



November/December 2012

Volume 1 Issue 2

November skills focus: Vocabulary

Voices from the Classroom:

A Principal's Perspective on Vocabulary Instruction

**Alicia Hunter, Principal
Farristown Middle School**

For too long, teachers have let students compartmentalize their learning. An excellent example of the limitations of this method of learning has been vocabulary instruction.

In addition, students learned the language of their English class but were not encouraged to transfer new knowledge to their Social Studies class. They were taught ways to learn new math terms but didn't connect those ways to the learning they did in Science (and didn't know how to).

But now, as we grow ever more comfortable in skills-based instruction, we are finding ways to equip students with skills that let them accumulate and apply knowledge and ways of learning across content areas. As students move from subject to subject trying to construct meaning and categorizing new material, it is essential for teachers to help stu-

dents make connections.

Just this week in grade level team meetings, my teachers discussed ways to make connections with vocabulary instruction. A 6th grade Language Arts teacher discussed the way her students had been dissecting difficult vocabulary by isolating prefixes and suffixes from root words to look up words and discover nuances of meanings. A Science teacher and a Social Studies teacher heard this and immediately joined in by talking about the benefits of using the same strategy in a very intentional way with their content words.

They quickly realized that their students are using the same decoding skill, and that they are encouraged to make connections across content areas and learn vocabulary deeply, because it's being taught intentionally.

This kind of thinking doesn't have to be limited to vocabulary.

In the same meeting, a Math/Science teacher shared ways in which her students were using Venn diagrams to organize information from charts and graphs in order to learn to read these unfamiliar text types. A Language Arts/Social Studies teacher on her team admitted, "I should be doing the same thing in my class with my content."

The conversation that followed was highly productive as we discussed the many benefits of intentional planning and empowering students to make connections across content areas. Vocabulary instruction is only one way to do this.

I'm excited to see what other ways my teachers discover to help students transfer knowledge between their classes and be able to apply the skills they're acquiring in any situation.

Vocabulary in the Classroom:

Strategies you can use NOW!

2-6

Recommended Reading:

What We Recommend You Check Out This Month

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Content Area Literacy Task Force:

Who we are, what we do

6

Teach Vocabulary Skills

Student Created Vocabulary Chart

Lisa Antoniou, Science

This chart is a vocabulary strategy that is great for introducing students to new terms. This chart includes physics vocabulary, but could be interchanged with any content's vocabulary. One additional adaptation could be to add another column at the end in which the student would sketch a picture that depicts the meaning of the word.

Directions:

1. Place a checkmark in one of the first three columns. Do this for each word.
2. Write what you think the word's definition is in the "Definition I Think" column.
3. Look up the word and write the definition in the "Actual Definition" column. Compare to your definition to see how close you were in your answer.

Literacy Challenge:

How are **you** teaching
vocabulary

TOMORROW?

Can you use Lisa's chart?

**Send us an e-mail and
let us know!**

Word	I Know	I Think I Know	I Do Not Know	Definition I Think	Actual Definition
force					
motion					
speed					
inertia					
velocity					
friction					

Discoveries, Questions, and Key Words

Rhonda Orttenger, Social Studies

Organization is an important study skill for all people, especially students. An organized student has the opportunity to take advantage of learning opportunities. This vocabulary strategy involves note taking. Note taking is an organizational tool that allows students to use inquiry to explore key words in nonfiction text.

To use this strategy, begin by modeling it. First, have students read a preselected text. After reading, divide a piece of chart paper into three sections: Discoveries, Questions, and Key Words. Reread the text aloud. Stop to record your discoveries on the chart. As you record a discovery, explain why this is a discovery and why this discovery leads to a question or two. Record questions, but leave space for answers. Write important vocabulary in the section titled Key Words. Since the goal of this strategy is to help students use these key words in content conversations and in writing, explain that these words will help you remember important ideas when notes are reviewed and enable you to use this vocabulary when discussing this topic or when writing about this topic.

For more about this vocabulary strategy and other vocabulary strategies, check out the vocabulary sections in Max Brand's book *Word Savvy* by Stenhouse Publishers.

Empower Learning for Life

Word Generation: Middle School Literacy Development Using Academic Language Jennifer Bernhard, Literacy Specialist

Word Generation, developed by the Strategic Education Research Partnership, is a research-based vocabulary program for middle school students designed to teach words through language arts, math, science and social studies classes.

This **free** program consists of weekly units that each introduces 5 high-utility target words through brief passages outlining controversies currently under debate in the U.S. The paragraphs are intended to help students join ongoing “national conversations” by sparking active examination and discussion of contemporary issues. The cross-content focus on a small number of words each week (15 minutes once a week in each subject area) will enable students to understand the variety of ways in which words are related, and the multiple exposures to words will provide ample opportunities for deeper understanding. **Each week’s exposure culminates in a writing task in which students give their opinion about the week’s topic.**

The WG program focuses on academic vocabulary, i.e., words that students are likely to encounter in textbooks and on tests, but not in spoken language. *Interpret, prohibit, vary, function, and hypothesis* are examples. Academic vocabulary includes (a) words that refer to thinking and communicating, like *infer* and *deny*, and (b) words that are common across subjects, but hold different meaning depending on the subject, like *element* and *factor*. Both types of academic vocabulary are likely to cause problems with comprehension unless students have been taught how to deal with them.

To access these FREE resources, you can [CLICK HERE](http://www.WordGeneration.org) or go to www.WordGeneration.org

Word of the Day: Integrating Vocabulary Daily Brittany Stacy, Mathematics

Vocabulary instruction is just as important in a math classroom as it is in any other classroom. In my intervention class, we have a **word of the day** posted right under the agenda and outcomes. I select a different word every day that relates to the content we are studying. Some days I ask them to verbally explain the word. Other days I include it in our **flashback** and they have to define it in their own words as well as provide an example. When we have a unit that is heavy with new vocabulary, I design a **matching game** with the words and the students have to match the content vocabulary with examples.

For example, 8th grade has a unit at the beginning of the year that is perfect for this type of activity including words such as rational and irrational numbers. The Common Core State Standards require the students to be able to define and provide examples of these.

I also do an **around the room activity** at the start of the class that requires students to classify vocabulary terms. Specifically for the rational and irrational numbers unit, I hand out **index cards** with various numbers on them and tell students to go to the left side of the room if their number is rational or the right side if their number is irrational. The activity is a great review at the start of class or can be used as a formative assessment at the end of class that only takes two minutes.

From the Library Media Specialist:

Katie McClain

- Words, Words, Words: Teaching Vocabulary in Grades 4-12* by Janet Allen
- Vocabulary Strategies Every Teacher Needs to Know* by Danny Brassell and James Flood
- Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction* by Isabel L. Beck PhD, Margaret G. McKeown PhD, Linda Kucan PhD
- Vocabulary Games for the Classroom* by Lindsay Carleton and Robert Marzano
- Learning Words Inside and Out, Grades 1-6: Vocabulary Instruction That Boosts Achievement in All Subject Areas* by Nancy Frey and Douglas Fisher
- Building Academic Vocabulary* by Robert Marzano
- Teaching Basic and Advanced Vocabulary: A Framework for Direct Instruction* by Robert Marzano
- Essential Strategies for Word Study: Effective Methods for Improving Decoding, Spelling and Vocabulary* by Timothy Rasinski
- Greek and Latin Roots: Keys to Building Vocabulary* by Timothy Rasinski ...et al.
- Vocabulary in the Elementary and Middle School* by Dale D. Johnson
- Words: The Foundation of Literacy* by Dale Johnson & Bonnie Johnson

Magic Squares

Maggie Brewer, Social Studies

New vocabulary in Social Studies can often be challenging because it includes people, places, battles, and events as well as terminology that can be tricky for a variety of reasons. The words that students come across in Social Studies texts may be difficult not only because of their novelty but also because they may be in foreign languages, antiquated terminology, or have different meanings specific to historical background. For this reason, it is wise to teach vocabulary in context and to reinforce with as many re-teaching strategies as time permits.

A useful strategy for teaching a unit with a large amount of new vocabulary is the Magic Square. The Magic Square, described by Richard T. and Jo Anne L. Vacca in their book, *Content Area Reading: Literacy and Learning Across the Curriculum*, is a grid-like organizer which helps students to match terms to their definitions using a Sudoku-like puzzle. Each vocabulary term is listed and given a letter which is then placed in its prescribed place in the square. Next, every definition is given a number and listed on the opposite side of the paper. Students place the numbers of the definitions in the boxes with the matching term's letter.

When the numbers in the magic square are filled in correctly, the boxes in each horizontal row and each vertical row add up to equal the same "magic number." Students who are not certain about all of their terms can check their answers by doing the math. Learners who are logical/reasoning thinkers tend to do well using this strategy. Vacca and Vacca provide templates for Magic Squares of several sizes (3x3, 4x4, 5x5) and many examples can be found on the internet.

We're Interactive:

Check it out online!

CLICK HERE

to see a Magic Square created by Rachel Baggett for the novel *Canyons* by Gary Paulsen available on Novelinks.org

Teaching Vocabulary in Context With Music

Sandy Allen, Arts & Humanities

Students need to understand the vocabulary in various content areas before they can use it. In the arts, it is especially critical.

Words like pitch, measure, high, and low have a different meaning in musical context than in students' everyday lives. In addition, there are terms that are almost exclusively found in the various arts disciplines that many students are not familiar with. So, what can we do to make sure students understand the vocabulary of the arts? As an elementary music teacher, it often falls to me to introduce new music vocabulary words. Here are a few strategies I have found helpful.

At the beginning of each school year, I introduce/review the seven 'elements' of music: Melody, Rhythm, Harmony, Form, Tempo, Timbre, and Dynamics. The KET Arts Toolkit for Music has a fantastic "Elements Rap" that I have found

to be a great tool for teaching the definitions of these elements. In my arsenal of CDs I have a generic rap rhythm recording that I play as we 'rap' the elements.

Middle school and high school students could be challenged to create their own soundtrack using instruments or classroom found sounds. While this is strictly a music vocabulary rap, it could easily be adapted for visual art, drama and dance vocabulary.

When introducing vocabulary words that have multiple meanings, first talk about what it is 'not' in your content area. For example, when introducing the word "pitch" I ask students what they think of when they hear that word. The answer usually involves the act of throwing a baseball. We also relate it to throwing something away in the trash. Neither of these definitions have much to do with music, so that leads us to discover the musical definition. Pitch is a specific musical tone.

If possible, relate new terms to something they already understand from another content area. The word "measure" always gives elementary students a bit of trouble when it is introduced in music class. By drawing on their prior knowledge of measurement in mathematics they are able to grasp the musical meaning as well. We talk about how a ruler is divided into "sets" of inches or centimeters then relate that to how music is divided into sets of beats.

If students are going to be able to think and write like a musicians, artists, actors, and dancers, they must have an understanding of the vocabulary related to these arts. Relating this vocabulary to other content areas and the "real world" helps students make connections and gives them an understanding of these terms in the context of the arts.

Kinesthetic Vocabulary

Amanda Terry, Mathematics

When teaching vocabulary in my math classroom, I like to have students physically manipulate the new word. Since many math vocabulary words require the student to complete a task or use the word in an action, I feel allowing them to learn the word in the way it will be used can assist in this learning process.

The following is one strategy I use in my classroom:

-I first like to clear up any misconceptions by asking what the students know about the new word.

-Next, I provide a definition in student-friendly language followed by having the students act out or manipulate the new word.

For example, if the word was "division," I would have the students separate into equal groups to illustrate the concept of division.

-Then, I would have the students create their own definition using words and pictures that allow for student understanding.

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Teaching Selected Terms
Mona Eldridge, Language Arts

In my Language Arts class, I have adapted one of Marzano's vocabulary strategies which has also been used throughout our school and has proven to work in retaining knowledge with new vocabulary words. When students are exposed to new vocabulary words, there are several steps taken to ensure student recall and application of the selected terms.

Step One: Provide a description, explanation, or example of the new term.

Step Two: Ask students to restate the description, explanation, or example in their own words.

Step Three: Ask students to construct a picture, symbol, or graphic representation of the term.

Step Four: Engage students periodically in activities that help them add to their knowledge of the term in their notebooks.

Step Five: Ask students to share the term with one another.

Step Six: Involve students periodically in games that allow them to play with terms.

Term:	My Understanding:	1	2	3	4
Describe:					
Draw:					

When introducing new vocabulary terms, for example literary terms, my students relate the new vocabulary terms to a common book such as *The Three Little Pigs*. They will continue to add information to their own personal dictionary throughout the unit. This is a fabulous strategy that students enjoy because it reaches many different levels of student learning.

This strategy is from *Building Academic Vocabulary* by Robert J. Marzano & Debra J. Pickering.

Coming Soon:

January: Evidence and Support

February: Mentor Texts

March: Critique and Analysis

April: Publishing Opportunities

For More Information

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page for resources, or check
out the application to become
a part of EKUWP!