

R&P meeting 2018 – vocabulary workshop

The afternoon workshop session on 'Promoting vocabulary knowledge' was led by Dr Jessie Ricketts and Sanne van der Kleij. Sanne began by talking about an upcoming project examining reading and vocabulary in the transition from primary to secondary school (the RAV project) being run by researchers at Aston University and Royal Holloway University. During this period, children transfer from 'learning to read' to 'reading to learn', and the process of reading affords opportunities for learning new words. Sanne highlighted the close relationship between children's reading ability, reading practice, reading comprehension and vocabulary. The RAV project aims to explore these relationships further by examining the impact of reading practice on vocabulary knowledge in an unselected sample of Year 8 children. Reading practice will be measured through the use of SMS diaries, with children setting reading goals, reporting daily reading activity and receiving feedback on their goals. The intervention will run for 5 weeks, during which time all children will read topic-specific books, but only the children in the intervention group will participate in the SMS diary and feedback. Reading activity and knowledge of vocabulary items contained within the texts will be measured pre- and post-intervention.

Discussions around these plans for the project followed a number of themes. These included individual differences in engagement with the intervention, and specifically, the possibility that more able readers may be more likely to give consent to participate and to engage with the intervention than less able readers. Other discussions focused on the selection of the books themselves – for example, how to select age-appropriate texts when reading levels will vary between participants, whether to include texts suitable for children with visual impairments and how to ensure that the texts are motivating and interesting for pupils. Another theme centred around measuring improvements in vocabulary following the intervention, including differentiating between knowing the words and being able to use them, finding out strategies children use to learn the words, and the possibility that word learning may be influenced by exposure to the same or similar words in the curriculum. Finally, a number of practical considerations were raised, including how to ensure that children's SMS diaries provide a fair reflection of their actual reading practices, recording reasons for children disengaging with the intervention and obtaining feedback on the intervention more generally, and examining the long-term impact of the intervention on reading habits.