

Justice, L., Meier, J., & Walpole, S. (2005). Learning new words from storybooks: An efficacy study with at-risk kindergartners. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools, 36*, 17-32.

Keywords: language intervention, book reading, at-risk children, vocabulary, word learning.

Summary: This study examined the effectiveness of storybook reading in promoting novel word acquisition among a group of 57 at-risk kindergarten students. The students, who attended low socioeconomic schools, were evaluated during 20 small-group storybook reading sessions. Researchers sought to determine 1) the efficacy of learning novel words after repeated exposures during storybook time; 2) what effect, if any, explanation of novel words would have on their acquisition; 3) the effect of students' prior vocabulary knowledge on learning new words.

Assumptions:

- Repeated reading of storybooks assists in the acquisition of new vocabulary.
- Lower socioeconomic status (SES) students are further behind in literacy performance than their middle and high SES counterparts.
- Vocabulary achievement at the kindergarten level influences later reading achievement.
- Adult interactions with children can assist in acquisition of new vocabulary.
- Students' ability to learn novel words is influenced by their current level of vocabulary knowledge.

Results:

- Incidental exposure to novel word showed negligible gains for low SES kindergarten students.
- Gains in word knowledge were most often observed when novel words were explained to kindergarten students
- Elaborated explanations, rather than simple exposure, had a significant effect for students acquiring new words.
- Children with pre-existing low vocabulary knowledge showed greater gains in explained vocabulary acquisition of novel words than their higher-level counterparts. This result did not hold true for non-explained words.

Conclusion:

- Non-explained, repeated word exposure does not result in significant vocabulary acquisition.
- Vocabulary acquisition through explained, repeated storybook exposure did show a significant effect on low SES students' word learning.
- Students who began the intervention with a low vocabulary knowledge base had the largest gains from word explanation.

Suggestions for Teachers:

- Explanation of novel words during storybook reading sessions is advantageous for the student in acquiring new vocabulary, particularly among students with low SES backgrounds.
- Explained and repeated word exposure methods/strategies provide significant gains in vocabulary acquisition among students.
- Storybooks can be an effective tool for kindergarteners' acquisition of novel words, when coupled with explanation.

Suggestions for Literacy Leaders:

- Teachers should be encouraged to explain novel words during repeated storybook sessions.
- Teachers should choose storybooks that promote novel vocabulary exposure.
- Explained storybook exposure intervention programs should be adopted when teaching students, particularly those with low SES backgrounds, who may have limited knowledge of vocabulary-