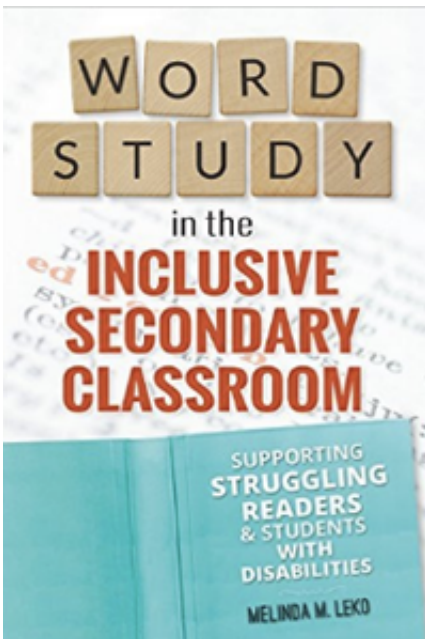


Author shows how teachers can use 'word study' to improve student reading

July 13 2016, by Mike Krings



Many secondary education teachers do not receive training in helping students learn to read because the thinking goes that developing reading skills should begin and end in elementary school. A University of Kansas professor has written a book to help secondary teachers use the practice of word study to help students with disabilities, struggling readers and their peers all become better readers without adding to the educators' workload.

Melinda Leko, assistant professor of [special education](#), is the author of "Word Study in the Inclusive Secondary Classroom: Supporting Struggling Readers and Students with Disabilities." The book is designed to help [teachers](#) use practical strategies and ideas on how to add word study in their classrooms.

"The book helps back up a basic level of instruction that I think a lot of secondary teachers didn't get training in," Leko said. "Middle school and [high school students](#) are generally good at recognizing and understanding monosyllabic words. But when you get into multisyllabic words, that's when trouble can start, especially for struggling readers and students with disabilities."

Word study is a practice that integrates decoding and phonics, spelling and vocabulary instruction to help students identify unfamiliar words and improve their reading comprehension. About 10 percent of students enter secondary school with some form of reading difficulty, Leko said, and teachers don't have time to teach every word that will appear in coursework. The book includes practices such as helping students understand common prefixes, what they mean and how they interact with other parts of speech. Chapters include teaching resources such as sample lesson plans, reproducible teaching tools, web resource lists and tips about technology-based learning tools.

While word study as a practice is useful at all reading levels, Leko's book provides examples and resources appropriate for specific older age levels and across content areas. Teachers can find ideas on how to use the practice to recognize words they often encounter in their discipline, be it science, English, mathematics, social studies or others.

Among the text's resources are information on syllable types and how educators can teach rules on how to divide words into smaller parts for easier recognition, as well as in-class assessments to help determine

which words students might be struggling with. It also contains measures teachers can use to determine how well the strategies are working and where more attention may need to be paid.

The evolution of language is also considered as the book contains a section on how words and parts of speech have changed over time and how teachers can address slang, which often does not follow the established rules of language. The text also helps educators understand why certain types of mistakes are commonly made and how they can be addressed.

"Why individual students have difficulties can be very different, but how we respond to them as educators can largely be the same," Leko said. "By helping them understand word parts and recognize patterns and using these strategies and ideas, we should be able to help all of them."

The book is designed for teachers who already have full workloads. It contains classroom examples and vignettes of situations in which the strategies have been successfully implemented. It also contains illustrations that help present the concepts in a humorous, engaging way.

"Once these strategies are part of the classroom experience, they don't take any additional time at all," Leko said.

Leko's book also illustrates that the practice of word study is not only one that can benefit struggling learners or special education students. It can be applied to a modern, blended classroom in which students of all abilities are learning together and help boost achievement for all.

"I make the argument that this approach can help all students in the classroom," Leko said. "Even high-achieving [students](#) can benefit from taking words apart and understanding ideas such as how prefixes and suffixes work and what they mean."

Provided by University of Kansas

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