Strategies to Build Vocabulary

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Abstract
The purpose of this study was to determine the strategies that support and enhance students' understanding of new vocabulary. Determining the appropriate method of vocabulary instruction continues to be a significant issue for teachers. This qualitative study involved two ten-year-old participants where multiple strategies were implemented and assessed using interviews, observations, and student artifacts. Results from this study showed the benefits of each strategy and the importance of student involvement. Educators need to provide opportunities for students to engage in learning that is meaningful and relatable to them. It is vital that educators are aware of the multiple ways in which students learn to ensure they are consistently meeting individual needs.

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Strategies to Build Vocabulary

Effective vocabulary instruction is a critical and complex issue faced in today’s educational world. Words are the tools we use to access our background knowledge, express ideas, and learn about new concepts. Students’ word knowledge is linked strongly to academic success and is crucial to reading comprehension. Currently, the significance of vocabulary instruction is coming to the forefront of concerns and issues that are demanding attention. The main issue is agreeing on the most effective and efficient way to teach vocabulary. School populations are increasingly becoming more diverse, which is leading to a demand for differentiation of vocabulary instruction. In addition, there is also an increased pressure on schools to meet academic yearly progress goals under No Child Left behind (NCLB).

Vocabulary is a main component of literacy and affects the overall understanding of what is being learned. Often times, students are instructed to get a dictionary and look up definitions to words they come across that are unfamiliar to them. When this happens, the word is stored in the short term memory and typically is not fully understood or applied in other contexts (Kali, 2008). Flynt and Brozo (2008) state that, the more meaningful and authentic the context a teacher uses the greater the impact on students’ ownership of the targeted terms. The objective is not for students to know the meaning of the word for a day, or even an hour, but instead to have them engage in the words so that they are able to apply them to their everyday lives.

A variety of strategies were used throughout the research to enhance vocabulary instruction. The strategies that were used included appropriate selection of specific words that students would come across in the reading and content learning. A verbal story introduced the words where all fifteen words were embedded throughout the story so that students could initially hear them used in context. In addition, picture clues were provided to help activate
students’ schema about each term. Students then engaged in creating appropriate descriptions of each term by having a class discussion about each term and defining it in words that makes sense to them. Graphic Organizers were then used to build on the understanding and application of each term. A variety of methods are exposed to the students (Oral exposure to build schema, direct instruction and crafted descriptions, reading contexts, graphic organizers, students’ own writing, and part of review) and therefore create a meaningful and lasting experience for students.

Vocabulary instruction demands differentiation. To be most effective, the learning style of each student must be considered. A framework for success is created when vocabulary is learned through a variety of strategies that meet individual needs. Providing this foundation gives students the opportunity to make connections with and build on their prior knowledge.

Theoretical Framework

Literacy is an essential component of education, including vocabulary development, and can be defined as, “A malleable set of cultural practices shaped and reshaped by different – often competing and contending – social institutions, social classes, and cultural interests” (Freebody & Luke, 1990). Literacy is changeable depending on the individual, circumstances, and situations. The multifaceted concept of literacy is not simply stated and not perceived the same way by all people. Literacy is multidimensional and acquired based on numerous factors. Each individual’s background knowledge, culture, prior experiences, opportunities, and available resources, all contribute and have an effect on the acquisition of literacy. It is essential that educators explore the factors and build on the foundations that impact each student’s learning. Gee (2001) claims that acquisition is stronger than learning because when you acquire something, it becomes natural and fluent (2001).
Literacy is the key to personal, professional, and global growth in our world. Literacy teaching is not limited to guided reading and writing, rather, an ever-evolving term that involves the integration of technology, critical thinking, a variety of approaches, social interactions, etc. Literacy is not one single concept, but instead a combination of multiple ones – multiple literacies. The connection of in and out of school literacies is a significant aspect of effectively teaching literacy. When material is authentic and relatable for each individual student, learning is enhanced and much more effective.

Research suggests that effective vocabulary instruction demands the presence of background knowledge and authentic experiences. Larson and Marsh (2005) claim that literacy is obtained through both direct teaching and acquisition in natural, meaningful ways. The sociocultural theory aligns well with vocabulary instruction. The theory has profound implications for teaching, schooling, and education. A key feature of this emergent view of human development is that higher order functions develop out of social interaction (Larson & Marsh, 2006). Sociocultural theory suggests that we must not limit our strategies and techniques solely to the individual, but also examine the external social world in which each individual’s life has developed. There is an emphasis on the importance of culture and social context in learning. The sociocultural theory is important to consider when examining and dissecting vocabulary acquisition and instruction. For example, parents who read books to their children at home, have significant impacts on the development of their vocabulary. Walsh (2008) explained that reading books to children provides opportunities for exposure and learning of words. Additionally, Marzano (2008) created a vocabulary program based on his book “Building Background Knowledge for Academic Achievement”. The program addresses the social influences that children face and uses their background knowledge to better develop vocabulary. As a result,
vocabulary is meaningful and relatable for children. Students are able to make connections between in-school and out-of-school practices (i.e. vocabulary words). Through participation in activities that require cognitive and communicative functions, children are familiar with the use of functions and practices in ways that nurture and scaffold them. The sociocultural theory emphasizes the importance of providing students with opportunities to connect with words through authentic experiences. Researchers and stakeholders have expressed their opinions and supporting arguments, however the issue still remains, how can we build students’ vocabulary in an engaging and effective way?

Literature Review

A number of researchers have investigated the critical issue of building vocabulary. The different types of vocabulary acquisition, factors that affect vocabulary acquisition, and the variety of instructional strategies and techniques, are all significant concepts to consider when analyzing the research on vocabulary.

Different Aspects of Vocabulary Acquisition

Researchers (Bromley, 2007; Joshi, 2005; Shanklin, 2007; Walsh, 2008) address the acquisition of vocabulary in a contextual way. In summary, contextual vocabulary refers to active use of textual cues and prior knowledge to make meaning of a specific word without additional assistance from other people or dictionaries (Bromley, 2007; Joshi, 2005). According to Bromley, seventy percent of the most frequently used words have multiple meanings. When students put words in context, it is easier to unlock the meaning. Bromley also concluded that instruction that engages students in the meaning of new words and their letter, sound, and spelling patterns promotes more effective word learning than just analyzing context (2007).
Nelson and Stage (2008) carried out a study to assess the effects of contextually-based multiple meaning vocabulary. They used third and fifth grade students who varied in their initial vocabulary and comprehension achievement to assess the benefits of instruction using contextually-based multiple meaning vocabulary. The students were able to identify their initial understanding of the word by categorizing the words as 1. I never saw the word before. 2. I’ve heard of the word, but I don’t know what it means. 3. I think I know it – it has something to do with. And 4. I know the word – it means “…” in this context (2007). This beginning strategy activates the students’ prior knowledge or schema and ultimately makes them more responsible for their learning (Nelson & Stage, 2007; Marzano, 2008).

The teachers who participated in the study carried out the six steps to the vocabulary instruction that they were trained in – A two-day lesson sequence, use of the pre-lesson activity, review of the target words meanings, having students write sentences for each of the related words, word meaning map, and have the students complete the understanding check (2007). The study showed greater gains for students with low initial vocabulary and reading comprehension achievement; however improvements for all participants involved was apparent (2007).

Research concluded by Joshi (2005), states that most of the words students learn are learned in context and relatively few are learned through direct instruction. In support of this, Shanklin (2007) identifies the importance of learning words in context to make meaning more explicit. Walsh (2008) examined a study in which kindergarteners were exposed to words in the context of a shared storybook reading either twice throughout the story or four times. The results of the study showed a greater increase in the acquisition of the vocabulary words when they were presented four times, as opposed to twice, in the storybook (Walsh, 2008). Students depend on
textual clues to help them better define and understand the meaning of words (Walsh, 2008; Bromley, 2007).

Much of the research examines the acquisition of vocabulary through wide reading. Shanklin (2007) suggests (in accordance with Marzano, 2008) that six exposures (oral exposures, study of word parts, graphic organizers, reading contexts, students’ own writing, and part of review) to new words are needed to learn the word in context. Shanklin also identifies the importance of encouraging students to do wide reading to support the needed exposure. In Bromley’s “Nine things every teacher should know about words and vocabulary instruction” (2007) article, she suggests that wide reading can build word knowledge but students also need thoughtful and systematic instruction. Her research explains that wide reading supports the development of vocabulary, but direct instruction in vocabulary influences comprehension more than any other factor. Joshi (2005) argues that relatively few words (only 300 in a given year) are learned through direct vocabulary instruction. Joshi’s research concludes that part of the reason for such a large discrepancy between oral and reading vocabularies is because of the amount of reading that students participate in.

Factors that Affect Vocabulary Acquisition

Regardless of the type of instruction provided, each individual carries a tool box that is made up of their prior experiences, support mechanisms, life style, developed skills, and other factors that affect his or her vocabulary acquisition. According to Walsh (2008), children from lower socioeconomic status (SES) groups typically score lower on tests of vocabulary than children from higher SES groups. This can be partly attributed to the conclusion that children from lower SES families are read to less frequently than children from higher SES families (Walsh, 2008; Joshi, 2005; Flynt & Brozo, 2008). Researchers refer to this as the “Mathew
Effect”, explaining that good readers read more, become better readers, and learn more words; poor readers read less, become poorer readers, and learn fewer words supporting the unfortunately large gap between students (Walsh, 2008; Joshi, 2005).

Researchers (Kail, 2008; Flynt & Brozo, 2008; Smith, 2008; Walsh, 2008; Bromley, 2007, Shanklin, 2007; Joshi, 2005) agree that positive exposures to literature and the process of reading help students to be more motivated and excited about vocabulary acquisition. When students can make connections with the vocabulary words in positive ways, learning is inevitable. The process of acquiring vocabulary begins at home with students’ exposure and opportunity to engage in read alouds at a young age (Flynt & Brozo, 2008). Walsh (2008) describes the relationship between overall quantity of storybook reading and vocabulary learning in three year olds. Her research concluded that students who do not have frequent exposures to reading and words at a young age are already being placed at a disadvantage as they enter school. It is critical that teachers understand the discourse of each student so it can be built upon in a meaningful and authentic way. Applying a student’s background knowledge is crucial to their success as a learner.

**Instructional Strategies for Developing Vocabulary**

Much of research is in support of direct instruction as the means to effectively teaching vocabulary. Flynt & Brozo (2008) explained that “Direct instructional approaches improved both vocabulary and comprehension”. Shanklin (2007) found that vocabulary instruction needs to be cross curricular and embedded in units of study. In agreement with Shanklin, Smith (2008) supports the identification of three essential elements to an effective vocabulary program; integration, meaningful use, and repetition. Joshi (2005) and Kail (2008) found that the use of antonyms and synonyms makes words meaningful and therefore helps build vocabulary. Kail
explained a situation where a tenth grade class used roots and their derivatives to build their vocabulary. The example identified the students’ realization that they could draw on what they already knew (roots) to expand their learning and knowledge.

Kail (2008) also described the typical way vocabulary has been taught for years “Through rote memorization students are given a list of words and a dictionary”. Kail provided an example of a tenth grade English class in which the teacher found that memorization can be an important tool in vocabulary instruction because it encourages students to “think more deeply, to apply the knowledge that they have memorized, and ultimately to learn in a meaningful way” (2008)

Teaching vocabulary well is a key aspect of developing engaged and successful readers (Bromley, 2007). Vocabulary instruction demands meaningful experiences with words. These experiences need to be authentically integrated with students’ out of school lifestyles. It is important that teachers use a vocabulary that is more precise and diverse to create an environment that encourages students to do the same (Smith, 2008). It is crucial that students are exposed to the words multiple times through collaborative, active tasks that can be supported by technology. Students need to have opportunities to extend their word knowledge through processes such as the use of pictures and the application of the words to meaningful, authentic situations.

Methods

Context

Research for this study occurred at an elementary school located in a suburb of Rochester, New York. Soar Elementary School is located in Webster, New York. The school consists of children in kindergarten through fifth grade. Webster Central School District consists
of seven elementary schools (K-5), two middle schools (6-8), and two high schools (9-12).

11.7% of the students at Soar Elementary School are eligible for free lunch. 4.1% of the students are eligible for reduced lunch. Soar School is the furthest east school in Webster. There are four sections of each grade level, with the exception of grades one and two where there are five sections. The schools population is over five hundred.

The classroom where the research was conducted is a fifth grade classroom with twenty-two students, seven males and fifteen females. Instead of having individual desks, the students sit at tables (four-five students at each of the five tables). They work together to keep each other’s space organized with use of their table caddies and crates where each student has a spot in the crate to keep his or her materials. There are baskets and shelves around the room where students keep other materials such as Writer’s notebooks, Literature Study Notebooks, Strategy Notebooks, etc. A focus of the classroom is to work collaboratively as a team and to help one another succeed. During content time, the self-contained class is also in the room (ten additional students) as well as the self-contained teacher, a teacher aid, and a special education consultant teacher.

Participants

The study focused on two specific students. Hayley is ten years and six months and is a Caucasian female. She is an energetic and enthusiastic girl who enjoys riding horses, drawing, and writing. Hayley is above average academically and performs extremely well in school. She scored a 235 on the Reading Based Curriculum Measurement (R-CBM) Assessment, indicating that she is well-above average (average score is between 120 and 170). On the MAZE Comprehension Assessment, she received a score of 46, indicating that she is well-about average (average score is between 20 and 30). Hayley is in the “highest” math class out of four fifth
grade math classes. She earned a 234 on the NWEA Math Assessment, placing her above average. She also earned a 234 on the NWEA Reading Assessment. Hayley earned a four on the New York State Social Studies Exam. She lives with her mother, father, seven-year-old brother (grade 2), and eight-year-old sister (grade 3) in a newer built house in a development near school. Jack is ten years and ten months and is a Caucasian male. Jack received a score of 122 on the R-CBM Assessment, indicating that he is average, or on grade level. On the MAZE Comprehension Assessment, Jack received a 20, indicating that he performs at the level of an average fifth grader. On the NWEA Math Assessment, Jack earned a 216 which shows he is average. On the NWEA Reading Assessment, Jack earned a 214. In addition, he earned a three on the New York State Social Studies Exam. Jack loves magic and hopes to be a magician when he grows up. He enjoys playing basketball, baseball, and football and shows a high amount of activity during recess. Jack does not show much enthusiasm for school, but is consistently responsible for completing his work. Jack increases his level of involvement when the task is something of interest to him. He lives in a house across the street from school with his mother, father, four-year-old brother (pre kindergarten), and eight year old sister (grade 3).

**Researcher Stance**

As a researcher, I worked with the whole class for the study, with a focus on the two participants. I am currently on my first full year of teaching fifth grade at State Road Elementary School and am pursuing a master’s degree in Literacy at St. John Fisher College, located in Rochester, New York. I earned a bachelor’s degree in Elementary and Special Education from SUNY Geneseo.

**Method**

During this study, I introduced the students to a variety of strategies to use when learning
new vocabulary. The set of fifteen vocabulary words were the same for about two-in-a-half to three weeks. Fifteen words were chosen – three to four from the participant’s literature study books, one from the read aloud book, and three from content vocabulary. The words were put in a story I create. I will create illustrations that relate to each vocabulary word and put them on 8 ½ by 11 cardstock. As I read the vocabulary story to the students, I will refer to the illustrations as I come across each vocabulary word. The students will then complete the first part of their vocabulary cards, adopted from Marzano’s Vocabulary (Appendix A). They will use a rating scale of one through four (Four- I know this word so well, that I can define it and use it correctly in a sentence. Three- I have seen this word before and know what it has to do with. Two, I have seen this word before, but don’t know what it means. One- I have never seen the word before.) As a class, we will then generate definitions for the words. The students will lead the discussion as I guide them to formulating a correct definition that is worded in a way they understand. The students will then create vocabulary cards using Marzano’s vocabulary strategy, where they write the definition, create an illustration that reminds them of the word, and write other words that remind them of the specific vocabulary word. Each student will have a ring to keep their vocabulary cards in.

To reinforce the learning of the new vocabulary, other strategies will also be used. Students will play vocabulary-clue-in, where they come up with a number of clues that describe the vocabulary word and then a partner must try to guess what vocabulary word is being described. The students will also have multiple opportunities to play charades, where they will act out the vocabulary words and have others guess what vocabulary word it is. Also, students will choose one of the vocabulary words and bring in objects from their homes that remind them of that word. Additionally, towards the end of the three weeks, students will show they
understand the vocabulary word by using them in sentences and explaining them in various contexts (scenarios).

**Quality and Credibility of Research**

In doing this research, it is important to ensure the quality and credibility of the study. The attention to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability is critical when performing research. Credibility is the researcher’s ability to take into account the complexities that present themselves in a study and to deal with patterns that are not easily explained (Guba 1981, as cited in Mills, 2007). To ensure credibility, I will work with the enrichment specialist and other fifth grade teachers to debrief and reflect on the progress of the study. In addition, I will practice triangulation by comparing a variety of data sources to continuously cross-check the data (2007).

Transferability is the researcher’s belief that everything is context bound (Guba, 1981, as cited in Mills, 2007). I will collect detailed and descriptive data and develop detailed descriptions of the context to ensure the information is not generalized to larger groups of people (2007). Guba (1989, as cited in Mills 2007), defines dependability as, the stability of the data. To ensure dependability, I will establish an “audit trail” where a critical colleague will examine the process of my data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Confirmability is the neutrality or objectivity of the data that has been collected (Guba, 1989, as cited in Mills 2007). Again, my use of triangulation (implementing and comparing a variety of methods) will ensure confirmability. I will also practice reflexivity where I will refer to my research question and determine cause and effect as I gather data, being sure to reflect on my questions and generate new questions depending on the data gathered.

**Informed Consent and Protecting the Right of the Participants**
Before beginning my research, I collected informed consent from the participants and the participant’s parents/guardians. Although Hayley and Jack are the focus participants, I collected assent from all twenty-two students in the class after explaining the research process and benefits to them. I also issued consent forms to all parents/guardians explaining the purpose of the study and asking for their signature of permission to include their child in the research process. All parents/guardians and participants knew that all names were kept anonymous and that any identifying marks were removed from the artifacts used for research. All participants’ names were replaced with a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality.

Data Collection

Multiple forms of data will be used during the research process. In addition to the Vocabulary Story, vocabulary cards, and other vocabulary activities, I will use active observation and keep field notes during the research. I will also use video recording during the charades activity. Artifacts from Hayley and Jack will be collected and analyzed during data collection and findings to help determine the usefulness of each strategy implemented.

Findings and Discussion

The action research performed on the fifth grade class provided many important findings specific to this study on vocabulary strategies. The findings from the research show that implementing a variety of strategies is beneficial to the students. Additionally, it is important that the words are used in context and in a variety of scenarios to help students make connections and have a purpose for learning. When the students see the words used throughout their everyday lives, they are more likely to apply and use the words themselves. Students remember words better if they connect new meaning to knowledge they already have. As each strategy was implemented, it was obvious that Jack and Hayley were both benefiting from learning the new
words, not only so that they were aware of the meanings, but so they could also be engaged in a variety of strategies to have in their tool box when they are learning new words in the future. A variety of themes are identified to analyze and interpret the data. The themes correlate with Marzano’s (2008) idea of needing six exposures to the words in order to make the learning most effective - Oral exposure (building schema), direct instruction and crafted descriptions, reading contexts, graphic organizers, students’ own writing, and part of review.

Oral Exposure (Building Schema)

For the initial strategy, I created a story that included all of the vocabulary words. This was important to begin with, because it put each word in context for the participants, therefore proving them with background knowledge. As the participants sat in the reading corner, illustrations of each word were hanging in three rows of five on the window blinds. Based on previous assessments (learning profile), Jack and Hayley are both strong visual learners. Having the visual representations engaged them and had them interacting in a way most effective for them. Both Jack and Hayley rated the illustrations of the vocabulary words a four (one being did not help in my learning and four being helped me master the words) on the follow up reflection.

As the story was read and each vocabulary word was announced, a tab from underneath each illustration was pulled down to expose the spelling of the vocabulary word (Appendix B). I also held a wand that made a ringing sound each time a vocabulary word was said in the story. It was obvious that Jack and Hayley were engaged in their learning with the visual and auditory cues. Their facial expressions showed enthusiasm and they were extremely attentive. When asked how they liked being introduced to the words in such a way, Hayley responded, “I loved it! The pictures are so cool and it was neat to hear the words in a sentence so I could predict what they meant.” Jack responded, “I really liked the pictures with the words, but hearing the
words in the story didn’t really help me because there was a lot.” Without the illustrations, the visual learners would not be able to make the clear connection between the word and its meaning. The illustrations were displayed in the classroom until a new vocabulary story was introduced (about three weeks). This way, the students had constant reminders of the meaning of each term. During the interviews, Hayley and Jack both commented on how the illustrations helped them to better understand the term. Hayley said, “I liked the story and the pictures you drew because it was always up to remind me of the words.” She added that the story helped her predict the meaning of the term because she was able to connect the context the word was used in with the visual cue.

Direct Instruction and Crafted Descriptions

Prior to learning the new vocabulary terms, the participants completed a scale of their understanding of each word. They circled one if they had never heard the word before, two if they had heard the word, but did not know what it meant, three if they had heard the word and could use it in a sentence or give a brief description of it, and four if they knew the word so well they could use it in any context and could teach its meaning to others cite where this is from. After being introduced to the words, the participants recorded the words in their vocabulary notebooks (Appendix C). To do this, I asked them to choose one of the new words that they thought they could describe. Jack chose “gesture”. When asked what he thinks it means, he replied, “Waving your hand or telling someone to start.” We worked together to craft a description of the word, using the information Jack provided. Although gesture was a word that Jack rated a two on his understanding before scale, he was confident enough to share his thinking based on the new background information he had been provided.
Hayley chose to describe “neglect”. She said, “To leave something...to go away and forget about it.” We worked together to come up with the fact that you can neglect something and still be in the same place as what is being neglected. Hayley then said, “So it’s like you’re ignoring it.” Having the participants craft their own descriptions of the words based on their prior knowledge and use of the word in context is such a significant aspect of truly learning and feeling comfortable with the new vocabulary. It is so much more meaningful to them when they are use language that is comfortable to them and they can connect to so they truly understand the meaning of the word. When students try to learn new words from a dictionary, they grasp the meaning for a short amount of time, but it is never authentic enough information for them to feel confident using the word in context or even remembering its meaning in the future.

“Adaptation” was directly taught to the students during content time when learning about biomes. I provided different examples of adaptations that related to different biomes and the participants were able to identify others. The participants were able to connect their schema of the word and apply it in a new context. Jack was eager to share that he knew gills of a fish was an adaptation. The illustration I provided for “adaptation” was of a fish with an arrow pointed to its gills. It is obvious that the vocabulary story and illustration cards were helpful for Jack and he was able to use them in various contexts.

Reading Contexts

As a result of the vocabulary words being chosen from the students’ literature study books and our read aloud book, the students were set up to be exposed to the words. Hayley identified four different times that she came across a vocabulary word in her literature study book – furtive (two times), phobia and torment. She would stop reading to come show me where she found the word in the book. I asked her to read the word in context to see if the description
we came up with fit the meaning in this case. Hayley showed excitement when she read the sentence and could understand its true meaning because she did not have a misunderstanding of a particular word. When discussing “furtive”, she said, “Wow, it’s a good thing I know what that means now because it totally fits with the book and is an important part of how he is behaving”. Hayley was reading *Among the Imposters* and because of the story plot, it was critical for her to know that the character was being sneaky. Hayley also came in one day and was excited to share that she heard “instinct” on the radio.

Jack identified three different times he came across a vocabulary word; twice in his literature study (neglect and pristine) and once in a poetry center activity (instinct). There was one other word in his literature study book (reciprocate), that he did not identify. Jack was able to read “reciprocate” in context and not have to skip over it because he did know its meaning. I know this to be true because I asked Jack to go to the page that “reciprocate” was on and asked him to read it in context me. He explained its meaning in the book, showing his understanding of the “reciprocate”. When asked to rate the effectiveness of finding the words in context (song lyrics, literature study, etc._), Jack rated it a one and Hayley rated it a four. Jack explained that he thought it was neat to come across the words, but that it did not help in his learning of the word. I asked Jack if it helped that he knew the meaning of the words when he came across them and if he could understand what he was reading better because he knew the meanings. He said, “Yes”. When the students are immersed in the words and see them in various contexts’, they are able to become more comfortable with the words and ultimately, begin to use the words as part of their individual vocabulary.

The participants showed their understanding of the vocabulary word in context by creating seven sentences where they used a vocabulary word correctly (Appendix D). Both Jack
and Hayley were successful in completing this task. Jack showed a misunderstanding the use of the “clamber”. He wrote, “The YMCA rock walls are sometimes very clamber.” Although he associated it with climbing, he used the word as an adjective. We discussed how he could switch it around to say, “I clamber up the rock wall at the YMCA”. I checked for his understanding by asking him to verbally use it correctly in a sentence. He said, “The mountain climber clambered up the mountain.” By having the students use the words in simple sentences, their understanding is built and it makes it more realistic for them. They are better able to then use the words in their writing because they are confident in their knowledge.

Graphic Organizers

After the participants created descriptions for each vocabulary term, they were then given a set of fifteen graphic organizer cards (Marzano, 2008) to record the meaning of each vocabulary word in multiple ways (Appendix E). This allowed the students to write the description again for practice, as well as include an illustration that would help remember the word. Out of the fifteen cards, Jack and Hayley both had four illustrations that closely resembled the illustrations I provided for each word from the vocabulary illustrations hanging on the window (Jack- adaptation, capital, clamber, and dimension / Hayley- clamber, barter, pristine, and instinct). The participants were allowed to use the same illustrations I provided; however they were encouraged to create their own that fit for their understanding. Jack and Hayley used their own illustrations for the other eleven cards. This shows that they were confident in their understanding of the word and were not afraid to create a different illustration to represent it.

When asked what she thought would be a good idea to put in the “More Ideas” section of the vocabulary card, Hayley responded, “Well, maybe like words that mean the same thing and words that different and I could cross them out to show that they are not the meaning of the
word.” I then said, “Like using antonyms and synonyms?” She said “Yes” and was eager to go work. When Jack was asked the same question he said, “I think I’ll use the words in a sentence because that will help me.” On the follow up reflection of the vocabulary building activities, Jack and Hayley rated the graphic organizer cards a four out of four, implying that they helped them master the words (Appendix G). Jack said that making the vocabulary cards was one of his favorite activities. “I like how we were allowed to draw pictures and use the words in sentences. It helped me remember.” Hayley commented, “I love my cards! I want to keep them forever! They helped me study and I like how I know what I wrote down.” I asked her if she has ever looked up a definition of the word and does not understand the definition. She said this happens a lot when she looks up the words. She said, “The dictionary uses weird words that I don’t understand anyways!”

Students’ Own Writing

The participants are beginning to feel confident in using the words in their own writing. Both Jack and Hayley used words in their writer’s notebooks. Hayley uses “furtive” and “serene” as often as possible. It is interesting to note that on Hayley’s understand before scale, she rated “furtive” and “serene” as a one. They were the only two words out of the fifteen that she rated a one. Now, they are the words she uses most frequently. Hayley also began using the words in her literature response journal (Appendix F). There have been multiple times when the participants have used the vocabulary words in their speech as well. For example, when we were going over their homework Jack said with a smile, “You are tormenting us!” When lining up to go to specials, Hayley said, “We have to walk furtively in the hallway”. It is enlightening to hear the students use the words correctly in different contexts, especially words they had never heard before.
Part of Review and Game-Play

It is crucial to continue to practice using the words in various contexts. The power of game-play is amazing. When students enjoy what they are doing and are having fun with the learning, it is much more effective. The participants’ favorite activity for vocabulary practice was Charades. Jack picked the word “phobia” out of the cup and acted it out by showing a scared face and running to hide under a table. Every student was able to record on their white boards that Jack clearly had a phobia of something. Jack and Hayley both rated Charades as a three on the follow up reflection. They both said that they had fun doing it and it was a lot of fun while they were learning. Specifically Hayley said, “Charades helped me because I remembered what people did and it was a lot of fun.”

The participants also engaged in a looping activity where the description of the word was on one side and a different vocabulary word was on another. The students had to work together to orally fit together the words with the descriptions. The first time, it took them four minutes and thirty-two seconds. After mixing the cards so each person had a different card, it took them four minutes and two seconds. On the final third time, it took them three minutes and eleven seconds. Even though each student had a different word each time, they were able to build upon their knowledge and make the process more and more efficient.

Another activity was the Vocabulary-Clue-In. The participants came up with clues to identify different vocabulary words. They switched papers and had to come up with the word that matched the clues. It was a fun activity where the students were again exposed to the words in a variety of contexts. One of Jack’s clues that he had to solve was, “swapping with someone, exchanging”. Jack put “reciprocate” and later realized, independently, that “barter” was the better choice. Both the participants struggled to differentiate between “reciprocate” and “barter”.
The words have similar meanings and we focused on the difference of reciprocating as giving and receiving and bartering as trading. On the follow up reflection, Jack and Hayley both rated it a three.

As an additional activity to practice with the vocabulary words, the students brought in items from home that represented a vocabulary word. Jack brought in a dollar bill (capital), a cheetah (furtive), and a new roll of tape (pristine). Hayley brought in a horse (pristine), a dollar bill (capital), and a baseball glove (gesture). It was interesting to hear why they chose those items to bring in. Each supported their choice of items with a correct description that directly correlated with the specific vocabulary word. Hayley commented, “I liked how we brought stuff from home. It made me connect with the words a lot better.”

To assess the participants understanding of the new vocabulary, I verbally gave the description of the word and they had to identify what word it was (Appendix H). They also had to use “instinct” and “adaptation” in sentences and provide the vocabulary word that matched the clues. Hayley earned a 20/20 on the assessment and Jack earned a 19/20. He gave an example of “adaptation”, but did not use the word in a sentence. He wrote, “The fish’s gills helped the fish with the changed environment”. Although he did not follow the directions, it is clear that he understands the meaning of adaptation.

Exposing the participants to the words in various ways really helped them to connect to the words and eventually made them confident enough to use the words in their speech and their writing. With multiple exposures, the participants were able to grasp the meanings in a way most suitable for them. Each of the multiple intelligences was identified in the process. The process proved to be powerful and successful. It will be interesting to check the students understanding of the words in a few weeks to see if they retained the information.
Implications and Conclusions

Teaching vocabulary well is a key aspect of developing engaged and successful readers. Vocabulary instruction demands meaningful experiences with words. These experiences need to be authentically integrated with students’ out of school lifestyles. It is important that teachers use a vocabulary that is more precise and diverse to create an environment that encourages students to do the same. It is crucial that students are exposed to the words multiple times through collaborative, active tasks that they can make connections to. Students need to have opportunities to extend their word knowledge through processes such as the use of pictures and the application of the words to meaningful, authentic situations. Teachers need to create and maintain word rich environments that invoke a sense of curiosity and risk taking with words.

Vocabulary instruction cannot be a list of words on Monday with a quiz on Friday. Nor should students be expected to look up definitions in a dictionary to learn the vocabulary. The learning has no purpose for the students, their individual needs are not being met, and there is no opportunity to make connections between the terms and the context it is used in. Students need opportunities to use the vocabulary in meaningful ways that are relatable to them. The variety of instructional strategies provided a framework for my students to build meaning. Providing the different activities gave the students the opportunity to explore the word and be able to make meaning with it. Students remember words better if they connect new meaning to knowledge they already have. Most importantly, students must be given the opportunity to have multiple exposures to a word in different contexts, as well as be encouraged to actively participate in their word learning. Content vocabulary should be addressed and unfamiliar words should be loosely pre taught to help ease students in to the material. Teachers should also encourage students to read independently to help develop vocabulary through wide reading.
With the extensive amount of diversity among students, vocabulary instruction demands differentiation and the use of multiple methods to meet the needs of each student. It would be interesting to study how students’ scores on standardized tests might be affected by this approach to teaching vocabulary. Often times, students cannot determine what the question is asking. They are not familiar with the wording of the questions and the content vocabulary used throughout. Introducing vocabulary with multiple strategies that are authentic to students provide them with the opportunity to make a personal connection to the new terms, as well as be able to make connections among other words. Ideally, I would like to see this way of introducing new vocabulary terms used cross-curricularly, across all of the grade levels. The students would have ownership of their learning and all learning styles would be continuously met.

Considering the different types of vocabulary acquisition, the factors that affect vocabulary acquisition, and the variety of instructional strategies for developing vocabulary, help to more successfully identify how we can build students’ vocabulary in an engaging, and effective way. Students acquire knowledge in a variety of ways. When the opportunities are differentiated, the learning is individualized and the students are able to make connections with and build on their prior knowledge. Ultimately, the learning is lasting and transferable.
Appendix A— Marzano’s Vocabulary Graphic Organizer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My Understanding Before: 1 2 3 4</th>
<th>My Understanding After: 1 2 3 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Subject:</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Illustration:</strong></td>
<td><strong>More Ideas:</strong></td>
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</tbody>
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Appendix B—Vocabulary Story Illustrations
Appendix C—Crafted Descriptions in Vocabulary Notebooks

Vocabulary Story

- Phobia - a situation, object, or motion, or person, that you are afraid of.
- Torment - to cause physical or mental pain.
- Capital - another word for money.
- Economy - management of resources, goods, money, etc.
- Barter - to trade or exchange (not usually capital).
- Clamber - to climb using both hands and feet.
- Adaptation - a former structure that helps adjust to a changed environment.
- Pristine - clean, untouched, new-looking.
- Instinct - comes naturally, not learned behavior.
- Reciprocate - to give and receive, interchangeable.
- Gesture - a motion or signal using hands and feet. While speaking or in place of speech.
- Dimension - a property of space.
Appendix D—Vocabulary Create-a-Sentence

Vocab. Sentences

1. I have a dastardly phobia of heights.
2. The mountain climber clambered up the steep mountain using muscle power.
3. Ingrid gestured to the child to walk across the road.
4. The pristine silverware was gleaming at the serene fancy restaurant.
5. The burglar furtively snuck past the bank to barter with the man.

Blank Vocab. Sentences

1. Fish have the amazing ________ of gills so they can breath underwater.
2. Canadian Geese have the ________ to fly South during cold weather and ________ their homes for the cold months.
3. My older brother ________ed me with a lollipops since I lost sweets for a week.
Appendix E—Vocabulary Graphic Organizer Cards

Description: A form or structure that helps adjust to a changed environment.

Illustration: [Image of a horse's hoof]

More Ideas:
- Change, adjust, animals, humans
- Synonyms: stay the same, feet, paper, non-living
- Antonyms:
### Appendix F—Literature Study Response

#### Part 4: Response Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>I think that Luke still isn't giving up his true identity because he still agrees he's really Travis (Travis's Day) and he's good. He still isn't sure he can trust him. I think he's unsure about whether or not it's really true that they're all doing the test to see if they're really what they say they are. He says they're very surprising. They say they're not, but they start questioning him. This is a test. Luke isn't giving away his real name. He also says he has no idea who he is, and he's just acting really mad. He's not ready to be called Luke. He's just pretending to be him. It would give Luke too many enemies if he were telling his own name. It's why Luke still isn't giving away his real name.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I think it's so easy for the Shadow Children to get into the woods because Arna (Arna's Day) works on making sure the forest is clear and open to them. The forest is clear for the Shadow Children when they go out. I think that they can hide the computer and change test scores because it's because they've had so much practice of using the computers at home where they didn't do the homework or turn in a paper. Plage they're used to hiding and stuff that it's normal for them. I think that it's easy for them to get out of classes and activities because of the autistic or autistic kids that need so much care and attention. The teachers and staff are paying so much attention to them. If they don't pay much attention to them, they can get away with so much stuff.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**PS:** Used further torment and adversity.

**PPS:** + Parted
Appendix G—Follow-Up Reflection

Vocabulary Learning

1- Did not help in my learning
2- Helped in my learning some
3- Helped my learning a lot
4- Helped me master the words.

Vocabulary Story with words in context.....................1  2  3  4
Vocabulary illustrations (on window shades)...............1  2  3  4
Vocabulary descriptions as a class..........................1  2  3  4
Vocabulary cards (on silver ring)............................1  2  3  4
Charades..............................................................1  2  3  4
Finding the words in context (song lyrics, lit. study, etc)......1  2  3  4
Vocabulary Clue-In.................................................1  2  3  4
Vocabulary Make-a-Sentence...................................1  2  3  4
Items from home connection.....................................1  2  3  4
Vocabulary Celebration..........................................1  2  3  4

Additional Comments: ________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
Appendix H—Assessment Celebration

**The Olympian**
Using Vocabulary in Various Contexts (Scenarios)

1. Use *instinct* in a sentence that shows your truly understand its meaning.
   - It is a geese *instinct* to fly south *during* cold weather.

2. Why did you leave me? Why don't you pay attention to me? Why do I feel like there is no one here?
   - *neglect*

3. Use adaptation in a sentence that shows your truly understand its meaning.
   - Fish have *gills* as an *adaptation* so that they can *breathe* *under* the water.

4. Shine! Sparkle! Dazzle! Those sure do look nice! If I didn't know better, I would think they were brand new.
   - *pristine*

5. I'll give you my Luchable for your fruit snacks!
   - *barter*
References


