Vocabulary Assignment

Pamela Campbell

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EDUC 632 Liberty University

There is more to language and word understanding than just being able to read a word. Knowledge of words is a multi-faceted approach that takes many years to develop. Vocabulary should be included as part of the classroom instruction each and every day. There are unlimited strategies and techniques to teach children Vocabulary. Students come to preschool and Kindergarten classrooms with varying degrees of both basic interpersonal communication skills and cognitive academic language proficiency. The language and vocabulary that the child has learned up to this point has been taught and developed by parents or preschool environments. As a teacher, your role is to expand their language and make their cognitive academic language proficiency strong. Discussed in this paper are 5 different strategies or methods that can be used to teach vocabulary and vocabulary lessons. With definite planning by the teacher with an understanding of the different methods, teaching vocabulary can be more than the standard process of copying definitions from a dictionary and then writing a sentence.

Method #1 Developing a Thematic Unit

In this vocabulary teaching method, planning is the most important part. There are steps that you should take to be sure that you are paying close attention to a student’s emergent literacy. This means that you are acutely aware of the ways that they are learning to read or write. Everyone learns and develops through different means and by different teaching techniques and your thematic unit needs to include all of those appropriate types of instruction to be successful in your class. Much of the planning should fall under a constructivist approach, meaning that your lessons should be student centered. Your lessons should involve ways of engagement so that students can all be successful. You should fully recognize that your students are curious by nature, and your unit should be designed to cater to that curiosity by providing activities that will encourage questioning and the inquisitive mind. There are steps that you should take to develop a successful thematic unit.

1. You need to select a theme for your unit that is grade level appropriate
2. Determine exactly what the objectives of your unit are.
3. Choose your literature very carefully for this unit.
4. Choose broad-based and literature based activities to use throughout the unit.
5. Construct an appropriate means of evaluation.
6. Choose carefully related works of literature for independent reading or reading aloud.

One of the best ways to start a thematic unit, especially with younger children is with the reading of a book in a close reading atmosphere. This means that a story attached to the thematic unit would be read aloud or independently. Then a discussion about the finite details would occur. An example of this would be a thematic unit on the poem the Gingerbread man (for younger students). Ask them what they know about the story, what details they can recall and write them on the board. Read the story, and then go back to the board to get the details right. If this is an older group of students, they could write in their journals, a simulated journal entry from the point of view of the gingerbread man. Journal entries such as this means that students are required to develop and fine tune their listening skills, even with a simple story. Teachers should help to ensure that students are in fact listening and not paying attention to what is being read. Students will use aesthetic listening skills merely to listen to the story. After reading the opening or introduction text, teachers can facilitate a Grand Conversation where they will engage students in discussion about the text, pinpointing certain vocabulary that will follow them through the whole unit. This grand conversation should include reading a chosen text either quietly by themselves, or listening to the teacher read it. Everyone should be reading the same, teacher chose, literature selection. They should then draw or write something in their reading logs. “This is especially important to the Grand Conversation because with this preparation they’re more likely to have ideas to share with classmates.” (Thompkins, 2014) After this, there should be teacher led discussions, and student led discussions with new ideas they have from the book text. The teacher should direct the students to consider certain specific aspects of the story that they feel are an important focus. After all of the ideas have been explored, the students should return to their reading logs and write again about what was discussed. This would be a perfect time to assign a sample writing in their double entry journals. These are special types of reading logs where the page is separated into two different columns. On one side, the student writes quotes from the story or book that they have read and on the right, they reflect on that quotation in their own words. Teachers use double-entry journals to help students structure their thinking about a text (Tovani, 2000) Teachers may change the headings of the two columns to help students achieve their specific objectives for this thematic unit, and for the intended vocabulary lesson that they are teaching in conjunction with the thematic unit. Another part of a thematic lesson is for students to write in their learning logs. These are often time paper booklets where they record the information that they are learning. They should write, draw diagrams, ask questions that are reflective of their learning. The focus of the learning log should be on the writing as a learning to, not specifically for clean, polished, perfect work. Teachers should however encourage them to correctly use and spell the words that appear on the word wall, and are a part of the thematic unit.

Method #2 Literature Circles

Another good strategy to better teach vocabulary words is the literature circle. This will require that you divide your class into groups based on their specific book of choice. The most important factor of a literature circle is choice. The students should understand that they are in “groups of people reading the same book and meeting together to discuss what they have read” (Peralta-Nash and Dutch, 2000) There are very specific tasks for each person in the circle in order to facilitate a learning environment. They choose both the text and the group. These texts should be at their reading level, and be manageable with regard to understanding and ability. Sometimes literature circles can last several days, week or a series of weeks, depending on the length of the book. The students should meet several times for discussion about the book. “Through these discussions, students summarize their reading, make connections, learn vocabulary, and explore the author’s use of text factors” (Tompkins, 2014) Students should be lead by the person who assumes the Vocabulary Enricher role to identify key words in books that they are reading and learn the specific etymology of these words from the dictionary. This would also be a good time for students to formulate a grid such as the one shown below to determine more important information about the words they have looked up in the dictionary such as a synonym or antonym for the word.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **PAGE #**  **PARAGRAPH #** | **WORD** | **SENTENCE FROM BOOK** | **DEFINITION** | **ANTONYM** | **SYNONYM** |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |

As a final step, the student use their efferent listening skills as they share their book with their classmates through some type of oral presentation. This could include a visual representation such as a poster, slide show, or small play with regard to the book they have been discussing. It should be certain to include the vocabulary words that they looked up and studied during the course of their discussions and reading. As a result of these presentations, student’s visual literacy will increase also. They will learn how to garnish meaning from a visual representation of something. Students could then create an entry in their journals reflecting on what they have heard or learned from the others student’s presentations. Another great option would be for the students to engage in dialogue journals. This means that they would share their journal and engage in a conversation with another student or the teacher about a specific presentation. This would be yet another way to develop their listening skills and provide vocabulary instruction. An example of a dialogue journal is found below.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Student 1** | I thought the story would end differently. |
| **Student 2** | Why? |
| **Student 1** | I thought the wizard would give the boy all his hearts desires because the boy seemed to be a good boy and do the right things. |
| **Student 2** | I thought he might not get what he wanted because at the beginning of the story the author teaches the lesson with his little sister when the mom says , "We don't always get what we want...we get what we need” |
| **Student 1** | I did not think about it that way. That’s not fair! He worked hard and did the right things and should have gotten what he wanted. |
| **Student 2** | Maybe the author wants us to realize the difference between our wants and our needs, which is why he talked about the other boy’s family who lived down the street and needed a new car to transport him back and forth to baseball. |

Method #3 Teaching students word identification strategies

There are many methods to teach students how to identify vocabulary words. The first is through phonic analysis. It is a good idea for teachers to read the vocabulary words out loud. This requires that students listen discriminatively to distinguish among certain sounds of words. Here students take the knowledge that they have learned about phonemes and graphemes and how they interact with each other, in addition to what they have learned about phonics rules to complete this strategy.

Phonics is the ability to recognize letters have sounds and to mesh them together to make words from those sounds. However, phonemic awareness is something very different, yet part of the phonics arena. “Phonemic awareness is a students’ understanding that words are made up of groupings of sounds. This concept is the basis for phonics and for spelling as a whole.” (Armbuster, Lehr & Osborn, 2000)

Additionally students should be taught to use the strategy of decoding by analogy. In this instance, students associate the current vocabulary word that is unknown with a term that they know. For example, students might know the phonogram ill from the word will, so they associate this with the new vocabulary word bill when they come to it. It is essential that students are familiar with consonant blends and digraphs to be able to fully understand and use this strategy. Another powerful strategy that students can be taught in a vocabulary lesson is syllabic analysis. In this instance, students divide long words into syllables to identify them. Finally students can be taught morphemic analysis to identify multi syllable vocabulary words. They will need to be taught that there is a root word called a morpheme. In addition to this, there are prefixes and suffixes that are added to words, and removing them from the root word, and identifying their meaning by the connection of the two parts is a critical step in learning and decoding vocabulary words through morphemic analysis. “Direct instruction of the most common morphemes (prefixes, suffixes, and root words) can greatly enhance and build the vocabulary and reading comprehension of all students, especially struggling readers.” (XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXx) Once students become familiar with the most common morphemes, they can then use their knowledge of word parts to help determine meaning when they encounter unknown words. A good way to teach these basics of free and bound morphemes is with your word wall words. A lesson about bound morphemes (words that stand alone such as cat, cost, fire, demand) in conjunction with learning about the role of word endings such as ed, es, and is that must be attached to the free morpheme to mean anything or prefixes such as re called bound morphemes. The use of the word wall words gives you an opportunity to work this lesson forward and backwards. For example… if your word wall words has the following words on it:

1. Baby
2. Month
3. Bear
4. Like
5. Kiss
6. And
7. Take
8. Rats
9. Maps
10. Return
11. Rewind
12. Verse
13. Climb
14. Brush
15. Square
16. Timer
17. Know
18. Now
19. Map
20. lamp
21. Van
22. Talk
23. Need
24. Claim

You can either determine the free or bound morphemes first. You could turn the words that are free morphemes into new words by adding the bound morphemes. You could use the newly created word to teach the antonym or synonym of the word by changing the bound morpheme, for example making the word claim reclaim, and then finding the opposite of or word that means the same as that word. For this example the synonym might be recover, the antonym misplace (when using the word reclaim as in get your possession back). There are so many different ways to teach these concepts through the use of the word wall words AND to teach grammar along with the vocabulary.

Method #4 – Writing and observing print

Students can learn a wealth of vocabulary information by writing and observing print. In their very beginning stages, students can use environmental print to investigate the specific letters that are being studied. Teachers can collect labels, signs, menus, etc. and use them as tools for students to point to or call out specific letters that they might already be familiar with. Older students can keep journals or logs. There are endless assignments and tasks that teachers can use in order to help children with differing styles or voices. Regardless of the task, “setting a purpose for writing is just as important as setting the purpose for reading, because purpose influences decisions students make about genre.” (Tompkins, 2014) Students benefit from continuous writing of any style from a vocabulary standpoint because it encourages them to make appropriate word choices. Another important part of journal writing is expressing expectations and being sure that the required conventions are being met. There might be a need to ask students to proof specific entries for correct conventions if this is part of their grade. Specifically with regard to journals, Toby Fulwiler an expert on journals and journal writing in the classroom says that “personal [journal writing](https://www.teachervision.com/writing/letters-and-journals/48533.html) is an important way of individualizing instruction and encouraging independent thinking. Journals record the students' "individual travel through the academic world"; at the same time, journals can provide a springboard for more formal papers or projects (Fulwiler, 2000). Another fun journaling activity that will continue the vocabulary instruction is through simulated journals. Students will need to use their efferent listening skills as they watch some type of informative video and then write in their journals from a perspective other than their own. If you were watching a classic literature movie, perhaps the student could write from the point of view of one of the characters. It is important that students write as much as they read. “Reading and writing are reciprocal; they’re both constructive, meaning making processes and research has found that reading lead to better writing and writing has the same effect on reading.” (Spivey, 1997)

Writing in the early grades helps to develop their handwriting. Learning to craft the lines and loops of handwriting are also part of Vocabulary study (in an inadvertent way) because as they write better they can write with stronger words and use advanced vocabulary. The “traditional” method of writing style called Zaner-Blosser. This is the traditional block text that students are taught as early as preschool. Once they advance to first and second grade, they are taught another method of writing called D’Nealian or cursive. Learning to write in this fashion may impede both their understanding and their abilities to express themselves. “A common issue is that D'Nealian is taught extremely early, to [first](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_grade) and [second grade](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_grade) students, many of whom are still learning the rudiments of print-style writing. “ (Spivey, 2014)

Method #5 For ELL and Special Needs Learners

Not surprisingly, vocabulary development is especially important for English-language learners (ELLs). Poor vocabulary is a serious issue for these students (Calderon et al., 2005). ELLs who have deficits in their vocabulary are less able to comprehend text at grade level than their English-only (EO) peers (August et al., 2005).

Response to intervention is a critical component of monitoring students, (especially ELL and special needs students) with regard to their vocabulary development in reading and writing. Teachers can only establish a RTI strategy when they are aware of the need for improvement in certain areas. An example from a vocabulary standpoint might be that a teacher gave a student an assessment and found that several students were not word aware. They also did not have a positive attitude towards learning new and exciting words, as a result, their vocabulary development was not advancing. She implemented and designed an appropriate Response to Intervention strategy, and her student’s attitude and achievement began to improve.

There are several elements of vocabulary instruction that are difficult in comprehension for English language learners: phonology, syntax and semantics. “Phonology is the study of sound systems and sound change usually within a particular language or family of languages” (Curzan and Adams, 2009) This means that when you work with ELL students teachers should be very aware of the fact that some of the sounds in English just simply do not exist in other languages. This can make the understanding of new words and sounds very difficult. There are some good phonemic activities to do with ELL students that will increase their vocabulary and understanding of the English language sounds: Clapping of names, finding initial phonemes, or merely listening to a sequence of words. Syntax is also a difficult concept for the ELL. Syntax skills are what make the student say “The dog up street ran” or some foreign form of those 5 words. They lack the vocabulary understanding to organize words in a way that makes sense. These skills can be fine-tuned with the ELL learner by cutting and pasting words into a sentence, or color coding the parts of a sentence, including the parts of speech. Finally the ability to garnish meaning is semantics. When working with ELLs it is essential to help them develop this skill as it is the key to understanding. Students are encouraged to write vocabulary words in sentence structure perhaps changing their meaning to elicit understanding. An example of this might be *The dog was barking because he was angry*. Another way to write this might be *The dog was barking because he was mad*.

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