

Explicit Teaching of Academic Language—SIPPS Challenge Level IES-WWC

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IES: What Works Clearinghouse Educator's Practice Guide Supports the Results-based Instruction Found in all three SIPPS (Systematic Instruction in Phonological Awareness, Phonics, and Sight Words) Levels-Part 1: Teaching Students Academic Language.

When the Practice Guide Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten through Third Grade was brought to my attention in July 2016, I looked forward to the opportunities to challenge or confirm what I knew to be evidence-based reading instruction. I eagerly read their recommendations because WWC, in conjunction with an expert panel, not only publishes reading research, but they rate the **strength of the research evidence** supporting each of their recommendations. As a professional development provider, I can use this guide to confidently recommend programs that guide teachers to use **evidence-based** instruction when teaching foundational skills for reading in the early grades.

The Practice Guide recommends four overarching needs for the instruction of foundational skills to support reading with understanding in grades K-3. The purpose of this blog series is to direct educators' attention to how the SIPPS program supports teachers to instruct students in a manner that are recommended in this practice guide.

Four Overarching Recommendations and Rank of Evidence:

1. **Teach students academic language skills**, including the use of inferential and narrative language, and vocabulary knowledge.
Summary of evidence: Minimal evidence.
2. **Develop awareness of the segments of sound in speech and how they link to letters.** Summary of evidence: Strong evidence
3. **Teach students to decode words, analyze word parts, and write and recognize words.** Summary of evidence: Strong evidence.
4. **Ensure that each student reads connected text every day to support reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension.**
Summary of evidence: Moderate evidence.

In this blog post, the first of four, I will point how the explicit teaching of academic language skills is carried out in SIPPS Challenge Level. Even though the evidence of teaching academic language is not strong in its impact on reading with understanding, having knowledge and high exposure to academic language is necessary for overall reading and writing.

Recommendation 1 includes, "Academic language includes **words** and **structures** that are common across subjects and unique to individual subjects." Knowledge of English morphology is one necessary component of teaching academic language. SIPPS Challenge Level uses a process to ensure that teachers do not simply teach isolated lessons about morphemes, roots, and affixes, but to approach the instruction of word analysis as a stage of development: the polysyllabic and morphemic stage. This process requires daily student engagement with ample exposures of words and their variations, with students doing the work. In SIPPS Challenge, one instructional routine called "Morphemic Transformations" supports exposure to academic language across content areas. This routine

presents the base word to the students, and the teacher proceeds to transform the base word by adding or deleting affixes right in front of the students as they read each transformed word.

The background regarding the importance of teaching word types is described in the SIPPS Challenge Level Teacher's Manual, pp. 522-523.

The words selected in each SIPPS Challenge lesson (from lessons 21-75) are the academic words that students need across content areas for reading, discussion, and making sense of text. Each lesson transforms two base words; each word with all its transformations is called a "word type." Since the English language contains 88,600 word types (Moats 2010; Nagy, Berninger, and Abbot 2006), experience in seeing and reading these word types daily are extremely beneficial to build word awareness connected by meaning.

Examples of the word types taught in each lesson are presented as:

| | |
|---------------------|------------------------|
| expect | nation |
| expected | national |
| unexpected | nationalize |
| unexpectedly | nationalization |

While we don't strive to teach all 88,600 word types, the process of engaging in daily syllabication and word analysis instruction will result in the students' ability to transfer their practice when encountering word types that have not been taught. Knowledge of word parts and morphemes supports students in knowing that suffixes and prefixes affect base words differently; they may change the word's pronunciation, part of speech, and meaning. See the Challenge Level Teacher's Manual Theory & Research section on pp. 626-628 and 633-634.

The first recommendation from the WWC Practice Guide helps us to consider how to effectively teach students to increase their academic language through the explicit instruction and practice of word structures and word parts. The next blog post will examine the second recommendation, and demonstrate how SIPPS Beginning and Extension Levels and SIPPS Plus explicitly teach students to develop their awareness of sounds in speech and how they link to letters.

For more information on this topic, you may want to read my colleague Marisa Stuke's blog series on the IES>WWC Recommendations for Foundational Skills or watch the webinar archive, Unpacking the Recommendations from the IES>WWC Practice Guide.

Check out Part 2 of this blog series here.