

Nelson, J.R., & Stage, S.A. (2007). Fostering the development of vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension through contextually-based multiple meaning vocabulary instruction. *Education & Treatment of Children*, 30(1), 1-22.

Keywords: elementary education, vocabulary, reading comprehension, instruction, multiple meaning words.

Summary: Over a three-month period, 3rd and 5th grade students received either contextually-based multiple meaning vocabulary instruction or regular, non-treated instruction in their respective language arts classes. The research generally found students at the low achievement level who received the contextually-based multiple meaning vocabulary instruction significantly gained in their vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension. More gains were seen among 3rd grade students than their 5th grade counterparts. Moreover, students who initially tested at the lower achievement levels had higher gains in vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension than those who tested at the moderate or higher levels.

Assumptions:

- People can learn vocabulary indirectly through casual exposure (reading, conversations) or through direct vocabulary instruction.
- Vocabulary instruction can increase vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension particularly among low achievement groups.
- There is a research gap in the effectiveness of teaching multiple meaning words.
- Focusing on multiple meaning words should encourage a reader to be more attentive to the contextual clues, which give words their meaning; this, in turn, should increase the student's reading comprehension.

Results:

- Third and fifth grade students, testing at the low achievement level for vocabulary and reading comprehension, showed statistically significant gains in vocabulary knowledge; however, the magnitude was small.
- Third and fifth grade students, testing at the moderate and high achievement level for vocabulary and reading comprehension, did not show significant gains in vocabulary in comparison to the non-treated group.
- Third grade students at all achievement levels showed reading comprehension gains compared to their non-treated counterparts; however, the treatment effect was moderate.
- Fifth grade students with low achievement scores achieved statistically significant gains in reading comprehension; whereas, the moderate to high achievement group did not see gains in their reading comprehension compared to the non-treated group.
- Generally, there were moderate gains in comprehension compared with vocabulary knowledge.
- Teachers rated the efficacy of the contextually-based multiple meaning vocabulary instruction as high.

Conclusions:

- The number of exposures to words with multiple meanings may have been too small to achieve vocabulary knowledge.
- Students may have shown greater gains if their instruction had been for the entire year rather than 3 months.
- The mixed outcomes, based on initial vocabulary and reading comprehension levels, are consistent with research in the field which articulates greater gains are usually made by those at the lower achievement levels.

Suggestions for Teachers:

- Teachers should consider using contextually-based multiple meaning vocabulary instruction.
- Teachers should consider the use of the instructional practice.

Suggestions for Literacy Leaders:

- Consider more intervention time to test the validity of contextually-based multiple meaning vocabulary instruction.
- Help teachers to understand that word choice should be amended to account for differences in 3rd and 5th grade vocabulary levels.
- Provide professional development to develop strategies for content-area driven words in 5th grade.