



Vocabulary and Reading in Secondary Schools (VaRiSS)

Learning to read and reading to learn

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Learning to read and acquiring a rich and varied vocabulary are among the most important skills that a child will develop. Furthermore, there are well-established links between the two areas: good vocabulary knowledge supports reading comprehension, while the process of reading provides opportunities for acquiring new vocabulary. This relationship does not become any less important as a child gets older; if anything, it becomes more central to a pupil's learning. It is surprising, therefore, that up until now, research (and educational policy) has tended to focus on the relationship between oral vocabulary and reading comprehension in primary school children, neglecting its importance for pupils at secondary school level. The Reading and Vocabulary in Secondary Schools (VaRiSS) project aims to address this lack of research.

The project involves gathering information from over 200 Year 7 pupils across a number of secondary schools in and around Berkshire. We will look at how pupils' oral vocabulary and reading comprehension abilities develop across three years, and how these skills interact. We hope to discover whether good reading comprehension in Year 7 is associated with a high level of oral vocabulary knowledge in Year 9, and conversely, whether a high level of oral vocabulary knowledge in Year 7 is associated with better reading comprehension in Year 9.

A smaller group of pupils will then take part in a number of experimental tasks, which will investigate how reading plays a part in learning new words. In these tasks, pupils will be provided with certain types of information about a new word – for example, how it sounds, what it means, and what it looks like written down. We will then evaluate whether this information helps the pupils to learn the new words through reading.

The findings from our study will not only contribute to existing theories of reading and language, but will have implications for the ways in which new words are taught in schools. We hope that our research will highlight the continuing importance of reading and vocabulary skills for adolescents as they become increasingly independent in their learning.

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