Symposium Proposal
Title: Reading for Understanding: New Findings from the Catalyzing Comprehension for Discussion and Debate Project
SREE, 2015

The Institute of Education Sciences created the Reading for Understanding Research Initiative to develop effective approaches for improving reading comprehension for all students. Through this initiative, IES awarded five-year grants to six research teams who would work closely with practitioners to field test and refine new approaches for supporting literacy in multiple content areas and grades. The Reading for Understanding Initiative was also developed to change research on reading by accelerating the research process, and as part of this initiative, each of these new approaches to reading comprehension would be evaluated with randomized controlled trials.

The Strategic Education Research Partnership Institute (SERP) was awarded one of these grants for “Catalyzing Comprehension through Discussion and Debate” (CCDD) a project that includes (1) a large-scale, longitudinal, school-randomized experimental evaluation of Word Generation (WG), a discussion-based academic language program designed to boost the reading comprehension capacity of students across subject areas in grades 4-8, and (2) a student-level randomized evaluation of The Strategic Adolescent Reading Intervention (STARI), a comprehension-focused middle school reading intervention designed for struggling readers. In addition to the implementation and evaluation of WG and STARI, the CCDD project provided support for the development and testing of a group of novel instruments (e.g., a new measure of Core Academic Language Skills) designed to represent a more comprehensive theory of reading comprehension (deep comprehension). A primary goal of the project as a whole is to examine these new instruments and the constructs they represent in relation to each other within and across time, in addition to examining them together in a model of deep comprehension.

The multi-site trial of WG and STARI includes 4 districts, 24 schools, ~250 classrooms, and ~8,000 students. In addition to multiple waves of data from student assessment, classroom observation, and fidelity of implementation measurements, the project engaged in an iterative process of documenting challenges to implementation at the classroom, school, and district levels.

This symposium brings together a multi-disciplinary group of researchers to report for the first time impacts of WG and STARI on a set of middle school reading outcomes for linguistically and socio-economically diverse children in multiple grades across years, and to examine developmental/grade variation in one of the constructs representing deep comprehension (Core Academic Language Skills) and its links to existing measures of reading comprehension.