

Vocabulary Instruction

by

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Bachelor of Arts, University of the Fraser Valley, 2008

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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This paper examines the importance of vocabulary instruction both in and out of the language arts classroom. Research has shown that despite a word gap between high and low socioeconomic families, both direct and indirect instruction is beneficial in raising students' level of vocabulary understanding and thus reading comprehension. Following an examination of research, this project gives practical suggestions for teachers to use in their classrooms in order to increase vocabulary instruction and retention. Included are lists of recommended read-alouds for the middle school classroom, vocabulary games and professional resources for teachers.

Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee	ii
Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Chapter One: Purpose and Inspiration	1
Pre-service teaching experiences	1
Teaching Experiences	2
Project Inspiration	4
Project Overview	5
Chapter Two: Literature Review	6
Vocabulary and Socioeconomic Status	7
Levels of Word Knowledge and Different Types of Words	9
Strategies for Vocabulary Development	12
Incidental learning	12
Direct instruction	15
Rich and varied instruction	15
Frequent exposure	17
Extended outside the classroom	19
Conclusion	20
Chapter Three: Teacher Resource for Vocabulary Instruction	21
Components of vocabulary instruction	21
Creating a word rich classroom	22
Wide reading	22

Book talk	23
Read aloud.....	25
Suggestions for Read-aloud.....	25
Games.....	28
Classroom Activities	30
Activity 1: Word wizard	31
Activity 2: Word of the week.....	33
Activity 3: Word wall	36
Suggestions for Further Professional Development	38
Concluding thoughts.....	39
Chapter 4: Final Reflections	41
Project summary	41
Reflecting on changes.....	42
Looking towards the Future.....	43
Final Recommendations	44
References.....	47
Appendix A: Word Wizard Blackline Master	50
Appendix B: Word of the Week Blackline Master	51

Chapter One: Purpose and Inspiration

I am a reader. Place just about any print in front of me and I will begin to read it. My reading preference is for fiction, and my passion is for young adult literature. To this day, I love to find a new book and immerse myself in its world; only emerging when the story ends, finally looking up, momentarily surprised to find myself in my own home.

I became an avid reader at about nine years old. As a young student I used to hide my novels inside my math or French book and enjoy reading a story instead of doing the school work that I was actually supposed to be doing. Now, as a teacher, I cannot help but laugh knowingly when I see my students doing the same thing. Some might say that I should tell them to “put that book away and start learning” like my own teachers used to say to me. But I often allow the students this bit of freedom, knowing that, even though they may not currently be practicing the same thing as the rest of the class (such as how to multiply fractions), they are learning just as much as I could teach them, if not more, through their enjoyment of and engagement with literature. Undoubtedly, there will be another opportunity to learn how to multiply fractions.

This chapter highlights how my own experiences as a reader and my teaching experiences inspired me to choose vocabulary development as my Masters of Education project.

Pre-service teaching experiences

As an education student, my favourite course was one about teaching language arts to elementary students. Throughout this arts-based course, we explored various types of literature - from non-fiction to poetic novels - by using both dramatic and visual arts as responses to reading. In my subsequent student-teaching experience, I used some of these strategies to teach the novel *Underground to Canada*. Over the course of a couple months my grade five students

explored the novel, summarized main ideas, inferred what the characters were feeling, and justified their opinions - all important aspects of reading instruction and learning. However, I felt that there was a gap in some of my students' learning. In my typically diverse classroom, there were a few students who struggled greatly with a basic comprehension of portions of the text. When I read with some of these students in small groups, I would ask them to sound out and define certain words. But they had never even heard the word before. It was evident to me that their lack of vocabulary was impeding their ability to comprehend the storyline of the narrative. Unfortunately, during my student-teaching experience, I did not get a chance to explore how to teach kids what the difficult words in the text meant, nor how they could use these words in their own speech or writing. In fact, in this classroom, the only way that vocabulary was taught by the sponsor teacher was as a separate activity not grounded in the concepts that the students were learning in other subjects.

Teaching Experiences

Despite my passion for language and reading, my first teaching job was in a middle school teaching math and science to French Immersion students. Teaching in a second language context meant that reading skills and vocabulary development was a central part of all instruction. Even though my students had been speaking French for at least seven years, there were gaps in their vocabulary that hindered both their reading comprehension and writing skills. These challenges affected their ability to learn the increasingly complex science and math concepts. As part of our science course, students completed various assignments for each unit to help them learn new vocabulary. I had students: create posters to represent words; create a glossary of terms with accompanying definitions, examples and pictures; create crossword puzzles; and play vocabulary games. While I am confident that these strategies and activities

helped students learn enough to pass their tests by giving a simple definition of the words or using vocabulary words in their answers, I do not know if they were fully able to comprehend new words at a deep or lasting level. I'm not confident that students could have used those words in other contexts than the science classroom or even outside of our current unit of study.

Recently, my teaching assignment changed. As part of my new teaching assignment I started teaching English language arts to French Immersion students. I was thrilled with this work and immediately began to think of ways to encourage my students to be as passionate about reading as I am. As we begin to read books together, I was once again surprised at the words they were asking me to explain even though we were now working in their native language of English. After some reflection, I realized that I was expecting my middle school students to have adult level vocabulary even though students learn approximately 25,000 words between grades eight and twelve (Graves, 2000 as cited in Bintz, 2011).

Throughout my short journey as a language arts teacher, my strength has been finding the literature that gets kids excited about reading. Being an avid reader of a wide range of young adult literature, I can guide my advanced students towards the dystopian literature of James Dashner or Marie Lu, or my reluctant readers towards the shorter books of Gordon Korman or Margaret Peterson Haddix. Recently, I read the novel *City of Ember* to my grade six class. Hearing my students beg to read and groan when I closed the book was evidence that they were fully engaged in and excited about this piece of literature. While we do spend time talking about new words and using new vocabulary in sentences, I am not convinced that I'm facilitating vocabulary development as much as I could be. My goal is that by the end of the school year, my students can use more words in their speech and writing as well as comprehend texts with more difficult vocabulary than they could at the beginning of the year.

Project Inspiration

While my passion for literature is deeply rooted within me, this new interest in vocabulary development was sparked by a short conversation with a colleague the day before school started this year. We were talking about an activity each of us had done in order for our students to practice new vocabulary in French. When I explained my activity to my colleague she responded, “Your activity might be more pedagogically correct, but you should teach it my way.” Throughout that day, I laughed to myself at the audacity of that statement. However, that brief conversation stuck with me for the first few weeks of school. I began to think about why I designed the assignment the way that I did. It was based mostly on my ‘teaching instincts’. It was an assignment that I felt would help increase my students' vocabulary, but I had no solid reasoning or grounding in the research literature for thinking so. This experience was a main factor in my decision to complete my final project on the importance of teaching vocabulary, and how to do so in a manner that is critically informed by research in Language and Literacy classrooms. If my goal is to increase my students' vocabulary, I want everything I do to be grounded in solid research. I want to challenge and expand the perspectives that I hold as a language and reading teacher.

I’m entering into this project knowing that my own beliefs and lived experiences create bias within my research of the literature and creation of the classroom vocabulary activities and assignments. I believe that reading is the foundation of education and that reading comprehension is an important indicator of academic success. To me, therefore, it is logical that vocabulary development is important so that students can understand the texts they read. Furthermore, I believe that vocabulary cannot be taught in isolation - it must be relevant and connected to students’ lives in order to be retained.

Therefore, for my Masters of Education project I have chosen to examine the research literature on vocabulary development for middle school students, its impact on their reading comprehension, and the best practices for teachers to increase students' vocabulary. Further, as part of this project, I use research-based theory to create activities and assignments that can be used by other teachers in their Language Arts classrooms to enhance vocabulary development in their students.

Project Overview

In chapter one, I unpack who I am as a reader and how my experiences have led me to choosing vocabulary as a project topic. I also acknowledge my own biases around reading, reading comprehension and vocabulary instruction. In chapter two I review current literature on topics such as why vocabulary instruction is important and the best research-based practices for developing students' vocabulary. In chapter three I share my own created resources that are grounded in current research and explain how these resources can be used by classroom teachers.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

As early as the turn of the 20th century, John Dewey established the importance of vocabulary in children's education stating that a word is an "instrument for thinking about the meanings which it expresses" (as cited in Bintz, 2011, p. 44). A single word has meaning. Put together a variety of words and the ability to communicate any idea is possible. One strand of communication in Language and Literacy education is reading. In its simplest form, reading can be broken down into two parts: 1) fluency or decoding – the ability to read the words on the page, and 2) comprehension - the ability to understand the story or ideas presented.

Unfortunately, "students who are successful at decoding can, and often do struggle with comprehension when they encounter too many words for which they have limited or no meaning" (Rupley, Nichols, Mraz & Blair, 2012, p. 300). Reading, and therefore, reading comprehension is one of the primary goals of our education system. In 2000, the National Reading Panel stated "comprehension is critically important to development of children's reading skills and therefore their ability to obtain an education. Indeed, reading comprehension has come to be viewed as the 'essence of reading', essential not only to academic learning but to life-long learning" (p. 4-1). The Panel considered vocabulary as a critical component of learning to read. "As a learner begins to read, reading vocabulary encountered in texts is mapped onto the oral vocabulary the learner brings to the task....When the word is not in the learner's oral vocabulary, it will not be understood when it occurs in print. Vocabulary occupies an important middle ground in learning to read" (p. 4-3). Michael Graves (1986), in his review of vocabulary instruction research concluded that "vocabulary has repeatedly been shown to be the most powerful component of readability formulas and a major component of reading comprehension" (p.58).

The teaching of vocabulary is imperative in both the language arts and content area classrooms such as a science or social studies class. “When readers know a lot of words, they can read more complex texts. When writers know a lot of words, they can compose more sophisticated documents” (Fisher & Frey, 2014, p. 594). Beck and McKeown (2007) state that, “[a] large and rich vocabulary is strongly related to reading proficiency” (p. 251). Despite this ongoing recognition that vocabulary instruction is crucial as it increases reading comprehension (Asselin, 2002; Graves, 2007; Jalongo & Sobolak, 2010; Marzano, 2012; Rupley, Nichols, Mraz & Blair, 2012), “there has been an ebb and flow of concern for vocabulary. At times, interest in vocabulary has been high and intense, and at other times low and neglected, alternating back and forth over time” (Bintz, 2011, p. 44). In this chapter I examine the research literature, with a focus on middle years learners, regarding the relationship between vocabulary development and socioeconomic status, levels of word knowledge and different types of words, and strategies for vocabulary development.

Vocabulary and Socioeconomic Status

The relationship between vocabulary development and academic success is even more pronounced among at-risk learners, specifically those who come from low-income backgrounds. Well before formal schooling, some children are already at a disadvantage. In 1995, Hart and Risely discovered a substantial correlation between socioeconomic status and vocabulary. By three years old, children of professionals had an average of 1200 cumulative vocabulary words while children of parents on welfare had only 500 cumulative vocabulary words. In fact, this phenomenon was titled 'The 30 Million Word Gap' as “In four years, an average child in a professional family would accumulate experience with almost 45 million words, an average child in a working-class family 26 million words, and an average child in a welfare family 13 million

words” (Hart & Risely, 2003, p.9). Throughout the longitudinal study, this so-called word-gap widened as the children progressed through school. Hart and Risely further discovered that not only did children who come from high-income families begin school with more developed vocabularies, they also learned new words more easily thus increasing their advantage over the years. Beck and McKeown also discuss this widening gap when they reference Smith's 1941 study stating, “high school seniors near the top of their class knew about four times as many words as their lower-performing classmates (Smith, 1941). Although the latter reference is old, no current research suggests that the situation has improved” (Beck & McKeown, 2007, p. 252).

The link between struggling students, vocabulary and low socioeconomic status is acknowledged by many researchers (Kelley, Lesaux, Kieffer & Faller, 2010; Marzano, 2012; Beck & McKeown, 2007). Specifically, Kelley, Lesaux, Kieffer and Faller (2010) recognize that “large numbers of struggling readers walk into classrooms every day. These students, many of whom are learning English as a second language (ESL) and/or come from low-income backgrounds, are hard to reach and even harder to teach - through no fault of their own. They enter school with more limited vocabulary knowledge than their middle income and native English-speaking counterparts and fall further behind in vocabulary and reading as they move through school” (p. 5). With an established correlation between reading comprehension and vocabulary, it is no surprise that these struggling students continue to struggle throughout their education. It is a vicious cycle. Students begin school with low vocabularies; as they struggle to read, their enjoyment of reading is minimal so they read as little as possible. Since they avoid reading, their vocabularies do not increase from learning words through context thus perpetuating the cycle.

In their study on effective academic vocabulary instruction in urban middle schools,

Lesaux, Kieffer and Faller (2010) notice that even though,

research has shown that gaps in reading performance are often associated with gaps in vocabulary knowledge, attention to developing language is not occurring in most schools. Most middle school English language arts (ELA) programs emphasize literary analysis over direct instruction in comprehension strategies. For many of these learners, what is missing from class work is direct instruction focused on academic vocabulary that will support them as they read expository texts in their academic future. (p.5)

In an attempt to focus their intervention on vocabulary development, the researchers developed an 18 week program which focused on academic vocabulary, word learning strategies and reading comprehension. They found that students in the treatment classrooms performed better on multiple choice vocabulary tests. More importantly, they also found that students who had received this curriculum were better able to comprehend passages that contained the words they had been taught as well as outperform the control classrooms on general reading comprehension tasks. This study demonstrates the need for a balanced approach to teaching ELA. It is important to teach basic reading comprehension strategies (including vocabulary study) in addition to literary analysis. Unfortunately, even when the importance of vocabulary development is well understood by teacher, schools or districts, the implementation of vocabulary development programs is not always successful (Blachwicz & Fisher, 2002). This is likely because there is no single best method for teaching vocabulary. Also, it is not always clear to educators which words students need to learn, or at what level.

Levels of Word Knowledge and Different Types of Words

Part of the difficulty in implementing vocabulary instruction stems from both the difficulty in defining what it means to know a word and knowing which words should be taught.

In a study by Overturf, Montgomery and Smith, (2013) in which one teacher-participant shared her experiences, it was noted that “In spite of dutifully providing her students with a vocabulary list and definitions, her students almost never transferred the new vocabulary to their speaking or writing, which is the ultimate point of vocabulary instruction.” (p.11). Not only does this demonstrate the ineffectiveness of dictionary definitions as a teaching strategy but it also clarifies one teacher's view of what it means to know a word. Researchers agree that there is not one simple definition of what it means to know a word (Rupley, Nichols, Mraz & Blair, 2012; Kindle, 2009; Asselin, 2002; Bintz, 2011; McKeown & Beck, 1988). In 1987, Donald Graves outlined six stages of word knowledge that included learning to read a known word, learning new meanings of known words, learning new words that represent known concepts, learning new words that represent new concepts, clarifying and enriching meanings of known words, and moving words from receptive (listening and reading) to expressive (speaking and writing) vocabulary (Asselin, 2002, p. 57). McKeown and Beck (1988) agree, stating that “word knowledge is not an all-or-nothing proposition. Words may be known at different levels, such as knowing only that a miser is a greedy person versus knowing that a miser is someone who hoards money, as well as being able to give examples and consequences of miserly behavior and being able to use the word beyond typical contexts, such as to describe people who are stingy with things other than money” (p. 42). Researchers agree that there are stages to word knowledge. “A form of simple-level word knowledge is definitional....Often, however, definitions do not help a reader understand the contribution of an unknown word to meaning. To comprehend, a reader needs some idea not only of a word’s meaning, but also of the ways the meaning contributes to the cohesiveness of the ideas or information represented” (Rupley, Nichols, Mraz & Blair, 2012, p. 302). In order to move from simple definitional knowledge to

full understanding, the learner's prior knowledge and background experiences must come into play. “Vocabulary knowledge closely reflects children’s breadth of real-life and vicarious experiences” (p. 300). Each stage of vocabulary learning is important as the depth of understanding continues to grow through repeated exposures and continued life experiences. Despite the complexity of stages of word knowledge, Asselin (2002) gives a simple definition for students and teachers, “knowing a word means knowing how to do things with it, not write its definition” (p. 57).

Apart from the ambiguity of what it means to know a word, a second challenge is the quantity and variety of words used in everyday and academic settings. Various researchers (Marzano, 2012; Rupley, Nichols, Mraz & Blair, 2012) refer to the work of Beck and McKeown (1985) in categorizing vocabulary terms.

[*Tier 1 words*] are terms that are basic to the English language because of their high frequency in oral and written language use—terms such as big, clock, walk, baby, and so on...*Tier 2 terms* are those that appear infrequently enough that they will probably not be learned incidentally by students. Such terms might include nimble, feeble, vigor, and so on. *Tier 3 terms* are subject-specific terms that, although not frequently found in the course of general speaking or reading, are important to general literacy in specific subject areas. For example, the term cellular response might not be frequently encountered in general speaking or reading, but it is important to science at the high school level.

(Marzano, 2012, p. 31-32)

According to Marzano, tier 2 and tier 3 words are good candidates for direct instruction. Since tier 3 words are domain specific, they affirm that vocabulary needs to be taught across content areas and not just in the language arts classroom. During reading, students come across many tier

2 words and in the language arts classroom, “the words that are encountered in authentic reading activities...are those that should be the focus of instruction and result in the greatest impact on expanding the vocabulary knowledge of the students. (Rupley, Nichols, Mraz & Blair, 2012, p. 301).

Strategies for Vocabulary Development.

One of the reasons vocabulary instruction is so important is because it is “estimated that students entering ninth grade need to know and understand 88,500 word families” (Fisher & Frey, 2014, p. 595). While this number of words is impossible to teach explicitly, many of these words are learned through incidental learning. In fact, “a child’s reading vocabulary is likely to increase at the rate of 3,000 to 4,000 words a year, resulting in a reading vocabulary of greater than 25,000 words by eighth grade” (Rupley, Nichols, Mraz & Blair, 2012, p. 300). However, teachers cannot rely solely on incidental learning of new vocabulary. Explicit or direct instruction is also required so that more incidental learning can take place. Vocabulary learning is reciprocal. The more words students know, the more they understand what they read. Accordingly, the more students understand what they read, the more context clues they have to learn more new words.

Incidental learning. In this section I discuss how vocabulary acquisition can be supported through incidental learning including oral conversation, read alouds, independent reading and peer conversation. “Vocabulary can be acquired through incidental learning. Much of a student’s vocabulary will have to be learned in the course of doing things other than explicit vocabulary learning” (National Reading Panel, p. 4-4). From birth, young children develop their vocabulary through indirect instruction or incidental learning. As previously discussed, children who come from homes where there is rich and extensive conversation develop a higher level of

word knowledge (Beck & McKeown, 2007; Kelley, Lesaux, Kieffer & Faller, 2010; Marzano, 2012). It is evident that “oral conversation is the primary source from which young children learn the words they know” (Beck & McKeown, 2007, p. 252). In fact, children can continue to develop their vocabulary “effectively and almost effortlessly as long as they see words in meaningful contexts” (Bintz, 2011, p. 45). This can occur through both oral conversation and reading. Regardless of how the words are presented, “vocabulary grows when students have abundant opportunities to encounter new words and examples that are representative of the word in rich contextual settings” (Rupley, Nichols, Mraz & Blair, 2012, p. 302). It is important that students are provided with opportunities to see and hear new vocabulary. In younger children, this occurs primarily through oral communication as the reading material for young readers purposely uses simple vocabulary with which most students are already familiar. However, books that are written at a level beyond children's independent reading level are an excellent resource for teachers as they can be read aloud. Though the more complex storyline and advanced vocabulary are higher than students can read on their own, most students' listening and speaking skills are higher than their reading and writing abilities (Beck & McKeown, 2007; Moen, 2007).

In the middle years, students are read to less and less frequently, even though if students are exposed to new words as they are being read aloud to, both vocabulary and comprehension develop further. When teachers read aloud to students, especially material that students enjoy or can relate to, retention of the ideas and words is more likely to happen. Reading aloud also gives struggling readers a chance to focus on the content because they do not have to look at words on a page. This provides them an opportunity

to absorb the words they are hearing and find significance in them. (Mixan, 2013, p. 66-67)

Though read-alouds continue to be an excellent teaching strategy to increase exposure to new vocabulary that leads to incidental learning, by middle school, most students are also able to read literature that contains rich vocabulary. Even without direct instruction, “independent reading should be central in any effort to help students improve their vocabularies” (Moen, 2007, p.20). Moen further explains that independent reading should be central in any language arts classroom and include access to a variety of literature, student choice in reading material and time to read in class. Considering that “from the intermediate grades on, reading becomes the principle language experience for improving students’ vocabularies... [it is] absolutely essential to increase their motivation and opportunities to read” (Graves, 2007, p. 14). Heverely (2011), a middle school teacher, echoes the thoughts of fellow teacher Christine Moen and researcher Michael Graves when he states, “it is reading for enjoyment that is my way of teaching vocabulary” (p. 100).

Though oral conversation is crucial in young children, older students also benefit from peer discussion. “Students of all ages, be they English learners or native English speakers, need to engage frequently in authentic discussions—give and take conversations in which they are given the opportunity to discuss topics thoughtfully” (Graves, 2007, p. 14). In the middle years this is especially useful as using middle school students' natural inclination towards talking can be harnessed in a way so that their discussions are rich and engaging as well as with a variety of other students who each have their own internal dictionary from which to draw words. Mixan (2013) also supports the advantage of oral communication between students stating that incidental learning occurs “when children listen to others talking or when they are reading.

Students are remarkably adept at picking up new words, even when they are not being explicitly taught” (p. 66).

Direct instruction. In addition to incidental instruction, students acquire vocabulary through direct instruction. Through students' vocabulary will increase through incidental learning (especially when teachers provide appropriate and frequent opportunities for conversation and reading), direct instruction can also be used in the classroom to further increase word knowledge. Over 20 years ago, vocabulary research teams Isabel Beck and Margaret McKeown (1988) and Steven Stahl and Marilyn Fairbanks (1986) advocated for vocabulary teaching that was *rich* – including definitional and contextual information, *frequent* – presenting multiple exposures to words and *extended* – involving students in deeper processing. More recently, fellow researcher Michael Graves (2007) echoed the same ideas when stating that an effective vocabulary instruction program includes opportunities for “frequent, varied, and extensive language experiences” (p. 14). Essentially, vocabulary instruction should consist of a variety of learning strategies and activities to practice new vocabulary (*rich/varied*), there must be repeated exposure to newly learned words (*frequent*), and words should be used in various contexts and extended to use outside the classroom (*extended/extensive*).

Rich and varied instruction. The first component of an effective vocabulary program is rich and varied instruction. Rich instruction includes using a variety of activities such as giving definitions in student friendly language, relating a new word to a variety of contexts, comparing and contrasting words, using word parts, and finding synonyms and antonyms among other strategies (Beck & McKeown, 2007; Graves, 2007; McKeown & Beck, 1988). Many students have gone through the ritual of receiving a list of words, looking them up in the dictionary and either copying the definition or creating a sentence using the target word. “Parker (1984) has

shown that many junior high school students can learn words by looking them up in the dictionary. Of course, students do not fully learn a word's meaning simply by looking it up in the dictionary, but they are likely to learn enough about it to learn more from subsequent encounters with it" (Graves, 1986, p.65). Though the traditional method of using dictionaries to copy definitions of unknown words is common and requires little preparation or time on the teacher's part, it may not be an effective technique (Marzano, 2009). However, other methods of explicit teaching of some vocabulary is still an important component of vocabulary instruction.

"Teaching vocabulary should include explicit instruction and appropriate guided practice in specific skills along with broad reading opportunities and other language activities. Research supports the explicit teaching of word meanings for struggling and average readers" (Rupley, Nichols, Mraz & Blair, 2012, p. 302).

One of the key components of direct vocabulary instruction is the use of context to determine word meaning. "Use of context clues refers to deciphering the meaning of the word from the context in which the word is found" (Rupley, Nichols, Mraz & Blair, 2012, p. 303). Attentive use of context clues is not something that comes naturally to students and must be taught through explicit instruction and repeated examples and teaching modelling until students are able to effectively use context clues themselves to decipher and infer meaning (Moen, 2007; Overturf, Montgomery & Smith, 2013; Rupley, Nichols, Mraz & Blair, 2012). According to Graves, "this type of instruction is particularly appropriate in the middle grades when students encounter increasingly challenging texts, many of which are replete with unknown words" (Graves, 2007, p. 15).

Apart from instruction in using contextual information to determine word usage and meaning, another effective strategy is semantic mapping. Semantic mapping is the use of graphic

organizers that allows students to understand new words through the use of prior knowledge such as connections to their lives or other known words (Overturf, Montgomery & Smith, 2013; Rupley, Nichols, Mraz & Blair, 2012). “Semantic mapping can be used for explicit and active vocabulary instruction. Semantic mapping structures information categorically so that students can more readily see relationships between new words and concepts and their existing background knowledge....teachers should stimulate class discussion to guide students' thinking about the relationships between the target word and their experiences” (Rupley, Nichols, Mraz & Blair, 2012, p. 307). One type of connection to previous knowledge might include using prior word knowledge. “Research has found many benefits of including synonyms and antonyms in vocabulary instruction” (Overturf, Montgomery & Smith, 2013, p. 53). Another type of connection is a text to self-connection. “Connections between previously learned vocabulary words and new words encountered in reading help students begin to understand relationships among words. When instruction is based on strengthening these connections, students are not just asked to provide an abstract definition of a word, but make connections between the newly encountered word, their past experiences, and how these past concepts fit with the stories and informational texts they are currently reading” (Rupley, Nichols, Mraz & Blair, 2012, p. 303).

A rich and varied vocabulary program is not 'one perfect strategy'. Instead, it is a variety of activities, opportunities and strategies. Hopefully, by using a multifaceted approach including games and music to learn and practice new words and by creating experiences that engage students, they will continue to be motivated to learn.

Frequent exposure. The second component of effective vocabulary instruction is frequent exposure to new vocabulary words. There are three key ways to increase exposure to new words in the classroom: oral language, vocabulary teaching across curricular areas, and

independent reading. It is important for teachers to model strong vocabulary skills. “Teachers should incorporate new words using repetition so that students can better retain and comprehend these words” (Mixan, 2013, p. 66). Though teachers have students' best interests in mind, some teachers use simpler vocabulary so that all students understand what is being said. However, this does not help students in the long run as they need good role models with strong vocabulary skills in order to better their own vocabularies (Overturf, Montgomery & Smith, 2013). When teachers and adults use new and advanced vocabulary words repeatedly, students can echo those phrases and begin to use new words in their own speech.

It is also important to teach new vocabulary outside of the language arts curriculum. Often, “vocabulary instruction is isolated from other aspects of the instructional day, particularly in content area learning. It is far too common to assign students a list of words (usually technical terms) that will be used in a social studies or science unit and then ask them to look up words and write definitions so that they can then compose solitary sentences. This limited exposure to words and phrases in decontextualized situations has not proven to be effective, nor is it of a sufficient intensity” (Fisher & Frey, 2014, p. 595). In a science classroom, much of the learning content is based on new vocabulary words. It is therefore important to take the time needed to understand the underlying concepts in order to fully understand the target word.

Finally, as previously discussed, independent reading is a key component of learning new vocabulary. Though reading also is a form of indirect instruction, giving students time to read at school allows for repeated exposure of more common tier 2 words. The more students read, the more they are exposed to new words and begin to see the same word used in various contexts. This will help the student retain and begin to use new vocabulary in their speaking and writing. As Heverly (2011) states, “examples, by repeated exposure, make for the best vocabulary

lessons. Reading is the key. And it is reading for enjoyment that is my way of teaching vocabulary” (p. 100).

Extended outside the classroom. By using rich and varied activities in the classroom, teaching strategies to learn unknown words and encouraging students to use these strategies unprompted, and presenting opportunities for frequent exposure to new words, students will hopefully begin to take an active interest in words and become word conscious. “Individuals who are word conscious are motivated to learn new words and are able to use them skillfully. Helping students to become word conscious is a crucial task for teachers across all grade levels, especially those working with students whose vocabulary exposure may be limited. One of the most beneficial lessons a teacher can infuse in students is a love of language” (Mixan, 2013, p. 67). By becoming word conscious, students will naturally begin to seek out new words, explore vocabulary on their own and attempt to use varied and advanced vocabulary in their speech and writing even outside of the language arts classroom. By extending their developing vocabulary outside of the classroom, students truly become active learners and will retain their new word knowledge indefinitely. One strategy proposed by McKeown and Beck (1988) to develop word consciousness is 'Word Wizard'. This is an ongoing classroom activity where students are given points for using target words in their speech or writing or for recognizing target words in their reading or others' speech. This activity encourages learning to continue to occur outside of scheduled class time and throughout various contexts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the more words students know, the better readers they become. Vocabulary instruction is a critical part of a balanced literacy program but must also be incorporated into other content areas. More research is needed in the field of early intervention as children from low-income families are at risk for significant reading and academic challenges given the likelihood of decreased exposure to new words. All students benefit from a variety of strategies and direct vocabulary instruction but one of the strongest components of vocabulary instruction is time to read. Avid readers demonstrate high levels incidental vocabulary learning and increase their exposure to new words. Any teacher wanting to incorporate vocabulary instruction in their classroom must first examine how often their students are reading and make that a priority. In the following chapter, I will provide a variety of research-based resources for teachers to use in their classroom.

Chapter Three: Teacher Resource for Vocabulary Instruction

Vocabulary development cannot be taught in isolation. The need to understand and use words permeates through all subject areas. The purpose of this chapter is to provide teachers with a collection of activities that they can use to incorporate vocabulary instruction routines into their teaching practice. This resource is primarily designed with the middle-years language arts educators and students in mind though many of the activities can be used in content area classrooms and with late intermediate students as well.

The activities in this resource are designed to be used throughout the year and not as a one-time vocabulary study or unit, but as a collection of routines that teachers may choose from to incorporate into their daily or weekly classroom practice. After briefly explaining three components of vocabulary instruction, this resource describes the basics of a word-rich classroom, provides instructions, samples and blackline masters for specific vocabulary activities, and concludes with suggestions of further readings for teachers who would like to continue their professional development in vocabulary instruction.

Components of vocabulary instruction

As discussed in the literature review, vocabulary instruction must be rich, varied, frequent, and extended outside the classroom. By using a variety of different activities which challenge students to unpack words such as using context based clues, using words in new contexts, creating connections, examining word parts, engaging in meaningful conversation, and exposing students to a variety of literature, teachers are creating rich and varied vocabulary experiences. This multifaceted approach to engage and motivate all students also meets one of the Association for Middle Level Education's (AMLE) core beliefs.

One of the sixteen Keys to Educating Young Adolescent characteristics states that “educators use multiple learning and teaching approaches” (AMLE, 2010) which should also be a part of vocabulary instruction. In addition to rich and varied, vocabulary instruction must also be frequent. Students must be surrounded by and exposed to new words and new strategies constantly and consistently. Finally, vocabulary instruction must extend outside the classroom. Ideally, by providing instruction that is rich, varied and frequent, students will become word-conscious and begin to notice, learn and practice new vocabulary outside the classroom, resulting in authentic and lasting learning that naturally extends itself outside of the school environment. The suggestions and activities that follow all fit within the framework of these key components.

Creating a word rich classroom

A word rich classroom is one in which students are exposed to a variety of words both in print and speech. By creating a class culture of a word rich environment, students are exposed to new vocabulary, resulting in frequent exposures of specific terms which is required for retention. One of the simplest and quickest ways to expose students to new vocabulary is by having them read as much as possible.

Wide reading. Reading is the most effective way for students to be exposed to words. In fact, reading alone may be sufficient for some students to adequately increase their vocabulary. The simple act of reading to self and reading aloud can hugely influence vocabulary development as much of a child's vocabulary learning is incidental or without direct instruction. Teachers demonstrate their love of words and reading by encouraging reading, modelling reading, and reading aloud. One of the key aspects of a word rich classroom is providing time for wide reading. In wide reading, students choose their own reading material and read on their own. While some students thrive in this activity, others – especially struggling readers – spend

their time pretending to read or even worse, acting out. Teachers who struggle to have their class settle into silent reading may want to refer to *Daily 5* by Boushey and Moser. These educators lay out a detailed, step-by-step approach to building routines and reading stamina in children. The book is designed with the primary classroom in mind, but the process and procedures are equally useful and applicable in the middle grades. While some students can easily read for a set period of time, others need to train their body and mind to achieve this important skill.

Apart from time to read, an important aspect of wide reading is to engage students with material that matches their interests. Conducting an interest inventory with students may help the teacher find materials in which the student can engage. Another way to excite kids about reading is to introduce them to a wide variety of books. One activity I have done in my class was 'book hot potato'. For this activity I chose a variety of books, making sure to include a wide variety of genres, topics, difficulty levels and lengths. Each student begins with a book. When the music starts, students pass their books to the right. When the music stops, they hold on to the book they have. Students then spend two minutes looking at that book, reading the back and perhaps the first few pages. Then the music starts again and the books continue around the circle. This can continue for as long as the students are interested. Based on personal experience, one suggestion is to have more books than you have students. This way if a student ends up with a hot-potato book you know won't work for them (for example, a difficult, 500 page book for a struggling reader) you can quickly and subtly exchange it for something else. This activity has been a huge motivator in my grade 6/7 class and students have literally run to the library afterwards to be the first to checkout the books they want.

Book talk. Part of what makes wide reading so effective is not the reading itself but the conversations that take place before, during and after reading. Students who are engaged in

reading material want to share what they are reading. During their conversations about their books students may use words that are new to their peers and through frequent conversation, these words are repeated in a grade appropriate language and context.

There are many ways to facilitate book talk. The first way to encourage students to talk to a variety of their peers about their books is to do a play on speed dating – speed booking. In speed booking, students meet with a partner for two minutes to share what each of them is reading; after time is up, students switch partners and share again. This can be repeated a few times. Due to its quick nature, this activity may not lend itself to deep and meaningful conversation but what it can do is expose students to what many other students are reading so that later on, they meet with someone with whom they would like to spend more time discussing their books. In addition, to encourage active listening skills, students could complete a brief ticket out the door where they write or verbally summarize what their last partner shared.

Another way to facilitate discussion is to use a fishbowl method. In a fishbowl, a small group of students sit in a circle with the rest of the class in a circle around them. The small group are the only students who may speak. They discuss their books while the rest of the class observes and listens. This could even be a specific vocabulary activity where students have to try and use target words or strong words in their discussion and the outside students are listening for those words. A variation of this activity is to allow the inside students to leave the circle when they've said their piece and an outside student can take their place. The benefit to this variation is that everyone has a chance to share. This activity is most beneficial after creating a safe classroom culture where risk-taking is the norm as some students may initially have anxiety about being on display in front of their peers.

Read aloud. Another important part of a word rich classroom is teacher read-aloud. Read-alouds are not just for the primary or intermediate classroom. By sharing a book together, the teacher can model good reading habits, instill excitement for specific genres, and introduce students to vocabulary that may be at a slightly higher level than they're able to comprehend on their own (since most students' listening comprehension is higher than their reading comprehension). By late elementary the focus of reading instruction is no longer learning to read but reading to learn. While students may be masters at decoding and even appear to be very fluent readers, they still need to develop and practice specific reading skills to increase their ability to comprehend increasingly difficult text. The first benefit of the teacher read-aloud is that teachers can choose a text that is slightly more challenging than the students' independent reading materials and model skills such as checking for understanding, questioning, and deciphering difficult vocabulary. The second benefit of teacher read-aloud is the opportunity to model good fluency and expression while reading. This could also be used as fluency practice if students are following along in their own copy of the book so they can see and hear what good punctuation sounds like. A third benefit of teacher read-aloud is the opportunity to instill passion into students. By choosing the right book, students become engaged in the text and will want to read similar books. This can help a beginning reader develop their own idea of what they enjoy reading – they may not have a framework for what they like because they haven't read much.

Suggestions for read-aloud. Even with the knowledge of the importance of read-alouds, as a sixth grade teacher, I have struggled to find read-aloud books that are both age-appropriate and engaging. Books at a higher reading level often contain mild curse words and implied (or explicit) romantic or even outright sexual behaviour. My students begin grade six at ten or 11 years old and many are not developmentally interested in or ready for stories of boyfriends and

girlfriends. Furthermore, finding books with both male and female characters which focus on adventure or friendship can be a challenge. Personally, I look for books that meet the following criteria: 1) No bad language 2) Limited romantic relationships and 3) Relatable to both the males and females in my class. Though it is surprisingly difficult to find fictional reading material which meet these criteria, the following books are ones with which I have had success in the classroom. As an added bonus, after each of these read-alouds, students have asked me for similar recommendations, demonstrating their wide success.

Adamo, F., & Leonori, A. (2003). *Iqbal*. New York, NY: Atheneum Books for Young Readers.

Iqbal is a fictional narrative based on the true story of Iqbal Masih, a child slave labourer in Pakistan. After amassing medical debts, Iqbal's family is forced to sell him to a carpet maker where he learns that his debt will never be paid off and begins his quest for justice. The story is told from the point of view of the fictional character Maria who was also sold into slavery at a very young age. The combination of action and tragedy keeps students engaged right through the final chapter which had many of my students wiping tears from their eyes. Students who enjoyed this book also enjoyed *Oranges in No Man's Land* and *The Breadwinner*.

Draper, S. (2010). *Out of my mind*. New York, NY: Atheneum Books for Young Readers.

Many students enjoy books that are part of the realistic fiction genre and *Out of my Mind* is no exception. This book is told in the voice of a young girl with cerebral palsy who cannot speak. When she gets a new computer, she is finally able to communicate with the outside world. Her fifth grade peers are shocked to realize she is just as smart – if not even smarter – than they are. She proves her mental capabilities as well as her courage throughout the book while training as part of her school's academic bowl team. This book is a great way to encourage students to accept those who may appear to be different than themselves. Another similar book is *Wonder*

about a boy with a facial deformity. I wouldn't necessarily choose *Wonder* as a read aloud, however as it includes a lot of dialogue which can be confusing for students to follow without seeing the print.

DuPrau, J. (2003). *The city of Ember*. New York, NY: Random House.

City of Ember is the action packed adventure of Lina and Doon who live in a failing city, unaware that they are miles underground. Having both male and female protagonists meant that most students in my class had a character with whom they could identify. This book is a great, developmentally appropriate introduction to the increasingly popular genre of dystopian literature. Given its multiple high impact, suspenseful stopping points this book kept my students begging to read the next chapter, making it the perfect read aloud. Students looking for similar books may enjoy *Among the Hidden*, *The Maze Runner*, *Divergent* or *The Hunger Games*. However, all of these except for *Among the Hidden* (while still appropriate suggestions for middle school students) are at a slightly higher reading and developmental level.

L'Engle, M. (1962). *A wrinkle in time*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

A Wrinkle in Time is also an older book that introduces students to the world of science-fiction and fantasy. Like *City of Ember*, this story follows a male/female friendship through an adventure in time and space in order to rescue Meg's father and heal her brother from a mysterious illness. While this book might not have the same global appeal I've found among the other suggested books, students who like this book often enjoy other fantasy or sci-fi books such as the *Ender's Game*, or any of the following series: *Percy Jackson*, *Narnia* or *Artemis Fowl*.

Smucker, B., & McNeely, T. (1977). *Underground to Canada*. Toronto, Canada: Clarke, Irwin.

Underground to Canada is an older book about the Underground Railroad which led American slaves to freedom in Canada. This book is part of my favourite genre - historical

fiction. *Underground to Canada* is ideal for practising inferring skills as students can put themselves in the role of many of the characters and infer their feelings throughout the story. Because of its content and age, this novel requires a discussion about vocabulary; how words change over time and the power of words to explain its use of the word 'nigger' throughout the story. When I have used this book, I have read it as written confident that my class was mature enough to handle its usage. I have heard of other teachers choosing to replace the offending word with a less offensive one. While there is no perfect technique, it is important for the teacher and students to be comfortable with their decision. Other books in this genre are *Number the Stars* for younger readers and *The Book Thief* for more mature readers.

Apart from this small selection of suggestions, there are a multitude of books of all genres with which students can fall in love. The Goodreads website provides member-suggested books lists for all topics. In fact, <http://www.goodreads.com/list/tag/middle-school> links to a master list of various lists of suggested books for middle school.

Games. The final component of a word rich classroom is the inclusion of word-based games. Not only do students love to play games and feel like they're getting a day off learning but teachers could also develop a game library in their classroom, allowing students to sign-out games to play at home with their family. There is a plethora of word based games that can be added to any classroom collection. The following is a list of commercially available games that promote vocabulary development.

Mad Libs by Penguin Group

Mad Libs is a simple game where students fill in the blanks of a pre-written story. Each blank requires a part of speech such as an adjective or verb. There are variations available for multiple levels beginning with simply adding verbs and nouns to becoming more advanced by

requiring word parts such as conjunctions or prepositions. Students could also create their own Mad Libs by choosing or writing a paragraph and eliminating a certain number of each word part. Strong knowledge of parts of speech can help students in learning new vocabulary as they will better be able to use new words in the correct way when they know how adjectives, for example, fit into sentence structure.

Scrabble by Hasbro Gaming

While Scrabble is traditionally considered a spelling game, it can also lead to vocabulary development as students play together, each coming with their own personal lexicon. When a student creates a word that may be unknown to other players, they can challenge the word and the student who played the word can explain it to their teammates.

Taboo by Hasbro

During the game of Taboo, students must describe a particular word without using specified words. This activity requires students to deeply understand a word and different contexts words may be used in as they aim to get their teammates to guess the word. The commercial version of Taboo comes with two levels of difficulty but teachers can easily differentiate their instruction by allowing struggling students to choose from a variety of cards or allowing use of one 'taboo' word. Teachers can also create their own variation of Taboo to include specific vocabulary terms. In fact, students can create their own Taboo cards using target vocabulary and choosing five key words that cannot be used to describe the word.

Balderdash by Ventura Games

Balderdash is a game of creative definitions. Players are presented with an obscure word for which they must create a definition. One player copies the real definition from a card and then players guess which definition was the real definition. While this may not be an effective

way to learn unit-specific or academic vocabulary, this can be a fun way to learn some new and difficult words creating excitement for language.

Catch Phrase by Hasbro and *Heads-Up* by Warner Brothers

Catch phrase and Heads-Up both have a similar premise. Players are shown a target word and must get their partner to say that word by using words or gestures. While playing these games students use definitions, synonyms, antonyms, examples and actions to describe their given word. Heads-Up is one of the many apps available on handheld devices to help increase vocabulary. This specific app is highlighted in this list because it is one of the few apps that is available on a variety of platforms.

Similar to the list of suggested books, this list of vocabulary games is not exhaustive. A simple web search of ‘vocabulary games’ leads to many further suggestions. In a classroom setting, you could also have students create their own games that are word focussed or to practice specific vocabulary words.

Creating a word-rich classroom is not something that can be implemented overnight. However, by adding any of these suggestions (wide reading, book talk, read-aloud or vocabulary games) into the classroom, teachers can begin to create a culture where words are valued and exciting. This word-rich culture can support all learners in their need to increase vocabulary knowledge.

Classroom Activities

The following section introduces and gives instructions for three activities that can be quickly implemented into the classroom, especially with a set list of vocabulary words that are needed for a specific unit.

Activity 1: Word wizard. Word wizard (Figure 1) is a classroom activity to complement and extend any vocabulary program. Many teachers already use prepared spelling or vocabulary lists with their students. Word wizard is an ongoing game which encourages students to extend their learning of vocabulary words outside of the classroom. The main goal of the game is to amass points based on identification and usage of specific vocabulary words. The following instructions may help the teacher implement this ongoing activity in their own classroom.

1. Students are given a list of 'target words' for the month. These may be words that were previously studied or words that related to upcoming units of study or simply words that students come across in their daily lives.
2. Once students are provided with the target words, it is their task to find and use any or all of these words throughout their days both in and out of school.
3. When students hear or use one of the target words, they should write down the context in which it was heard or used. Students who struggle with written output may also be given the option to photograph or record their findings.
4. Points are tallied at the end of the month with one point being given for each authentic and correct usage.
5. The teacher may choose to run this as a competitive activity with prizes going to the top point-getting or as a cooperative activity where the class has to hit a certain number of points to get a class reward.

Name: SampleMonth: March

Word Wizard

Total Points

5

Target words

aspire exaggerate
rotate isolate

Identification

"Why does Meg always exaggerate things" (Wrinkle in time, pg. 39)
 "I isolated Farandolae because some thing .." (Wrinkle, pg. 86)
 "the earth rotates on an axis of 23°." (Science, pg. 84)

Usage

"our goal is to isolate the variable" (math, Friday)
 "Don't exaggerate" (to my sister when she said I never do dishes, Thursday)

Figure 1. Activity 1: Word Wizard. This figure illustrates how a student's worksheet might be filled in. Blackline master provided in Appendix A ©2015, Michelle Cuthbertson

Considering the components of vocabulary learning; that it is rich, frequent and extends outside the classroom, this activity hits on all three. It is rich vocabulary learning as the target words will be seen and used in a variety of contexts. Students are exposed to the words frequently as they are likely reviewing the words throughout the month to make sure they aren't missing any opportunity to 'catch' a word, they are also making an effort to use the words in their conversations and written work to get more points adding to their usage. Teachers should ensure that they also use the words periodically so that students from all backgrounds have an opportunity to hear the target words and amass points. Finally, this activity extends outside the classroom as students can gain points from conversation with parents, reading material in the natural world (advertisements, brochures, instructions etc.) This helps students engage as it becomes authentic learning.

Activity 2: Word of the week. Word of the week (Figure 2) is an activity that the teacher can include in their weekly routines or use as a focus area for a period of time. This activity gives students repeated exposure to a specific term over the course of a week. Teachers can purposely integrate the target word into their speech, notes and lessons through the week. Instructions for each part of this assignment are as follows:

Draw it: In draw it, students illustrate the word using its definition. The word itself illustrates its meaning. For example, a picture of angry might have each of the letters in the word angry spelled with mad looking faces

Define it: In define it, students copy a teacher provided definition. This could be from the dictionary, teacher generated or class generated.

Explain it: In explain it, students create their own explanation or definition of the word.

Identify it: In identify it, students write down which part of speech the word belongs to. Students beginning to learn parts of speech might also explain why it belongs to that part.

Compare it: In compare it, students write a list of synonyms (or similar words) and antonyms

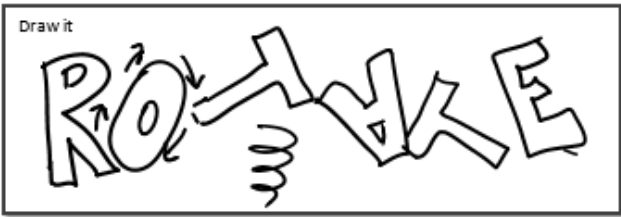
Find it: In find it, students listen and look for the target word being used throughout the week and write down where they heard or saw it. This activity directly links with Word Wizard.

Prove it and use it: In prove it and use it, students create their own sentences using the target word. Ideally, by the end of the week, students can create multiple sentences where the target word is used correctly and possibly in various forms such as 'rotate' and 'rotation'.

The circles on the bottom right corner represent a stoplight and are a form of self-reflection where the students evaluate themselves on their understanding. Green means that the student fully understands and can consistently use the target word in a variety of contexts. Yellow means that the student generally understands the target word but may still need a bit of help using this word correctly. Red means that the student still requires support in understanding and using the target word. This section could easily be replaced by the teacher's choice of formative assessment.

Word of the Week

Draw it



Define it

-Rotate means to move around an axis (central point)

Explain it

When something rotates it turns in a circle.

Identify it

to rotate: verb

Compare it

Similar words: revolve, turn, spin, pivot

Find it

"The earth rotates on an axis of 23°." (science text, pg. 84)

Antonyms: stay still, straight

Prove it and use it

When I ski, I can jump and rotate 360°.




Figure 2. Activity 2: Word of the Week. This figure illustrates how a student's worksheet might be filled in. Blackline master provided in Appendix B ©2015, Michelle Cuthbertson

Activity 3: Word wall. A word wall is simply that – a purposeful space, generally on the wall, where words are attached. The use of a word wall is way to incorporate vocabulary instruction throughout the day. Word walls are common in the primary grades but can be an equally valuable tool in middle school classrooms. There are a variety of ways to implement and incorporate word walls into the classroom. Word walls can evolve into massive projects so if the idea of a fully implemented word wall is daunting, teachers can focus on one subject or unit at a time. Likewise, if space is an issue, teachers can focus on one unit at a time and when the unit is finished, the words on the wall get hole punched and put on a ring so that they are still easily accessible if needed. While many teachers create and use their word walls in different ways, there are some core aspects which help maximize its effectiveness.

First of all, words must be added to the wall continuously. A static word wall simply becomes something pretty to look at and loses its effectiveness. By adding new words as students come across them, the word wall continues to evolve and shows progression of learning. An interesting way to add new words is by adding a new word without students noticing. Then students must scan the word wall and figure out which word has been added. This ensures that students are continually looking at the wall so they are familiar with what should be on there before new words appear. Apart from adding words, it is also important to continually refer to the word wall and use it as the resource it is meant to be. As specific words are used, the teacher and students can point to it on the wall while reinforcing its meaning and spelling.

Generally, word walls in the middle school classroom should be interactive. While adding new words and referring to words frequently creates some interaction, there are a variety of whole class, partner and individual activities which can be done to further reinforce its use. The most basic of word wall activities is a simple define and guess game where one student

defines or explains one of the wall words and their partner has to guess which word they are explaining. To add another level, students may also be required to spell the word in order to guess it.

An interesting way to allow students to play with words is by having students play with word sorting or word associations. In this version of the activity, students pick between two and four words and say why the words go together. The reason can be anything as long as they justify their thinking. For example, a student may say, “hospital, classify and inference go together because they each have three syllables.” Another student may say, “inference, classify and difference go together because they are things you might have to do on a test.” A variation of this activity is that the student simply states a number of words (still thinking of why they go together) and a partner has to guess their reasoning.

Bingo is a tried and true classroom activity that can be used in a variety of ways. Word wall bingo is a simple way to reinforce multiple words. Students create their own bingo card, filling in the 25 spots with their choice of words. The teacher then calls out the definitions, examples or fill in the blank sentences and the students can mark off the square if they wrote the word that applies. First student to mark off a line of five wins but with student encouragement, I've always played until blackout. This works well because the students think they just get to keep playing but in reality, the teacher gets to further practice even more vocabulary words.

A final suggestion for the word wall is especially useful for the language arts teacher. In this writing activity, students are given a goal such as 'use the most word wall words in a paragraph in 10 minutes of writing' or 'create a single, grammatically correct sentence using as many word wall words as possible'. Students love to be creative and the sentences and stories that come out of this writing activity are often quite amusing.

Suggestions for Further Professional Development

Like all aspects of teaching, focusing on vocabulary development in the classroom does not have a simple formula for mastery. Teaching is a profession of lifelong learning. For those who are interested in increasing their knowledge about vocabulary development and creating a word-rich classroom, I have provided reviews on a selection of professional materials that I have found especially useful.

Boushey, G., & Moser, J. (2006). *The daily 5: Fostering literacy independence in the elementary grades*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

The Daily 5 is a set of daily routines for the elementary language arts classroom. Where this book excels is in describing the procedures in place for students learning to work independently. The procedures outlined in chapter five on ‘read to self’ help students understand the expectations around wide reading and encourages them to increase their stamina for reading for pleasure.

Miller, D. (2009). *The book whisperer: Awakening the inner reader in every child*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Miller, D., & Kelley, S. (2013). *Reading in the wild: The book whisperer's keys to cultivating lifelong reading habits*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Both of Miller's books are ones which significantly shaped my teaching philosophy and practice. *The Book Whisperer* explains the importance of choice reading in the classroom and *Reading in the Wild* is the how-to follow-up. *Reading in the Wild* also offers suggestions on cultivating lifelong ‘wild readers’ not simply students who enjoying reading at school. Either, or both, of these books are an excellent starting point for any teacher who wants to begin to create their own word-rich classroom.

Overturf, B., & Montgomery, L. (2013). *Word nerds: Teaching all students to learn and love vocabulary*. Portland, MA.: Stenhouse.

For teachers looking for a variety of vocabulary based activities and games, this book is a necessity. This book provides a plethora of activities with explicit instructions, blackline masters, examples and organizers. Teachers will be inspired to implement many of these activities in their own classroom and create a class of vocabulary lovers.

Concluding thoughts

Vocabulary instruction cannot be taught in isolation. To effectively teach vocabulary, the focus must be on creating a classroom culture that values words and learning about words.

Through general language strategies such as reading and word games as well as specific vocabulary activities students can increase their vocabulary throughout the school year. Ideally, students surrounded by a word-rich environment will also take this love of learning words home to their families who will continue to grow their word knowledge together.

In order to encourage this word-rich classroom environment, teachers can incorporate routines such as wide reading or read-alouds which are followed by conversations among students about their reading. In addition, word games such as Taboo or Heads-Up can be taught and encouraged in the classroom both during instructional time and available outside of school hours.

For teachers who do not teach language arts or prefer specific and more self-contained activities, word-wizard, word of the week and word walls can easily be started at any point in the school year and using any collection of vocabulary words. The instructions provided for these activities allow teachers to implement them quickly while still allowing for individual preferences and variations.

Finally, I encourage all teachers with an interest in vocabulary development to further their own knowledge by looking at some of the resources that have been recently published including *The Book Whisperer* and *Word Nerds*. Teachers should model lifelong learning as this is what we desire for our students.

Chapter 4: Final Reflections

Project summary

My Masters of Education final project is a study of how teachers can incorporate vocabulary instruction in their teaching practice. The project begins with my personal journey of becoming a teacher and why I chose to focus on vocabulary instruction. Next, I examine current research about why vocabulary instruction is an important aspect in any classroom as well as best practises in teaching vocabulary instruction. Finally, the project concludes with practical suggestions and resources for teachers who are interested in incorporating vocabulary instruction in their own classrooms.

This project stems from my passion for reading. Ever since I was a young child, I have loved to read; immersing myself in a story and explore new lands, new people, and new experiences. I knew I wanted to use my love of literature as a focus for my project. However, I was also cognisant of the fact that reading or literacy was too large of a topic. Through thoughtful consideration and conversations with peers and colleagues, I narrowed my focus to vocabulary instruction aware that my bias was that by learning more vocabulary words, students would become better readers. While that is a valid assumption, I ended up discovering was that the reverse was also true. In order to further expand students' vocabularies, one of the biggest factors is the amount of time students read. In general, the more time students read, the higher their vocabulary knowledge.

Through careful study of the work of researchers such as Michael Graves, Robert Marzano, Isabel Beck and Margaret McKeown (among others), I discovered that vocabulary instruction comes down to three basic components. First of all, students need a rich vocabulary experience where words are presented and studied in a variety of ways. Secondly, vocabulary

instruction and exposure must be frequent so that students are surrounded by a word-rich environment. Finally, vocabulary development must extend outside the language arts classroom and be integrated into daily life in order for maximal retention.

The final chapter of my project consists of practical suggestions for teachers. Its main goal is to encourage and enable teachers to aim to have a word-rich classroom and provide practical ideas and activities. The first component of a word-rich classroom is encouraging a love of reading in students. This can be done by engaging in shared read alouds which give students an opportunity to listen to and engage with literature as well as increase their exposure to a variety of words. It is also important to provide students with time to read in class, guiding struggling readers to level-appropriate and engaging books. A second aspect of a word-rich classroom is the use of a word wall. By their very existence, word walls demonstrate to students the importance of vocabulary and can be an excellent learning tool providing a wealth of games and activities. In addition to suggestions on creating a word-rich classroom, this section also provides suggestions for further professional development. Finally, the teacher resource section concludes with instructions, samples and blackline masters provided in the appendix for specific vocabulary activities.

Reflecting on changes

I came into this Masters of Education in Curriculum and Instruction with preconceived ideas of what the focus of our learning would be. I thought that the focus would be on what I thought the curriculum was – the government prescribed learning outcomes. From the first day, we explored the notion of curriculum and my preconceived ideas were shattered. My view of curriculum expanded from learning outcomes to quite simply, curriculum is what is taught. One of the key aspects of my evolved learning is that curriculum is inherently autobiographical –

given that curriculum entails everything to do with what is taught, a teacher's life experiences play a large role in their own perspective and delivery of the curriculum. A crucial part of the curriculum web is the individual teacher. Teachers bring in their own interpretations of whose knowledge and what knowledge is worth knowing. This shift in thinking has reinforced my belief that as teachers, we are not just robots delivering government mandated ideas but individuals who have a role in shaping future generations.

In reading a wide variety of materials, I have come across a plethora of information written by teachers who have had success using certain activities, techniques or lessons. Many of these new and innovate teaching practices stemmed from difficulties. The teacher saw something that was ineffective and so they took a risk and tried something new. I have used this opportunity to take risks in my own classroom by trying new ways of teaching, new units and new activities. For the most part these have been successful.

Throughout this two year journey, I have become a more thoughtful and intentional teacher. Through the variety of readings and assignments I have focused on making sure that my teaching style, lessons, activities and projects are based on practices that are founded in research. I have considered the articles I've read and tried to adapt my lessons so that they address current research-supported practices. I'm confident in saying that through many readings, reflections and risk-taking, I have become a more effective teacher.

Looking Towards the Future

Apart from the personal growth I've experienced throughout my graduate experience, I hope that I'm able to share some of what I've learned with my colleagues both in my school and throughout the district. Within my school we have built in multiple ways for teachers to collaborate. The first opportunity is through our school's literacy committee of which I have been

a part for the past three years. One of our school goals is that all students leave our school able to comprehend grade level text. Since vocabulary instruction and knowledge plays a large part in reading comprehension, I hope to be able to facilitate discussion and offer valuable suggestions for that specific aspect of reading. A second opportunity within my school is our built in time for teacher collaboration. We have time every morning for teachers to collaborate with each other on a variety of topics. I hope to be able to use that time to work with a small group of interested teachers to design further activities and lessons that encourage vocabulary development. Finally, within our district we have opportunities for professional development in the form of book groups. I have already been a member of the 'Reading in the Wild' book group where we have been able to discuss literacy and reading strategies and I have suggested 'Word nerds' as a possible group for next year which I would like to facilitate. Throughout these opportunities for collaboration and professional development, I hope to encourage other teachers to consider the importance of vocabulary instruction.

Final Recommendations

For teachers who may be interested in implementing more vocabulary instruction into their classroom, I offer three recommendations.

1) The first recommendation is to incorporate as much time for reading as possible. Spend time in the beginning of the year getting to know your students – especially their reading habits and preferences. Furthermore, teach literacy mini-lessons on topics such as choosing reading material, building reading stamina and conversing about reading. By incorporating reading into your daily schedule, students are exposed to significantly more vocabulary words than could ever be explicitly taught. In my own experience, by beginning a habit of providing daily time to read, even struggling readers look forward to this practice. Additionally, by

following up reading time with conversation, students have the opportunity to practice new vocabulary in a safe and level-appropriate setting. Finally, by providing time to read, you help establish an environment where words are valued and important which leads to the second recommendation of creating a word-rich classroom.

2) The second recommendation is to develop a word-rich classroom. By creating a community where words are valued, students encourage themselves and each other to explore language and vocabulary so that it ideally becomes a part of their daily lives both in and out of school. Two simple ways to begin to develop this word-rich classroom are by the use of word walls and vocabulary games. Word walls are simply words purposefully displayed within a classroom. These can be current spelling or vocabulary words, words related to a science or math unit or any group of words that students should be practising. Once a word wall is set up in the classroom it is important to keep it up to date and refer to it consistently. As mentioned in the word wall section in chapter 3, there are a variety of games that can be played to reinforce the vocabulary words. Not only can games be played with the word wall, but there are a plethora of commercially developed games that can be used in the classroom to encouraged vocabulary practice and development. For specific examples of these games, refer to chapter three.

3) The third recommendation for teachers is to continue to seek further resources and focus on vocabulary development as professional development. The suggested materials listed in chapter three are a good place to start – especially *The Book Whisperer* by Donnalynn Miller. This book was instrumental in my evolving teaching practice and I would recommended it for any elementary or middle school language arts teacher. For those looking for specific activities to do with assigned vocabulary words, *Word Nerds* by Brenda Overturf, Leslie Montgomery and Margot Holmes Smith is a priceless resource offering a huge variety of games and activities.

Personally, I have found that the most useful and inspirational professional development books are those written by teachers or former teachers who have taken the step to share their wealth of knowledge in the form of published materials. Likewise, a final suggestion for professional development is to seek out and share information with your colleagues. Even something as simple as informal sharing sessions can be beneficial to all those involved. Collaboration among teachers is a powerful way to improve your teaching practice.

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Appendix A: Word Wizard Blackline Master

Name: _____

Month: _____

Word Wizard

Total Points

Target words

Identification

Usage

Appendix B: Word of the Week Blackline Master

Name: _____

Date: _____

Word
Of the
Week

Draw it

Define it

Explain it

Identify it

Find it

Compare it

Prove it and use it

