



Story Talk: Increasing Preschoolers' Vocabulary Development Through a Streamlined Teacher Professional Development Intervention

Barbara A. Wasik

Annemarie H. Hindman

Temple University

What We Know Preschool Language and Vocabulary Development

- The preschool years are critical for developing language and specifically vocabulary skills.
- Children in poverty often do not have access to the necessary high quality language experiences to develop vocabulary.
- Preschool teachers need to provide quality language experiences to help support early language and literacy development.

The Problem

- Research has shown that preschool teachers (especially those working with children in poverty) do not always implement research-based strategies that provide opportunities for children to learn vocabulary words.
- Most PD that results in significant increases in children's vocabulary knowledge requires changes in the entire curriculum and intensive training.

Unanswered Questions

- Can teachers be trained in a streamlined PD model to implement research-based strategies that change their interactions with children by:
- promoting vocabulary development,
 - extending conversations, and
 - providing meaningful feedback to scaffold children's language and vocabulary?

Research Questions

- Question 1:** Does Story Talk raise the quality of teachers' instruction?
- Question 2:** Does exposure to Story Talk improve children's vocabulary? Outcomes of interest include taught words from the curriculum as well as receptive vocabulary and expressive vocabulary on standardized measures.
- Question 3:** Which specific Story Talk instructional strategies best explain children's vocabulary outcomes?

Professional Development

Intervention teachers received:

Four, three-hour group trainings throughout the year that explicitly detailed the strategies designed to promote language, the research upon which these strategies are based, and the rationale for the efficacy of these strategies.

Classroom materials including guides for book reading and center activities.

One-to-one coaching twice a month for approx. 1 hour. Coaches reviewed videos of teachers' practice and discussed successes and challenges regarding implementing Story Talk.

Control teachers were provided with business as usual training on a wide-range of topics including language and literacy practices.

Participants

Classrooms & Teachers: Thirty-five public preschool classrooms across 15 schools in a urban school district participated.
•20 randomly assigned to Story Talk
•15 to control classrooms

Children: 519 children were in the sample, with:
•ages ranging from 44 to 76 months, with an average age of 55 months.
• 83% were African American
• 8% white
• 9% Hispanic/Latino

In addition:

- 87% of children receive free or reduced lunch
- 15% of children have identified special needs.

Measures

The **CLASS** was used in each classroom as a pre- and post-test measure. We included all three domains.

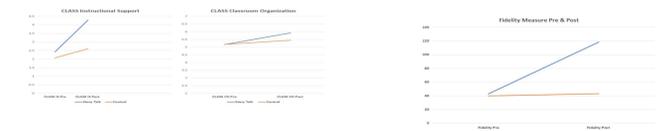
A project-specific **fidelity measure** was used at pre- and post-testing.

All children were pre- and post-tested on:

- a project-specific vocabulary measure including both expressive and receptive components,
- the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-4 (PPVT-4; receptive), and
- the Expressive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test (EOWPVT, expressive).

Results

Q1: Does Story Talk improve teacher practice?



Q2: Does Story Talk Improve Child Vocabulary?



Q3: What specific intervention-related strategies best explain child vocabulary outcomes?

- **Teachers' use of vocabulary** was the strongest proximal predictor of children's **receptive vocabulary learning**.
- **Frequency and quality of teachers' use of Story Talk strategies** was linked to increases in expressive vocabulary.

Conclusions

- **Teachers** implemented Story Talk with fidelity resulting in their increased use of vocabulary and their engaging children in conversations.
- **Teachers** in ST also improved their CLASS instructional support scores and classroom organization scores.
- **Children** in ST classrooms significantly increased their knowledge of target words and performed significantly better on PPVT-4 & EOWPVT compared to children in control classrooms.