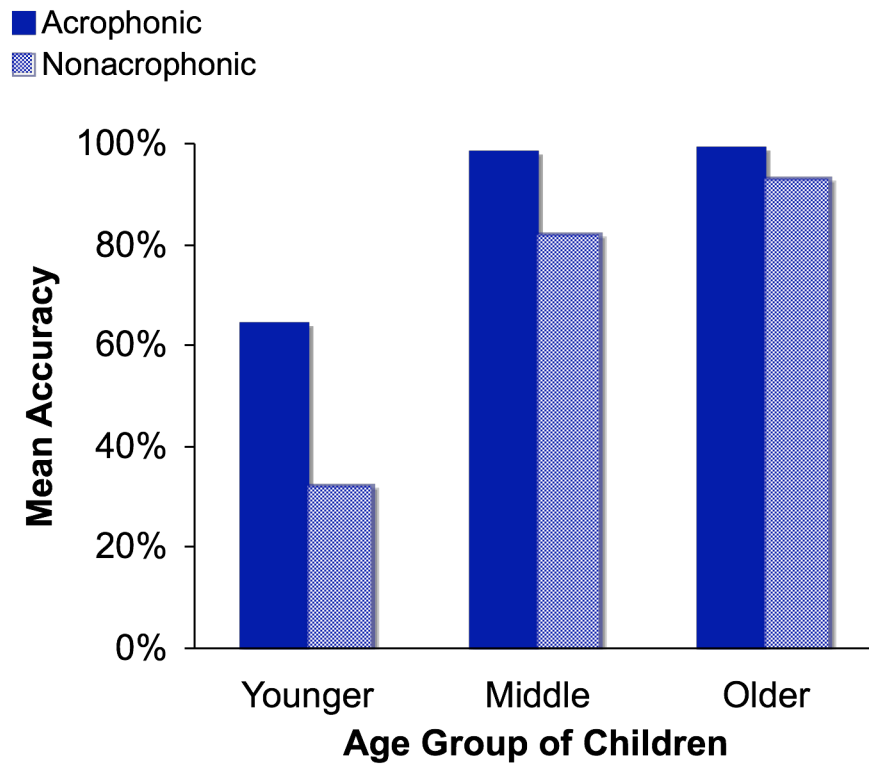
Example Errors

/də/ for W

/wə/ for Y

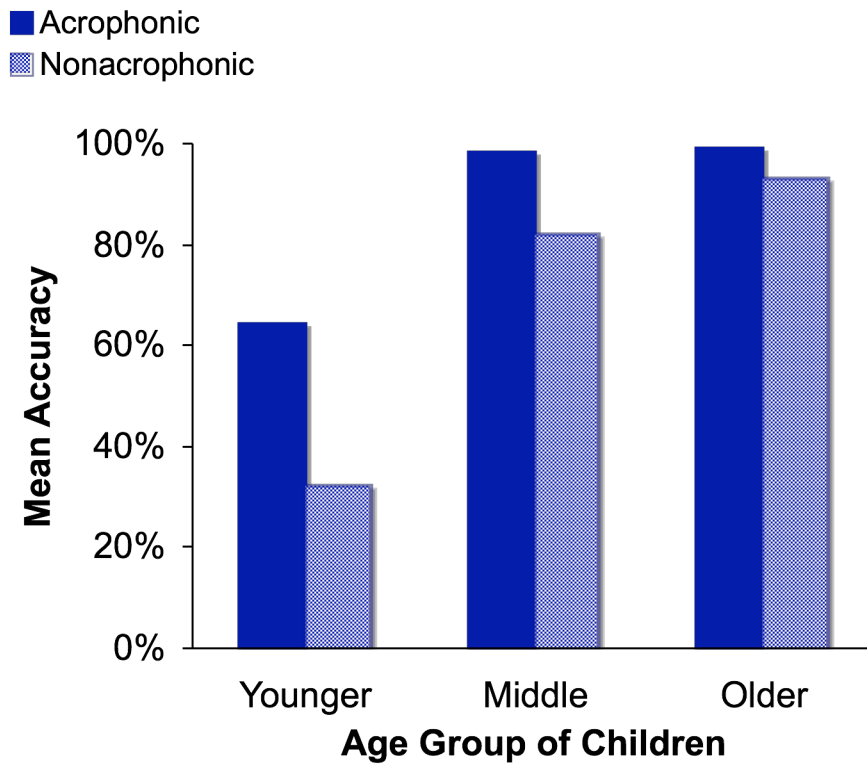
Letter Sounds

U.S. Children

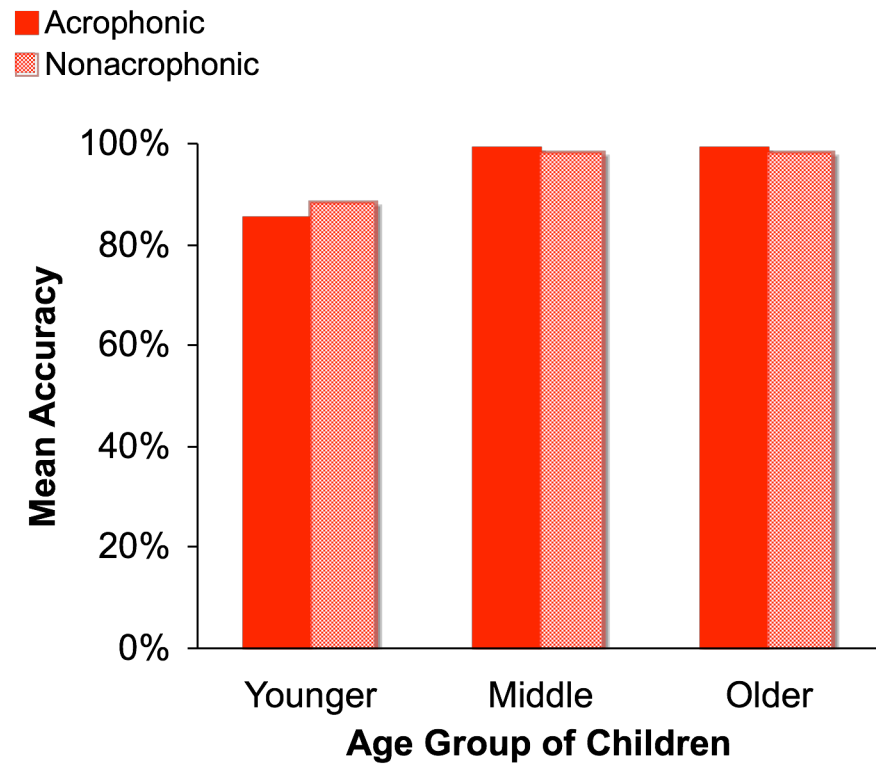


Letter Sounds

U.S. Children



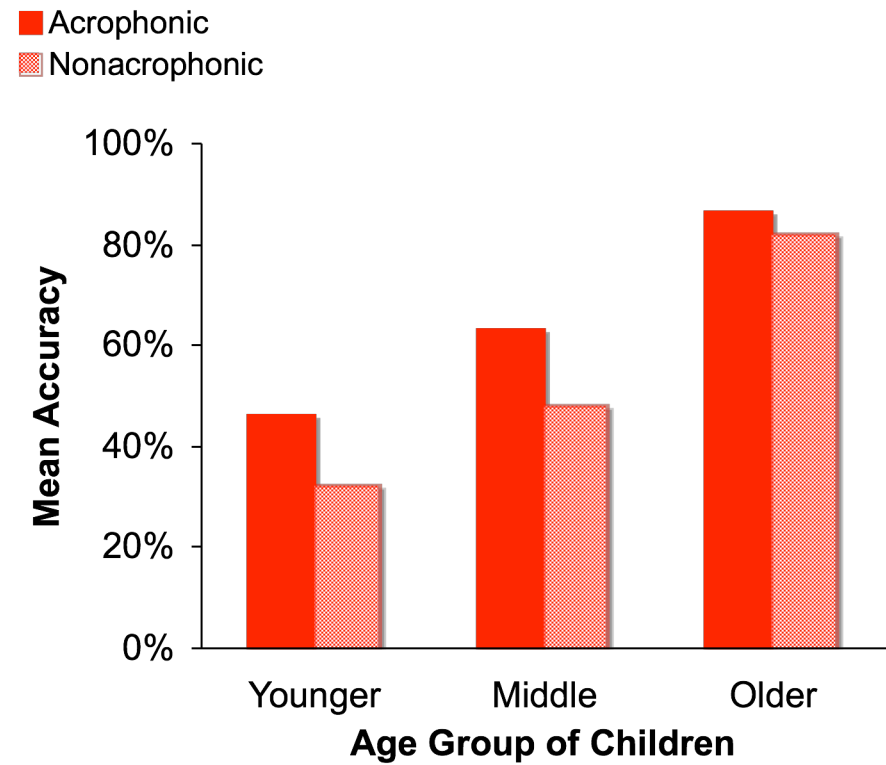
English Children



Letter Names

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Letter Names

English Children

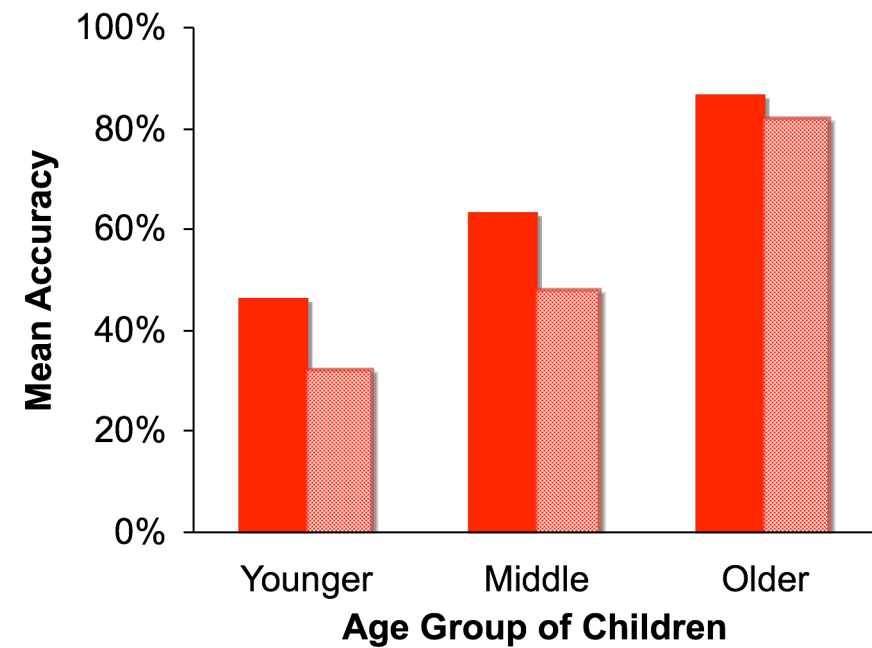
Example Errors

/kwi/ for Q

/fi/ for F

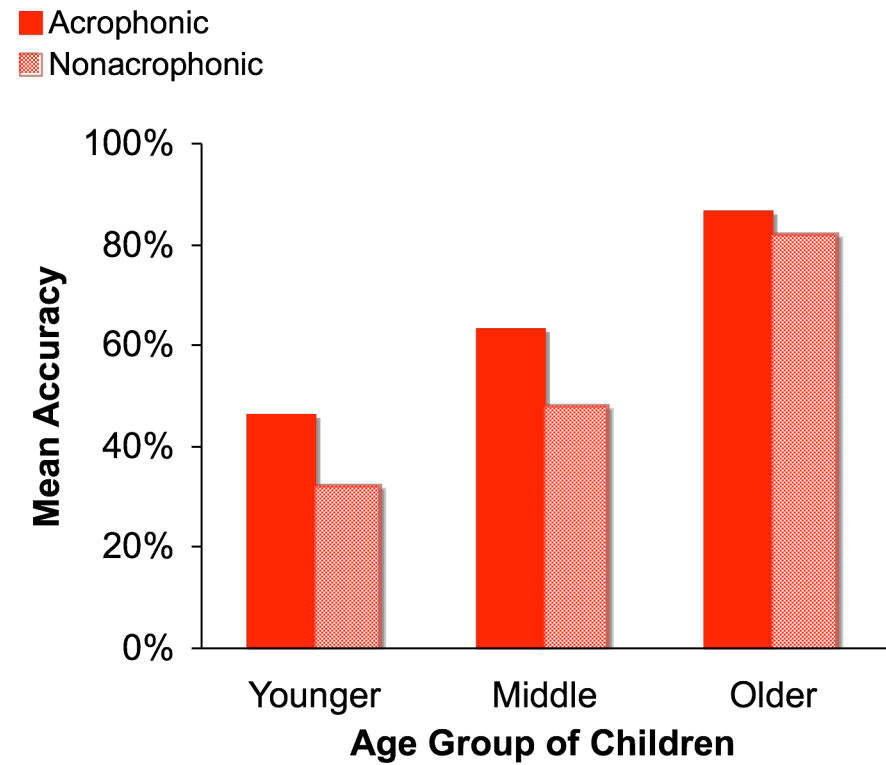
/ki/ for C

■ Acrophonic
▨ Nonacrophonic



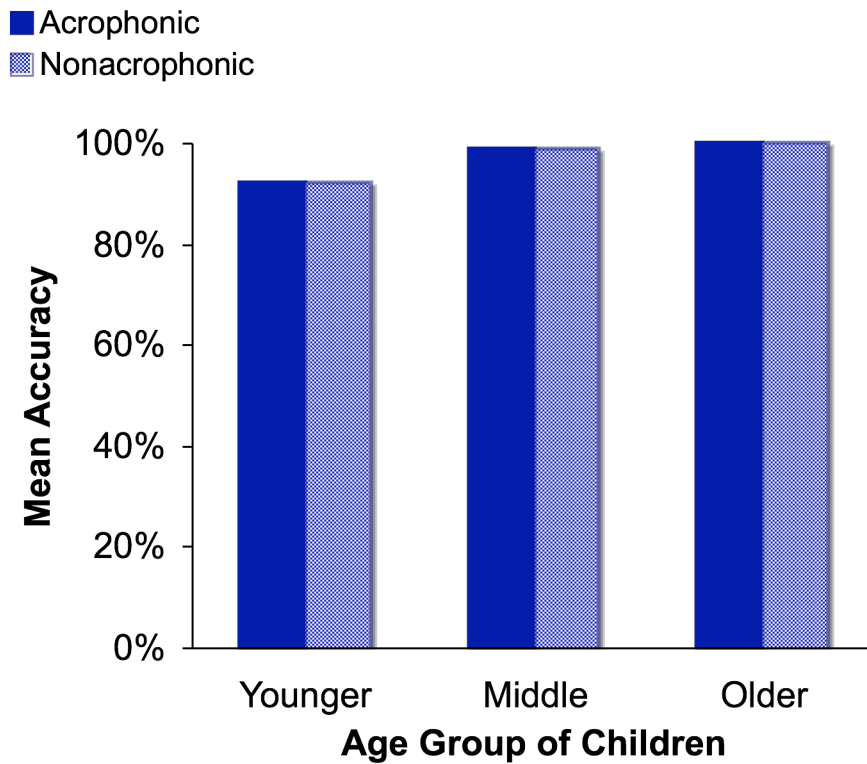
Letter Names

English Children

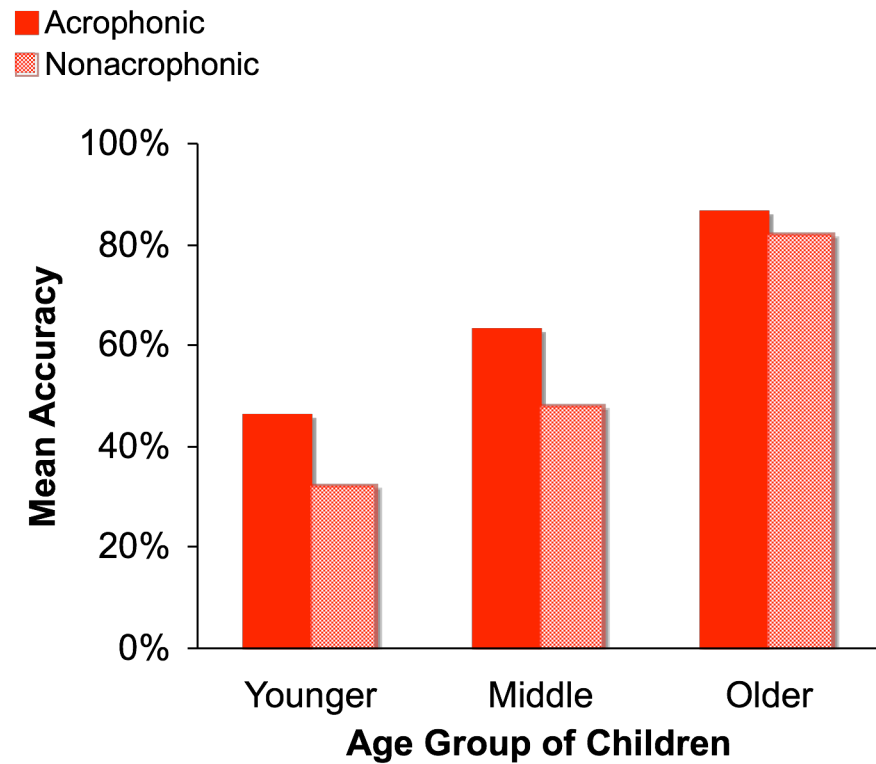


Letter Names

U.S. Children



English Children



Summary

- Formal and informal educational practices in the U.S. and England influence children's letter knowledge
- Children from both countries use the more familiar task to inform the less familiar task

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Do these differences influence how children represent phonemes in their spelling?

Letter Name Stimuli

Letter Name Item	Phoneme Only Item
/sig/ → 'cg'	/seb/ → 'sabe'
/dʒit/ → 'jt'	/dʒom/ → 'jome'
/waɪb/ → 'yb'	/wam/ → 'wam'

Letter Name Stimuli

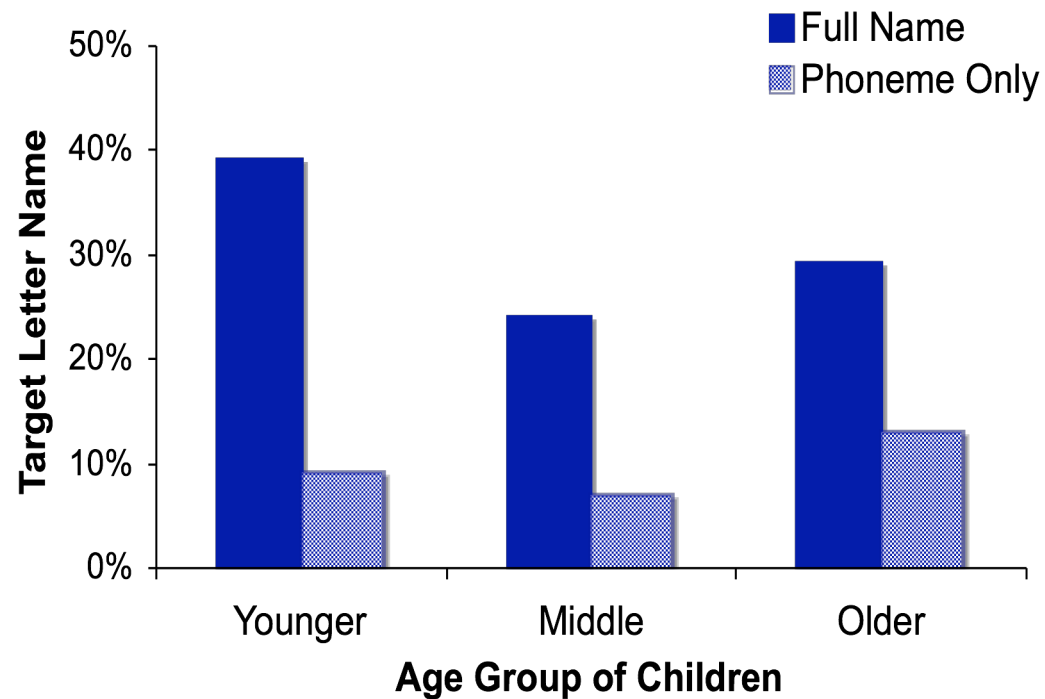
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Do children from the U.S. include letter names in their spellings more often than children from England?

CV Letter Name Items

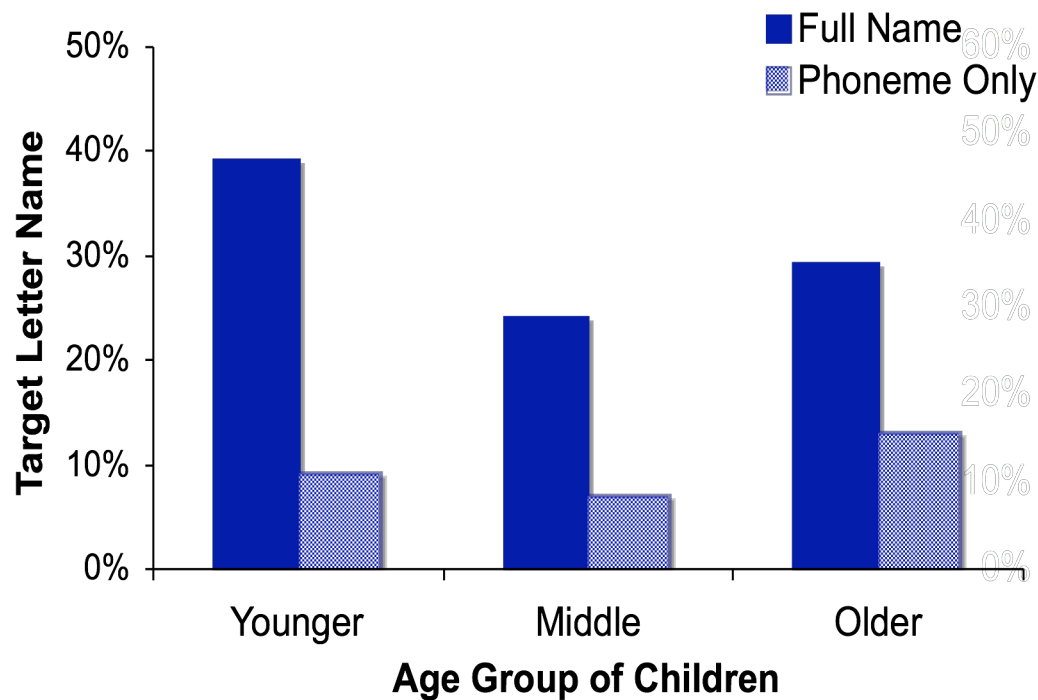
CV Letter Name Items

U.S. Children

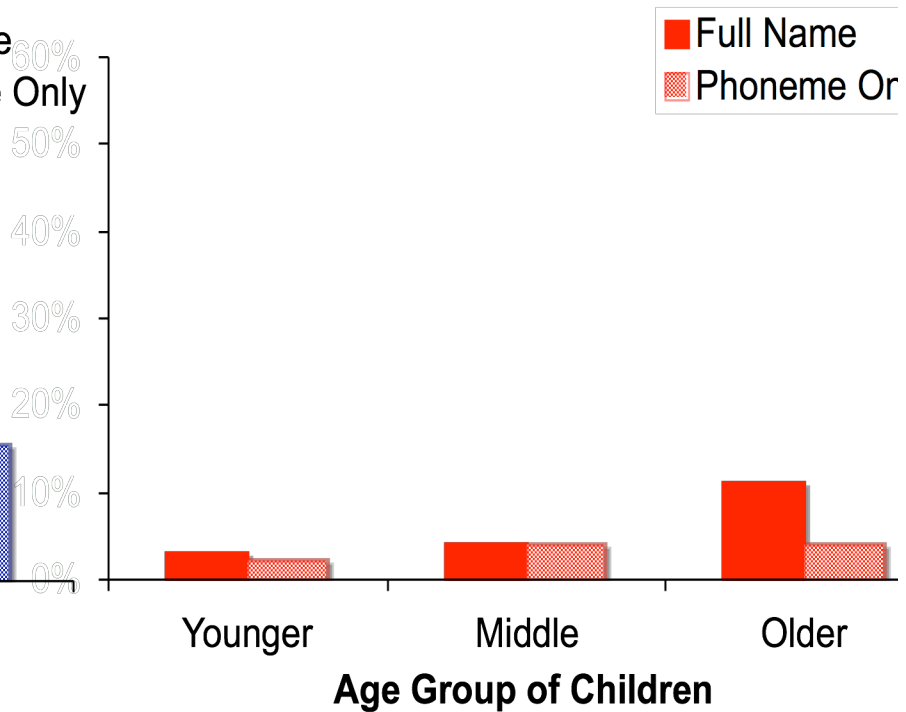


CV Letter Name Items

U.S. Children



English Children



Letter Sound Stimuli

Taught Letter Sound	Untaught Letter Sound
/wubə/ → 'wub'	/nulə/ → 'nula'
/mukə/ → 'muc' or 'muk'	/gunə/ → 'guna'

Letter Sound Stimuli

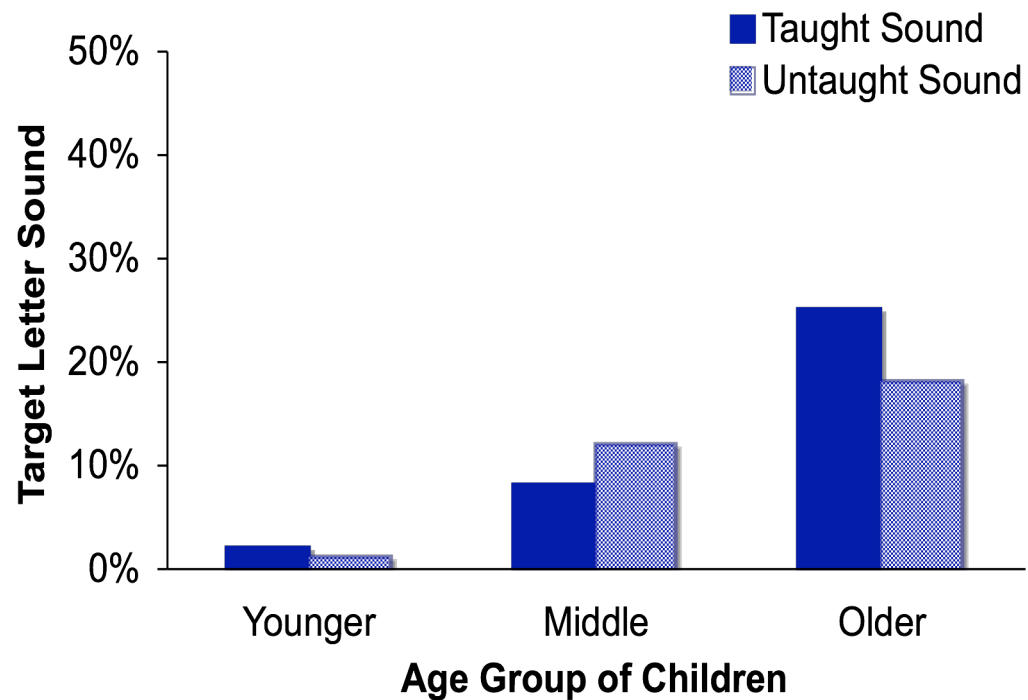
Taught Letter Sound	Untaught Letter Sound
/wubə/ → 'wub'	/nulə/ → 'nula'
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Do children from England include letter sounds in their spellings more often than children in the U.S.?

Letter Sound Items

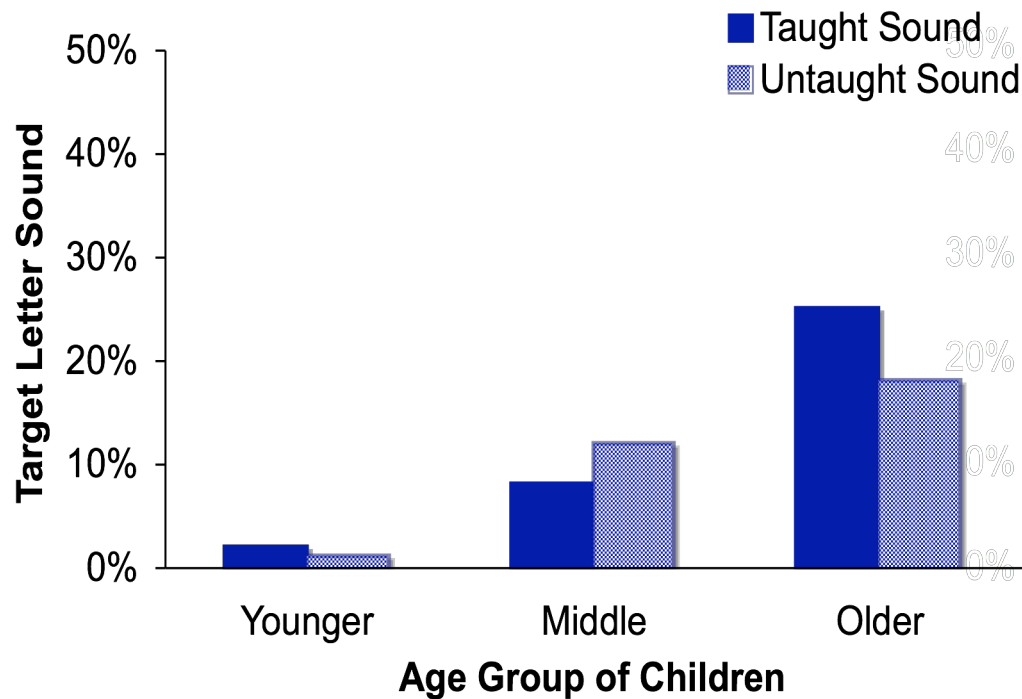
Letter Sound Items

U.S. Children

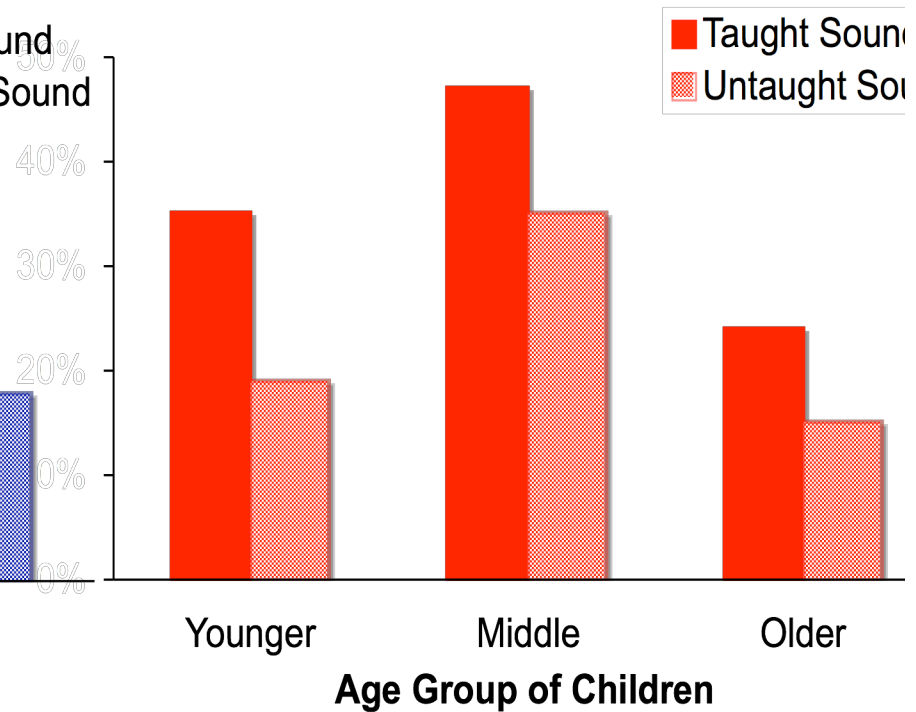


Letter Sound Items

U.S. Children



English Children



Summary

- The formal and informal educational practices in the U.S. and England influence children's letter knowledge
- Children from both countries use the more familiar task to inform the less familiar task
- Differences in educational practices differentially influence invented spellings of U.S. and English children because they have different knowledge about letters

Conclusions

- Letter names are not the only bridge to literacy
- Children use the stronger and earlier learned labels to guide their spelling

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Both letter names and letter sounds can be effective bridges to literacy

Acknowledgements

Feedback

- Nick Chater
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