

Teaching the meaning of the word helps with word reading accuracy and fluency

Austin, C. R., Vaughn, S., Clemens, N. H., Pustejovsky, J. E., & Boucher, A. N. (2022). The relative effects of instruction linking word reading and word meaning compared to word reading instruction alone on the accuracy, fluency, and word meaning knowledge of 4th-5th grade students with dyslexia. *Scientific Studies of Reading, 26*(3), 204-222.

WHAT DID THEY DO?

- 22 Students in grades 4-5 who were formally diagnosed with either dyslexia or a Specific Learning Disability (SLD) received 12 daily one-on-one 45 minute reading intervention lessons. There were two types of lessons—one focused on word reading only and the other focused on word reading plus meaning.
- After each intervention –and after the twelve lessons were completed– students were assessed on their word reading accuracy and fluency of the taught words. After the word reading lessons, students were also assessed on word definitions by matching words to word meanings.

WHAT DID THEY FIND?

- The word reading and word meaning intervention led to improved word reading fluency and accuracy of targeted words. This intervention additionally demonstrated greater maintenance of accuracy across intervention sessions.
- The word reading and word meaning intervention also led to significant increases in word meaning knowledge.

WHAT COULD THIS MEAN?

- Connectionist models of reading (Harm & Seidenberg, 2004; Seidenberg, 2005, 2017) focus on the importance of relying on orthographic, phonological, and semantic information for accurate and fluent word reading. This study provides evidence that there are benefits to using word meaning as an anchor when teaching new words.
- This type of word reading instruction could be considered for students with dyslexia because the semantic instruction provides an additional lexical layer of information when students are storing words. This can be helpful since students with dyslexia often have difficulties with orthographic-only learning methods.
- Although this study suggests positive growth and maintenance for students with dyslexia or other reading disabilities, it is unclear if the outcomes can be generalized for all students.
- Additionally, this intervention was very effective as a one-on-one 45 minute lesson, but classroom teachers would need to modify the time and size of the group to work this logistically into their classrooms.

