Effects of Phrase Styles in Storybooks on Children’s Word Learning in Small and Large Reading Groups

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Abstract

Shared storybook reading between adults and children has long been considered an effective activity that facilitates children’s early language and literacy development (Brabham & Lynch-Brown, 2002; Chomsky, 1979; Elley, 1980, 1989). Children are exposed to an abundance of new, complex words, for which adult readers subsequently expand on and highlight to help make memorable for children (Biemiller & Boote, 2006; Clark, 2010; Read, 2014). Given that early childhood providers regularly incorporate shared storybook reading sessions in small and large groups as part of the typical schedule, opportunities to support how young children learn new words within these contexts are possible. The purpose of the current study was to examine the influence of three specific phrase styles (rhyming, subverted-expectations, and typical phrases) on preschool children’s word learning (recall and recognition of target words) within small and large reading groups. Results from the study indicated that, regardless of the group size, children were more successful at recalling complete or partial definitions of the target words and were more successful at recognizing the target words’ definitions when they were read storybooks with phrase styles that rhymed compared to when they read storybooks with storybooks that did not rhyme. Implications are also discussed.