

Myth:

Language Levels of books can be too high

Introduction

Step into a story time class for newborns and toddlers at your local library. You'd be surprised to find that librarians read more than just board books to this age group. Do you know why they read books with high language levels? Because it helps children's vocabulary to grow!

We know that vocabulary is a reliable indicator of a student's academic success (Baker, Simmons, & Kame'enui, 1997). There is no better vehicle than a book to introduce and learn new vocabulary, especially when paired with rich content and scaffolded instruction. Simply put, we need to use books with high language levels because they nurture and develop children's vocabulary. Why wouldn't we want to give every child the same opportunities to gain academic success through an increased vocabulary? We should and we can!

How can we develop a vocabulary for students with disabilities?

Just like students without disabilities, students with disabilities should have numerous opportunities to engage with books that have powerful vocabulary. Children need rich and varied exposure to words, and their language development is impacted if they are kept from hearing new words. (Risley & Hart, 1995). The best way to foster this vocabulary exposure is to provide copious opportunities to explore books, especially those with higher language levels. This introduces children to new words.

Core First Learning provides powerful vocabulary within age-appropriate and goal-orientated content (i.e., core words). Books with higher language levels benefit students by providing the opportunity to learn new words through incidental exposure. Research tells us that about 80% of our vocabularies are learned through incidental exposure. This exposure can include conversations, meals, books, radio, television, and movies (Beck et al., 2010). Thus, it is imperative to use the **least dangerous assumption** with students with disabilities with regards to the teaching materials we choose to apply for instruction. Don't be afraid to choose books with high language levels. They are exactly what our students need

"The **least dangerous assumption** assumes students with significant disabilities are competent and able to learn, because to do otherwise would result in harm such as few educational opportunities, inferior literacy instruction, a segregated education, and fewer choices as adults," (Jorgensen, 2005).



When children encounter new vocabulary through shared reading experience, adults must help them to learn what the words mean and how to use them (Curenton and Justice, 2008). The Core First Learning vocabulary may include words we would not ordinarily teach to students with disabilities but remember that you are the critical link. You must make sure the student understands the words in a meaningful way.

I still think Core First Learning includes vocabulary beyond my student's level. How does the program meet my needs?

We understand that teaching students with disabilities is a challenge, especially in classrooms with diverse abilities and learning levels. It can be intimidating to provide content for vocabulary that we may consider beyond our students' comprehension level.

There are three points to consider with regards to the Core First Learning program:

- **The program does not test kids on the meaning or use of the words.** It is designed to target core words through an interactive and top-down approach. Students engage with the content meaningfully by building background knowledge, making personal connections, and shared reading experiences. The surrounding vocabulary to the core words is not only a bonus but also a crucial investment in their vocabulary development.
- **We provide illustration support on every page.** Books with high language levels are a no-fail way to learn new words because the pictures provide a meaningful scaffold.
- **We do not expect students to navigate this program independently.** Your guidance through each lesson is an integral component to the successes your students encounter. When you come across a high-level vocabulary word in the books, provide the student with any necessary support. Remember, they aren't expected to master the word, but continued exposure to the word can only help grow their vocabulary.

References

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