Action Research Project: Effective Methods of Vocabulary Instruction

Providence Christian Academy
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SPSE 6140
Overview of the Action Research Study

- Methods for vocabulary instruction vary widely from classroom to classroom

- One clear-cut method for teaching vocabulary has yet to be identified
Overview of the Action Research Study

- Vocabulary instruction has received less emphasis than other reading program components.

- Researchers acclaim vocabulary knowledge as the single most important factor in reading comprehension.
Components of Effective Vocabulary Instruction

- Incorporate ways to personalize word learning
- Provide extensive practice with words
Components of Effective Vocabulary Instruction

- Use of background knowledge, context, morphology, and dictionaries
- Utilize instruction that actively involves and engages students in their own learning
Ways to Develop Rich Vocabularies

- A rich vocabulary contains lots of words
- A rich vocabulary embodies and reflects extensive and complex understandings of many concepts
- A rich vocabulary means having deeply rooted, flexible understanding of concepts that words represent

(Brabham and Villaume, 2002)
Ways to Develop Rich Vocabularies

- A rich vocabulary is powered by a keen ability to use context to tease out important aspects of word meaning and subtle differences in word usage.
- A rich vocabulary is fired by fascination with language that creates disposition and motivation for learning words.

(Brabham and Villaume, 2002)
Research Questions

- What effect does the current method of teaching vocabulary to 5th graders have on student performance?
- Does the current method of teaching vocabulary result in increased participation and involvement by the student in his own learning?
- Do students and staff enjoy the current method of vocabulary instruction more or less than other methods experienced?
### Research Question

What effect does this particular approach to teaching vocabulary have on certain measures of student performance?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data Source 1</th>
<th>Data Source 2</th>
<th>Data Source 3</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What effect does this particular approach to teaching vocabulary have on certain measures of student performance?</strong></td>
<td>Student scores on vocabulary tests</td>
<td>Combined student survey and short answer questions</td>
<td>Semi-structured teacher interview (audiotaped)</td>
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<td>Student scores on other in class vocabulary activities</td>
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<td><strong>Does this particular approach to teaching vocabulary result in increased participation and involvement by the student in his own learning?</strong></td>
<td>Researcher field notes of class observation</td>
<td>Semi-structured student interview (audiotaped)</td>
<td>Semi-structured teacher interview (audiotaped)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sociograms of student activity</td>
<td>Review of student work samples</td>
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</table>

## Data Sources

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<td>Combined student survey and short answer questions</td>
<td>Semi-structured student interview (audiotaped)</td>
<td>Semi-structured teacher interview (audiotaped)</td>
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Description of Subjects

- 25 fifth grade students, ages 10-11
- Highly educated and experienced 5th grade language arts teacher
- 11 female students and 14 male
- English as the primary language in families
- High parental involvement
## Research Findings

### Student Test Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8/28/08</td>
<td>Test 1</td>
<td>85.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/24/08</td>
<td>Test 2</td>
<td>86.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/25/08</td>
<td>Test 3</td>
<td>91.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Findings

Student Scores for Vocabulary Activities

Table 2: Averaged Student Scores for Vocabulary Work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Average Score</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8/6-13/08</td>
<td>26.56/30</td>
<td>88.5%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/18-25/08</td>
<td>26.39/30</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/29-9/7/08</td>
<td>26.44/30</td>
<td>88.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/9-16/08</td>
<td>26.8/30</td>
<td>89.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*All scores from the 1st quarter grading period
## Research Findings

### Student Scores for Vocabulary Activities

#### Table 2: Averaged Student Scores for Vocabulary Work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Range</th>
<th>Score / Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10/14-21/08</td>
<td>27.29/30</td>
<td>90.1%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/22-11/4/08</td>
<td>27.96/30</td>
<td>93.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/4-7/08</td>
<td>18.29/20</td>
<td>91.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*All scores from the 2nd quarter grading period*
## Research Findings

### Student Survey Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>75% or More Strongly Agreed or Agreed</th>
<th>50-74% Strongly Agreed or Agreed</th>
<th>&lt; 50% Strongly Agreed or Agreed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understand word meaning better through teacher use of a reworded definition</td>
<td>Words studied are seen and used regularly in reading, writing, &amp; speaking</td>
<td>Understand word meaning better when learning about the word’s origin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to use context to determine word meaning</td>
<td>Thinking about synonyms/antonyms helpful</td>
<td>Knowing about the word’s part of speech helps in understanding word meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to use examples or illustrations to explain word meaning</td>
<td>Able to recall the vocabulary word’s meaning during review or discussion</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Encouraged to participate more</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Recurrent Themes from Student Interview

- Discussing derivatives for the vocabulary word
- Writing meaning rich sentences using the vocabulary word
- Getting feedback from the teacher regarding word usage in a sentence or examples/illustrations
- Sharing/discussing the word(s) with fellow students, friends and family members
- Applying methods of vocabulary instruction to own learning
Recurrent Themes from Student Interview

- Approach to learning new vocabulary words met many different types of learning needs
- Approach focuses on only one word a day and encourages more time to process the word’s meaning
- Approach does not allow enough time to review words in class
- Approach does not allow for frequent tests
Teacher Interview

- Approach encourages utilizing background knowledge and making personal connections to the word being studied
- Approach addresses many different learning styles
- Approach introduces fewer words which allows for increased time to focus on individual words and concentrate on the process for learning a word’s meaning vs. memorization
- Students are transferring methods to their own learning
- Students are excited about vocabulary and are becoming “lovers of words”
Conclusions

- Techniques for vocabulary instruction include use of background knowledge, context, morphology, and dictionaries.
- Students are encouraged to apply background knowledge as they study new words.
- Methods for teaching vocabulary require active involvement in learning by students.
- Students are learning to learn and enjoy vocabulary instruction.
**Action Plan**

**Phase 1:**

1. **Include more explicit instruction** so that students understand the importance and use of word origins, parts of speech, and other forms of the word to aid vocabulary understanding.
2. **Provide more opportunities** for review of past words during class time and provide tests more frequently.
3. **Continue to collect data** on vocabulary instruction for an additional six months and analyze SAT scores of 5th graders with previous SAT scores.
4. **Compare data and findings** to determine any additional changes or modifications to the teaching of vocabulary.
Phase 2:

1. Expand the program to include other grade levels in the Elementary and Middle School.
2. Collect data over a six month period.
3. Compare data and findings of all participating classes.
4. Compile data and findings into an action research report.
5. Present findings, conclusions, and suggestions to other faculty and PCA parents.