

Focus on Vocabulary Forum
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Complex causal links between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension: A rationale for a long-term, comprehensive approach to promoting vocabulary growth

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The complexity of the vocabulary-comprehension relationship

The incompleteness of the instrumentalist hypothesis (Anderson & Freebody, 1981).

Examples of indirect causal links between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension:

- Via phonemic awareness (Fowler, 1991; Metsala, 1999; Metsala & Walley, 1998)
- Via knowledge of print / word recognition (Dickinson, McCabe, Anastopoulos, Peisner-Feinberg, & Poe, 2003; Nagy, Berninger, Abbott, Vaughan, & Vermeulen, in press)
- Via morphological awareness (Nagy, Berninger, Abbott, Vaughan, & Vermeulen, in press)

Reciprocal links between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension (Stanovich, 1986)

Implications for research

The inadequacy of short-term interventions as a measure of the efficacy of vocabulary instruction

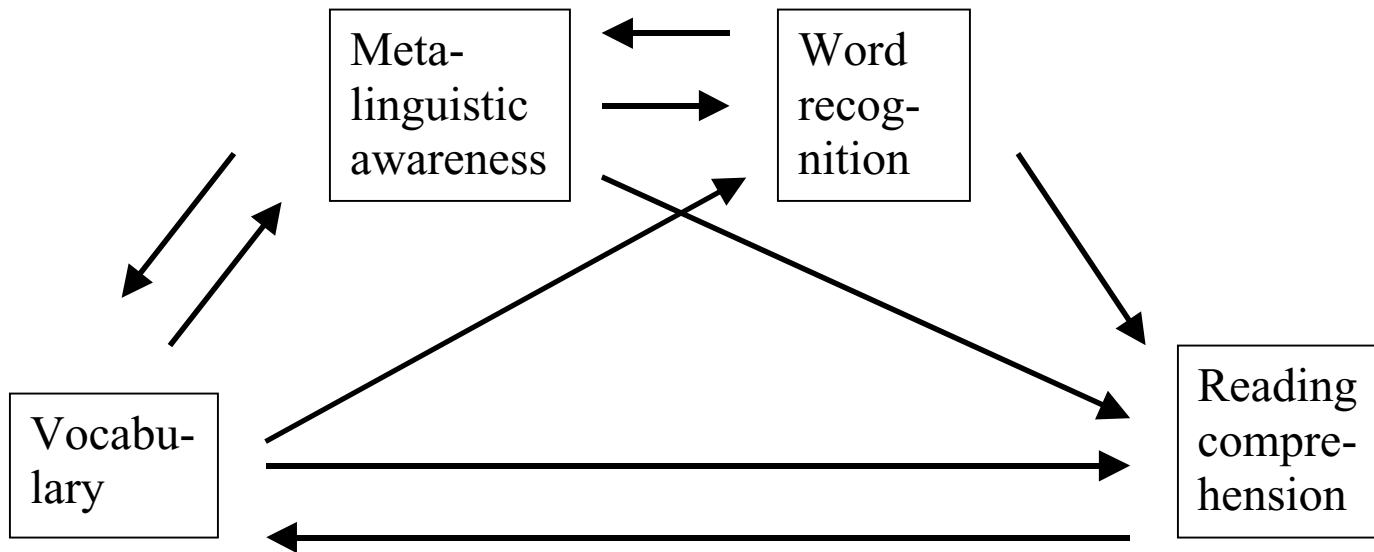
The difficulty of statistically disentangling reciprocal relationships with correlational research methods

Implications for instruction

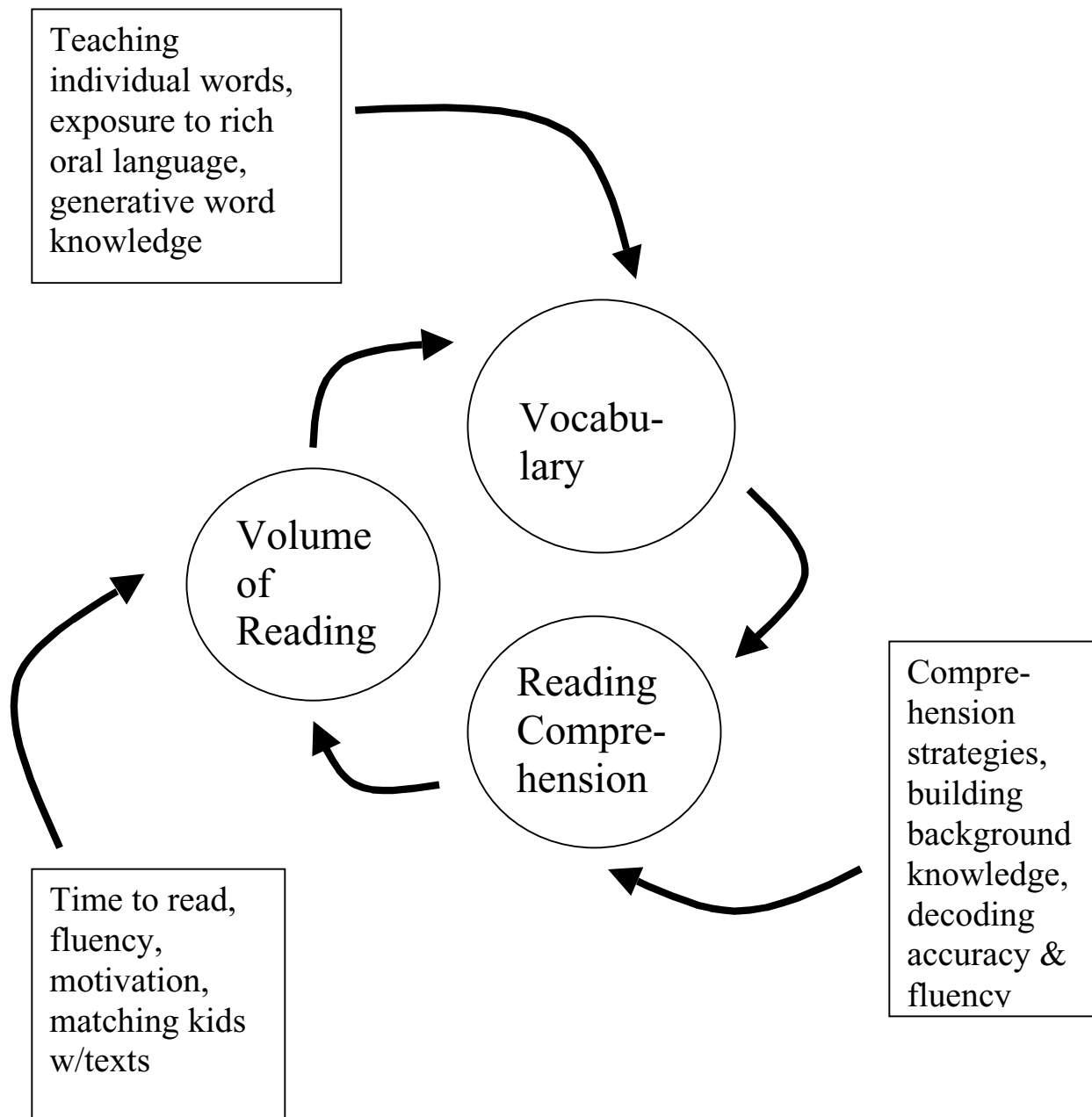
Because the causal relationships between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension are complex (both direct and indirect, and reciprocal), any attempt to increase reading comprehension by teaching vocabulary must:

- start early
- be long term
- increase generative vocabulary knowledge as well as knowledge of specific words
- include increased exposure to rich oral language as well as wide reading
- be part of, and integrated into, a rich literacy curriculum

Figure 1:
Some Of The Causal Links Between
Vocabulary Knowledge And Reading Comprehension



**Figure 2:
Some Instructional Implications of a Reciprocal Model
of Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension**



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