

# TOOL KIT FOR TEACHERS



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**Spir Oslo As**

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**MELODY**

METHODS FOR LEARNING  
DISORDERS IN YOUTH

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# Word knowledge instruction

## LEXICAL QUALITY MATTERS

The method is inspired by an intervention program which is a part of a three-part PhD dissertation. The study examined the effects of an intervention investigated to support the weak reader's vocabulary.

An important aim of the study was to design a theoretically based instructional program that could accommodate the challenges of educational practice by focusing on both decoding and linguistic comprehension. The purpose of the study was therefore to explore the hypothesis that teaching children knowledge of word forms and meanings supports the development of decoding and linguistic comprehension, which are fundamental components of reading comprehension.

Since the original study was designed to help third- and fourth-grade students, Spir Oslo has tried to create a toolkit based on the same methods, but adapted to students in high school. The students in the target groups are students with special needs, including general learning difficulties, which, among other things, display difficulties with reading and writing.

### LEARNING GOALS

*Help students increase student's reading comprehension and decoding skills by focusing on knowledge of word forms and meanings*

*Key concepts: Word knowledge instruction, reading comprehension, decoding, reading disabilities*

## Theoretical framework

The Simple View of Reading, a model by Gough and Tunmer, has proven to be one of the most influential frameworks for understanding reading comprehension in general and reading disabilities in particular. According to this model, reading comprehension is the product of two distinct components: decoding and linguistic comprehension. Decoding refers to the ability to recognize written words by using rules of letter-sound correspondences, whereas linguistic comprehension is broadly understood as “the process by which, given lexical (i.e., word) information, sentences and discourses are interpreted” (Gough & Tunmer). Because the two components are considered distinct, the model predicts that poor readers may have profiles that differ across the dimensions of decoding and linguistic comprehension. Reading disabilities may thus emerge in three different ways: from deficits in decoding, deficits in linguistic comprehension or both.

When talking about students with reading difficulties, there has been a particular interest for students who show specific difficulties with either decoding or linguistic understanding, such as reading difficulties are presented in the model "the simple view of reading". Although many weak readers have ability profiles that show marked dissociations between decoding and linguistic understanding, the boundaries between these two components are often not clear. In other words, most poor readers can be deficient in both components. Thus, it can also be difficult to find the right method to help these students, since the methods often focus on either the decoding difficulties or the difficulties with linguistic understanding. Since it is more complex than that, one needs interventions that cover more areas than just decoding or linguistic understanding. Research has also shown that deficits in semantic and grammatical comprehension can cause difficulties in children with adequate decoding skills. As the cause of reading difficulties varies, different approaches may be necessary to prevent and remedy difficulties in students with different reading profiles. In school, teachers face a heterogeneous group representing a wide range of readers. At the same time, teachers also have limited resources available and in many situations, so that the implementation of specialized instruction for specific groups may not be achievable. Although it is important to differentiate the instructions individually based on the variations in reading level, there may be good reasons to try out a more comprehensive approach that may be more applicable to different groups of readers.

This method is therefore designed to stimulate additional skills that support both decoding and linguistic understanding. The basis for this line of thinking is the theory of lexical quality, which is in line with “the Simple view of reading” depicts two major systems of reading: (a) a word identification system, in which orthography is mapped onto phonology, and (b) a comprehension system, in which language processing mechanisms are engaged to assemble the identified words into units of meaning. Astride the two major reading systems sits the mental lexicon, a subsystem in which representations of words are stored. What is interesting in this regard is the emphasis on the quality of these lexical representations. Lexical quality refers to the extent to which a reader’s knowledge of a given word represents the features of four constituents of word identity: orthography, phonology, semantics and morpho-syntax. Together, the quality of these four features and the coherence among them facilitate the rapid, low-resource retrieval of lexical word identities and their integration into a mental model of the text. In summary, the hypothesis postulates that the lexicon is the midpoint where word

identification and comprehension processes meet and that the quality of a reader's word knowledge forms the foundation of reading comprehension.

The aim of this method is to accommodate the challenges of educational practice by focusing on both decoding and linguistic comprehension. By teaching the students knowledge of word forms and meanings we will, based on this theory, be able to support the development of decoding and linguistic comprehension.

Bibliography:

*Brinchmann, E., Hjetland H.N. & Lyster S.A.; (2016) Lexical quality matters : effects of word knowledge instruction on the language and literacy skills of third- and fourth-grade poor readers. Reading research Quarterly.*

## Organisation

- *Group of students*
- *5-6 students per group*
- *One teacher*
- *Classroom setting*

- 30 sessions, ten weeks
- 60 minute sessions three times a week

## Materials needed

- Textbook
- Pencil
- Notebook
- Word knowledge activities

## Task procedure

Each week consists of three lessons that revolve around a specific topic. Each week topics will be based on texts from the student’s textbooks in the given subject. Every week the lessons will follow the same progression for how students are introduced to a new topic and the text they will read. In addition to text and topic, the students will also be introduced to important target words that they will encounter in the text.

In the following, the format for each lesson will be presented. It is important that every week follow the same progression in every lesson, so that it is easy for teachers to teach new topics, but also for the students to experience predictability in their learning situation.

## Lesson content

<b>Day 1</b>	<b>Lesson content</b>	<b>Time on task*</b>
	1. Introduce topic of the week and target words	10 min
	2. Reading of text	15 min

3. Discussion of text	20 min
4. Word knowledge activities	15 min

Table 1.1

<b>Day 2</b>	<b>Lesson content</b>	<b>Time on task*</b>
	1. Repetition of topic of the and target words	5 min
	2. Word knowledge activities	40 min
	3. Repeated reading of text	15 min

Table 1.2

<b>Day 3</b>	<b>Lesson content</b>	<b>Time on task*</b>
	1. Repetition of topic of the and target words	5 min
	2. Word knowledge activities	25 min
	3. Repeated reading of text	15 min
	4. Various assignments, eg written assignments from the textbook, quiz/kahoot, game adapted to fit the topic of the week or write own definitions of the target words	15 min

Table 1.3

*\*Time is approximate*

## Introducing the topic of the week and target words

The teacher will start the first weeks lesson by introducing the topic of the week and the chosen target words. The teacher will then invite students to share what they associate with the topic and the target words, and the class can discuss what they already know about the given topic.

## Reading the text

After the introduction of the week's theme, students will read the chosen text. As the students' reading skills may vary, guided reading is recommended. Each student gets to read a section out loud. The

teacher then has the opportunity to differentiate the level according to length and degree of difficulty adapted to each student.

## Discussion of text

The goal of discussing the text is both to clarify the content and to expand on the student's knowledge of the given topics. The teacher should ask open-ended questions, so the students have to make inferences or draw on their own experiences to answer.

## Repeated reading of the text

Reading the same text over and over again will lead to more fluent and error-free reading. The goal is to enhance the consolidation of orthographic mappings in memory. Repeated reading is a strategy that can be applied both individually and in a group setting.

## Word knowledge activities

The target words will be used as a starting point for the word knowledge activities. The goal of the word knowledge activities is to stimulate the semantic, syntactic and morphological features of word identity. Examples of the word knowledge activities are presented in table 1.4.

**NOTE:** IF THE THEME OR TEXTS OF THE TOPICS ARE SHORT, IT IS POSSIBLE TO REVIEW THE GIVEN TOPIC IN JUST ONE DAY, AND INTRODUCE A NEW TOPIC ON DAY 2. IT IS NEVERTHELESS IMPORTANT TO REPEAT THE PREVIOUS TOPICS BEFORE INTRODUCING A NEW ONE.

## Word knowledge activities

***Semantic activities***

**Syntactic activities**

**Morphological activities**

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*Discussion of pictures illustrating target word and concepts with semantic boundaries to target word. Which pictures illustrate target word, which do not and why?*

Sentence repair (discussion of ways to repair a sentence that is syntactically wrong)

Word sorts (find words belonging to the same word family as target word/find words with same affix)

*Work with semantically related words (synonyms, antonyms, subordinates and superordinates)*

Sentence puzzles (construction of sentences using words as pieces in a puzzle)

Word puzzle (create different words by combining prefix, root, suffix/create compound words with target word)

Missing words (different morphological forms of target word have been removed from various sentences. Which word form belongs to which sentence, and where in the sentence does it fit?)

Morphological problem solving (identify the meaning of novel words by using word parts)

Table 1.4