No More Word Lists: Teaching Vocabulary in Context

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Liana Heitin
Assistant editor, Education Week

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Expert Presenters:

Gina Cervetti, assistant professor of literacy, language, and culture, University of Michigan's school of education

Tanya Wright, assistant professor of language and literacy, Michigan State University's college of education

Jodie Westmont, special education teacher, Washoe County school district, Reno, Nev.

Related Article: Under Common Core, Students Learn Words By Learning About the World
An on-demand archive of this webinar will be available at www.edweek.org/go/webinar in less than 24 hrs.
No More Word Lists: Teaching Vocabulary in Context

Content-Vocabulary Connections

Gina N. Cervetti, University of Michigan
Tanya S. Wright, Michigan State University
When Most People Think of “Vocabulary Instruction,” They Think Of...

- Looking up words in the dictionary.
- Writing out definitions for words listed at the beginning of a textbook chapter.
- Memorizing flash cards for their SAT test.
Vocabulary Knowledge is Important

• Vocabulary (i.e., knowing word meanings) measured at a young age predicts reading comprehension in the long-term.
• Vocabulary represents knowledge and is therefore critical for participation in content area learning.
• Vocabulary “gaps” by family socioeconomic status evident as early as 18 months of age and these early differences remain throughout schooling.

Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997; Fernald, Marchman, & Weisleder, 2013; NAEP, 2012
The Problem

• While vocabulary is critical for school success...
• Recent studies demonstrate that there is very little vocabulary or content area instruction occurring in elementary school classrooms.

Carlisle, Kelcey, & Berebitsky, 2013; Scott, Jamieson-Noel, & Asselin, 2003; Wright & Neuman, 2014
Big Ideas about Vocabulary Development

• For children to learn a new vocabulary word, they need multiple opportunities to hear and use a word.
• For children to learn a new vocabulary word in depth (multiple meanings, how it is used in multiple contexts), they need a lot of information about the word.
Vocabulary-Content Connection

• Content areas lend themselves to many exposures, varied contexts, and rich explanations.
• Content areas are language-rich and participatory, providing many opportunities for hearing and using new words.
Vocabulary Growth in Science-Literacy Instruction

- French (2004)
  - Preschool
  - General vocabulary knowledge
- Cervetti, Barber, Dorph, Pearson, & Goldschmidt (2012)
  - Grade 4
  - Knowledge of content-related and inquiry-related vocabulary
  - Productive use of science words in writing about science concepts
- Fang & Wei (2010)
  - Grade 6
  - General vocabulary knowledge
Enriching and Capitalizing on Knowledge in ELA

- Orienting ELA instruction around knowledge goals and conceptually coherent texts.
- 4th grade students identified as grade-level readers using a standardized reading assessment.
- Design: Randomly assigned to Conceptually Coherent (CC) treatment or Non-Conceptually Coherent” (NCC) comparison group.
- Independently read six books in 3 sessions on consecutive days.
The Texts

Experimental Group

• Birds

Concept 2: What distinguishes birds from all other animals is feathers. Feathers serve many functions for birds—providing insulation, shade, and protection; helping birds attract mates; providing materials for nests; and helping birds fly.

Comparison Group

• Birds
• Glaciers
• The Sun
• Wolves
• Coral Reefs
• Thunderstorms

Concept 4: Some thunderstorms are severe. Severe thunderstorms can form hailstones and tornadoes, which can cause damage to property and endanger people.
The Texts

Experimental Group
- Birds

Comparison Group
- Birds
- Glaciers
- The Sun
- Wolves
- Coral Reefs
- Thunderstorms

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<th>Treatment Concept Words</th>
<th>Cross-Group General Academic</th>
<th>Comparison Concept Words</th>
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<td>Incubate</td>
<td>Simulate</td>
<td>Corona</td>
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<td>Dependent</td>
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<td>Terrain</td>
<td>Erode</td>
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<td>Safeguard</td>
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<td>Variegated</td>
<td>Attribute</td>
<td>Ascend</td>
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</table>
When birds molt, their worn-out feathers fall out and new ones grow in.
Results

- Student in the conceptually coherent group:
  - Acquired more knowledge of their conceptually central words and, marginally, of the general academic vocabulary words.
  - Acquired more knowledge about birds.
  - Had better recall of a novel passage at post.
Knowledge and Vocabulary

• The CCSS call for an ELA curriculum that is “intentionally and coherently structured to develop rich content. knowledge within and across grades” (CCSSI, 2010, p. 10).
• The CCSS change the balance of texts students read in ELA toward an even split of narrative and informational text.
Text Sets in Practice

Jodie Westmont
Special Education Resource Teacher
Reno, Nevada
A little bit about me

- Special education resource teacher in Reno, Nevada
- Attended and presented at a number of Student Achievement Partners trainings over the past two years
- In February I attended the Text Set Project training in Las Vegas
- Why is this work so important to me?
A little bit about my students

- Title I elementary school in Reno, Nevada
- 4th and 5th grade students eligible for special education under category of learning disability or health impairment
- Students are below the 5th percentile on MAP
- Push-in model
Earth’s Precious Resources

- Pulled small group during their ELA block
- Worked for 15-30 minutes everyday
- Number of different instructional strategies: fluency practice, partner reading…
- Unrelated to tier I content
Earth’s Precious Resources
Earth’s Precious Resources

FINDINGS?

- High student engagement
- > than 90% accuracy on cold read of last article
- Continue to struggle with fluency
- Building knowledge and vocabulary
Next steps

• Working to create text sets with SAP
• Co-teach 5th grade
• Tie text sets into tier I content and instruction
• Use with all students providing various levels of support as needed
Resources

- [achievethecore.org](https://www.edmodo.com)
  - Professional development
  - Lessons
  - Training opportunities

- [https://www.edmodo.com](https://www.edmodo.com)
  - Text set group code: **sma265**
  - Access to all available text sets from Student Achievement Partners
Amplify.
The Core Knowledge Foundation

Educational Excellence and Equity for All Children
A foundation of rich research
Their big findings:

Reading comprehension requires not just formal decoding skills but also wide-ranging background knowledge.
## Vertical articulation

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Vertical articulation

Grade 2
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- Early Asian Civilizations
- The Ancient Greek Civilization
- Greek Myths
- The War of 1812
- Cycles in Nature
- Westward Expansion
- Insects
- The U.S. Civil War
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Early Asian Civilizations
The Ancient Greek Civilization
Greek Myths
Horizontal articulation

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Read aloud structure and vocabulary

“Listening comprehension outpaces reading comprehension in the early years”

– T.G. Sticht, 1974, 1984
Read aloud structure and vocabulary

![Bar chart showing reading comprehension and listening comprehension at different ages. The chart indicates an increase in comprehension from age 1 to age 13 for both reading and listening.](chart-image)
# Knowledge Building

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Required Reading from Education Week:

**Spotlight on English/Language Arts for K-8**
The English/language arts skills taught in elementary and middle school are essential to students’ success throughout their academic careers. In this Spotlight, learn how teachers can spark student interest in reading, how some schools are automating student writing evaluations, and how personalized learning can boost English/language arts instruction.