

## Word definition skills in the early school years

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### Aim(s)

The presentation will cover two studies related to word definitions skills in the early school years, and its relationship with linguistic and cognitive factors, as well as the effect of formal schooling and a teacher Continuing Professional Development (CPD) program.

Study 1: Investigate monolingual and bilingual students' word definitions (WD) of 10 cross-curricular words.

Study 2: Evaluate the effect of a teacher CPD program on their students' WD skills.

### Theoretical framework/area of investigation

Well-developed WD skills are important for academic success. The use of clear and concise word definitions is required in many academic tasks, such as taking tests and writing expository texts. Teachers play a crucial role in developing children's WD skills. However, vocabulary instruction in the classrooms is generally not in line with current research base, and teachers often report being unsure of how to support their students' vocabulary development.

### Methodological design

Study 1: 208 children (range 6:8–9:0 years) were assessed with a 10-item WD task.

Study 2: 25 elementary school teachers, teaching grade 1 and 2, took part in a CPD program targeting language and communication supporting techniques in the classroom, for example evidence-based strategies for vocabulary instruction. The effect of the CPD was evaluated on WD skills of 209 of the participating teachers' students.

### Findings and conclusion

Study 1: Many students gave superficial, or incorrect, WDs of the words included in the task. On average, monolingual students outperformed the bilingual students. However, bilingualism alone cannot explain poor results, and other factors must be taken into account when analyzing poor WD skills.

Study 2: Different developmental trajectories between intervention and control condition indicated some positive effect on students WD skills, following a teacher CPD. However, more research is needed on how teachers best develop students' WD skills.

The results will be discussed in relation to an upcoming research project investigating the interaction between linguistic,

cognitive, and social variables shaping variability in WD skills.