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ABSTRACT

In response to a directive to devise strategies to increase student performance in vocabulary development skills, as measured by standardized tests, this paper suggests some of the following strategies: (1) teach word origins and structural analysis; (2) use semantic mapping/webbing; (3) show students how to attack analogies; (4) read aloud; (5) dramatize; (6) show students how to use the dictionary; (7) cloze sentences; use computer programs. Two "practical solution strategies" and sample lessons are presented (along with accompanying activities). Appended is a table containing prefixes and suffixes that merit instruction. Contains 16 references and a list of 3 interviewees. (NKA)

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Developing Vocabulary Skills

by

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Date: Summer 1998

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**Overall, vocabulary development skills are very low in your school.
Devise strategies to increase student performance in this area as
measured by standardized tests.**

Vocabulary is an important part of reading instruction. As teachers, we want students to understand a wide range of words. Parents, educators, politicians all ask, **“What is the best way to teach children unfamiliar vocabulary?”** Traditionally, students copied, looked up, and memorized definitions and later used them in sentences. According to a conversation with Myrna Hinson, she used this practice in her early career. However, this strategy still could be adapted and implemented today since vocabulary words on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills are tested out of context. A study done by Anderson and Nagy (1992) suggest students must learn three thousand words a year to keep up with demand. Moreover, there is good evidence that students do learn from context, although some students may not have enough background knowledge to be able to use context alone. The key to successful vocabulary development appears to lie in providing students with relevant and useful input and using language as a process (Hadaway, Florez, 1988). From all the research studied, it appears that learning vocabulary in isolation, should not be discounted as a positive strategy toward vocabulary development. In other words, vocabulary acquisition is fostered not by one strategy, but by a combination of strategies.

This paper will include different strategies that can be used to increase vocabulary. Research and local practitioners strongly suggest using the strategies below to help improve scores on the vocabulary section on standardized tests.

Strategies to Increase Vocabulary

Practical Solution # 1

Teachers must be aware of the content and format of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. All vocabulary words tested on the I.T.B.S. are classified as nouns, verbs, and modifiers (adjectives and adverbs). “Teachers must revert to teaching word origins and structural analysis in order to build vocabulary,” say Myrna Hinson and Carolyn Anthony.

It has been stated repeatedly throughout research and with local practitioners, that structural analysis is a strategy used in helping students foster independent word meaning (Cooper, 1993).

The following elements are usually considered part of structural analysis:

- **Base words:** Meaningful linguistic units that can stand-alone. **Ex. (resell: Sell is the base word.)**
- **Root words:** Words from which other words are derived. The derivational word is from another language. It cannot stand-alone. **Ex. (Scribble comes from the Latin word scribere, meaning, “to write”.)**
- **Prefixes:** Units of meaning that can be added to the beginnings of base words or root words to change their meanings. They cannot stand-alone. **Ex. (unhappy: Un is the prefix meaning “not”.)**

- Suffixes: Units of meaning that can be added to the ends of base or root words to change their meanings. **Ex. (tearful: Ful is the suffix meaning “full of”.)**
- Inflectional endings: Word parts that can be added to the ends of root or base words to change their case, gender, number, tense, or form. **Ex. (boy’s: possessive case; stewardess: gender; trees: numbers; walked: tense; funniest: form)**
- Compound words: Two or more base words combined to form a new word. **Ex. (run + way = runway)**
- Contractions: Shortened forms of two words in which a letter or letters have been replaced by an apostrophe. **Ex. (do + not = don’t; girl + is = girl’s)**

White, Sowell, and Yanagihara (1989) determined, on the basis of frequency of occurrence that there are nine prefixes and ten suffixes of sufficient use to students to merit instruction. (see appendix page 13) They also determined that knowing the prefixes listed would account for 76 percent of prefixed words and knowing the suffixes would account for 85 percent of suffixed words. Graver (1987) reported that knowing just four prefixes (un – in – (not) dis – non-) would account for nearly 50 percent of all prefixed words. Therefore, while teachers are planning vocabulary lessons, support focus should be on word parts with the greatest attention to the nine prefixes and ten suffixes listed on the appendix page.

Sample Lesson # 1

Obj. Students will define and teach the concept of prefix.

Materials: Chart paper, markers, and mapping sheet.

Method and Procedures: (1) Teacher will write the word prefix on chart paper and explain its meaning. Students will complete the chart on their individual sheets.

(Refer to page 4) The teacher will guide students to complete each box.

2) Teacher will guide students to use sentences containing prefixed words. Ex. John didn't come home when he was told; he **disobeyed** his father.

The following questions could be asked: What does **obey** mean? What does **dis** mean? What does **disobeyed** mean? Does it make sense?

(3) Teacher will encourage students to write and share their example sentences.

(4) Illustrations may be shared, if needed.

(5) After each lesson, students will be encouraged and reminded to use their knowledge about prefixes to determine the meanings of unknown words.

Note: All nine prefixes should be taught in this manner with students given opportunities to complete each chart. (Refer to appendix page for other prefixes.)

(6) For additional practice for the I.T.B.S. sample items will be used for practice after all prefixes and suffixes have been taught. It is recommended that by the end of 4th grade, the first three prefix lessons and the first five suffix lessons should be taught.

All instructions should be completed by the end of 5th grade. (Whitebet al, 1989)

Name _____

What is it?

A group of letters that goes in front of a word. (dis)

Examples

disbelief

disrespect

dishonest

Prefix

Prefixes change the meaning of a word.

If you peel the prefix off, the word can stand alone.

What are some other characteristics?

Name _____

What is it?

Examples

Prefix

What are some other characteristics?

Name _____

1. **Dis**qualified the runner
 - A. retain
 - B. use
 - C. paint
 - D. remove

2. **Pro**cess the order
 - A. on leave
 - B. go forward
 - C. keep up
 - D. backward

3. **Mal**edictions words
 - A. bad
 - B. funny
 - C. nice
 - D. loud

Note: After students have completed this page, discuss the meanings of each prefix along with the correct answer.

Sample Lesson # 2

Obj. Students will match words with their synonyms.

Materials: Magic Square

Method and Procedure(s) (1) The teacher will draw a magic square on a transparency placing it on the overhead. Words and phrases to be learned are placed within the cells of the square. The class members work together to solve the mystery of the magic number.

Note: The teacher may copy a magic square so smaller groups can solve it or an individual can work on it alone.

(2) The teacher will guide the students to look at item 1 below the magic square and match it to the correct word or phrase within the square.

(3) The teacher/students will write the numeral 1 in the smaller square within the cell containing the correct match. **Ex. obtain – acquire**

(4) Students will continue matching until the square is completed.

express	stroll	cry
4	3	8
death	grant	acquire
9	5	1
swallow	irate	free
2	7	6

Directions: This magic square contains nine vocabulary words. Match the words below to a synonym in the square.

- | | | |
|-----------|-----------|------------|
| 1. obtain | 4. state | 7. enraged |
| 2. gulp | 5. donate | 8. bawl |
| 3. stride | 6. rescue | 9. decease |

Answers:

(Magic number is 15.)

4	3	8
9	5	1
2	7	6

The key to this game is simple. It is self-checking. A magic square has a mysterious quality that is revealed only when all the statements are correctly matched to the words or phrases contained within its cells. Carolyn Anthony agrees with research that students could substitute a known word for an unknown word while building vocabulary and using this game. She has used this strategy and allowed students to divide into teams and exchange papers. These are 2 strategies any teacher could implement with ease on any given day.

express

stroll

cry

death

grant

acquire

swallow

irate

free

Directions: Match the words below to a synonym in the square.

1. obtain

4. state

7. enraged

2. gulp

5. donate

8. bawl

3. stride

6. rescue

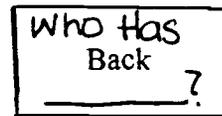
9. decease

*These words can be cut out and placed on top of the words on the magic square.

Beginning Fall, 1998, the new objectives in Georgia's QCC will mandate that teachers teach grammar parts according to Myrna Hinson. Students must be able to recognize and identify different parts of speech. This, of course will help students identify words according to parts of speech for the I.T.B.S.

Practical Solution # 2

A second strategy to increase vocabulary is through the use of games. Loretta Vail uses games to teach vocabulary to her students. Her favorite game is a game entitled, I Have, Who Has. This game reinforces vocabulary words previously studied. A word is listed on front of the card and one student says, "I have _____, Who has _____?" The student who has the new word must say, "I do" and explain what the word means. This game continues until the teacher feels the students have mastered the words.



By teaching vocabulary through games, students are motivated to focus their attention to learning in a fun and exciting way.

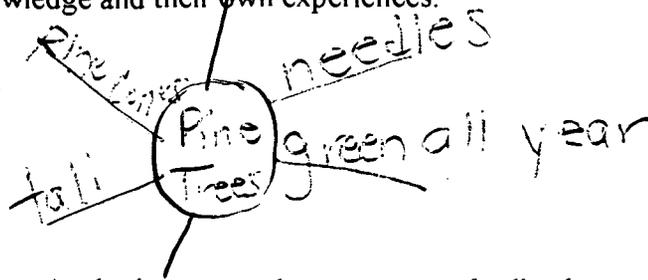
Boehm and Thompson (1996, 1977) suggest every teacher will likely profit from using the game, Magic Squares, to enhance students' ability for developing vocabulary. A magic square can function as a vocabulary learning tool and assessment device. Magic squares are composed of cells that are given numerical values which, when added together linearly or horizontally result in the same sum. The number value stays the same; teachers just need to change the words as needed.

Words and phrases are placed within the cells of the square. Below the magic square are definitions that are matched to the words or phrases. It is always challenging and interesting to try and beat the magic square.

Listed below are other strategies teachers could use to build vocabulary:

(A) **Semantic Mapping/Webbing** – This approach allows students to relate new words to prior knowledge and their own experiences.

Example:



(B) **Analogies** - Analogies are used on many standardized tests. It is advisable to show students the best way to attack analogies. Students should put the analogy in the form of a sentence and then find the words in the choice that fits the same sentence form. The use of analogies allows students to increase their knowledge about words.

Example:

- helmet : head :: _____
- A. glove : hand
 - B. tie : shirt
 - C. stocking : shoe
 - D. thimble : finger

Here's a good example sentence for students to use. A helmet is worn over the head. Now students should try the other choices.

- | | |
|--|--------------|
| A. A <u>glove</u> is worn over the <u>hand</u> . | Sounds good. |
| B. A <u>tie</u> is worn over the <u>shirt</u> . | Sounds good. |
| C. A <u>stocking</u> is worn over the <u>shoe</u> . | No |
| D. A <u>thimble</u> is worn over the <u>finger</u> . | Yes |

Choice **D** is the most logical answer.

(C) **Read Aloud** - For students to learn large numbers of words, they need to be exposed to them. Teachers should include as rich a vocabulary as they can in their own speech without losing students. There are numerous and varied ways to make the classroom a vocabulary rich environment without making vocabulary a chore (Nagy, 1988).

(D) **Dramatize** – Developing vocabulary knowledge through drama is a motivating method to teach vocabulary. **Ex. Charades With Adverbs** – A student pulls an adverb from a box. His team asks him to demonstrate the adverb by making various movements. For example, if the adverb is **slowly** the team members might ask him to “sit down” and he would respond by sitting down slowly. Loretta Vail states that this is just another way to familiarize students with the different parts of speech for the I.T.B.S.

(E) Use of Dictionary/Thesaurus – The dictionary is an invaluable tool for determining both the pronunciations and meanings of words. The use of the dictionary must be taught in a manner that will leave students with positive attitudes. Once students have learned the basics of using the dictionary, it can become a part of their strategy for independent word meaning (Cooper, 1993).

(F) Cloze Sentences – In the cloze procedure, a word is blocked out and the reader uses other clues in the text to predict what could complete the blocked portion. This strategy can be used to develop vocabulary and construct meaning. This type of activity tests student's knowledge of vocabulary words used in context.

(G) Computer Programs – Per conversation with Carolyn Anthony, the computer programs that are available in DeKalb County to increase vocabulary are Wordly Wise and Hot Words For SAT.

There is no one best strategy for teaching vocabulary. Vocabulary is acquired through wide reading and various experiences (Anderson, and Nagy, 1992). It is obvious that the large number of words that students need to learn cannot be taught. Using a variety of activities, materials, genre, styles, strategies, and fine arts can help a reader expand his/her vocabulary.

Therefore, teachers must strengthen students knowledge of words and create an intrinsic motivation by using one or more of the suggested strategies. These strategies have been utilized to support vocabulary development and help improve test scores on standardized test.

APPENDIX

Table 4.4 Prefixes and Suffixes That Merit Instruction

Prefixes		Suffixes	
*un- dis- *in-, im- *non- ir-	meaning "not": <i>unhappy,</i> <i>disrespectful,</i> <i>inactive,</i> <i>impossible,</i> <i>nonresistant,</i> <i>irresponsible</i>	-s, -es -ed	plural: <i>girls</i> tense: <i>jumps</i> tense <i>jumped</i>
re-	meaning "back or again": <i>revisit</i>	-ing -ly	tense <i>jumping</i> meaning "like" <i>sisterly</i>
*un- dis-	meaning "do the opposite of": <i>untie,</i> <i>disassemble</i>		meaning "one who performs a specialized action": <i>swimmer; er-</i> used to form comparative degree with adjectives: <i>darker</i>
in-, im-	meaning "in or into": <i>indoors</i>	-er, -or	
en-, em-	meaning "into or within": <i>entangle</i>	-tion, -ion, -ation, -ition,	} meaning "action": <i>absorption</i>
over-	meaning "too much": <i>overdose</i>	-able, -ible	meaning "susceptible, capable, worth": <i>debatable</i>
mis-	meaning "wrong": <i>misspell</i>		meaning "of or relating to": <i>parental</i>
			meaning "consisting of or inclined toward": <i>sleepy</i>
			meaning "state, quality, condition, or degree": <i>brightness</i>

*Accounts for nearly 50 percent of all prefixed words (Graves, 1987).

Source: Based on White, Sowell, and Yanagihara (1989).

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Interviews

Carolyn Anthony, Elementary Coordinator for Dekalb County.

Myrna Hinson, Elementary Coordinator for Dekalb County.

Loretta Vail, Reading Consultant for Dekalb County.



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