Introduction

Vocabulary development is a critical component of any literacy program. The ability to decode words is only a small piece of reading. Without the skills needed to identify or infer the meaning of new words it is impossible for students to understand text. In the upper elementary grades students are encountering more and more difficult vocabulary, specifically in the content areas, and they need skills and strategies for dealing with that language on their own. Direct instruction of new word meanings certainly has a place in vocabulary development, however, it is impossible to explicitly teach the meanings of all words students must know to be successful. For this reason it is imperative that students be taught how to use both context clues (the information surrounding a word in a passage) and morphology (an analysis of root words, prefixes and suffixes) to determine the meanings of unknown words they encounter as they are reading. Ebbers and Denton (2008) state that neither morphology or contextual analysis are completely effective on their own, but, when combined become powerful strategies for unlocking the meaning of new words.

Many students in the upper elementary grades fall into the syllables and affixes stage of development and are expected to read and understand polysyllabic words (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, Johnston 2008). Students in this stage require active involvement in learning words, engagement of prior knowledge, multiple exposures to new words, and instruction of structural elements of words such as syllables, base words, and affixes.

Analysis of the following three articles: Learning About Word Parts With Kidspiration; Developing Academic Language, Got Words?; and A Root Awakening: Vocabulary Instruction for Older Students with Reading Difficulties, woven with information from Words Their Way will reveal specific word learning strategies that will benefit students at this stage of
development. Not every strategy will work for every student, or every word, but a combination of various strategies will allow teachers to reach each individual and help them to build word learning strategies that will carry them through their educational careers.

Summary: Learning About Word Parts with Kidspiration

Gill (2007) promotes vocabulary instruction that includes word learning strategies so that students are able to decode, and infer the meaning of new words that they encounter in their reading. This article focuses specifically on the use of morphology, but also mentions that it is important to instruct students on how to use context clues to infer word meaning as well (Gill 2007). The author states that there is conflicting research about teaching root words to students in elementary grades, and that some studies believe that this instruction is better left until secondary grades (Gill 2007). Gill (2007) argues, however, that instruction on root words, prefixes, and suffixes can helps students spell and read the more difficult words they begin to encounter in the upper elementary grades.

The strategy that Gill (2007) promotes is the use of word webs to illustrate the relationships between words. The use of graphic organizers can assist students with making connections between new words and words they already know, and since it requires active participation by the students, it is more effective than other forms of vocabulary instruction (Gill 2007). To create these word webs students would begin with a root-word in the center (the author uses the term photo in his example of photosynthesis) (Gill 2007). They would then add derivatives of this word around it (Gill 2007). Gill (2007) suggests first modeling this strategy using words from a current unit of study and then asking students to create webs on their own, choosing a root word to study. Students are asked to first, find the meaning of their root word or
affix then, collect words that include that word part and finally, to create a sentence showing how a words’ meaning can be found using these parts (Gill 2007).

**Summary: Developing Academic Language: Got Words?**

Flynt and Brozo (2008) examine the importance of teaching content area vocabulary in a systematic way. The authors explain a direct relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension (Flynt et. al. 2008). This relationship is especially important in the content areas because students are encountering technical words (Flynt et. al. 2008).

In order for students to access the technical vocabulary in the content areas Flynt et. al. (2008) recommend several strategies for teachers of upper elementary grades. First, teachers should select words that are useful for applying word learning strategies (Flynt et. al. 2008). It is also recommended that teachers provide multiple encounters with content area terms that require students to use writing, speaking, listening, and reading skills (Flynt et. al. 2008). Flynt and Brozo (2008) also highlight the importance of direct instruction on the use of context clues and knowledge of word parts to infer the meanings of new words. The final recommendation is for students to use word sorts and other categorization activities to further their understanding of content area terms (Flynt et. al. 2008).

**Summary: A Root Awakening: Vocabulary Instruction for Older Students with Reading Difficulties**

Ebbers et. al. (2008) begin by stating that wide reading is the most effective way of fostering vocabulary development, but that students who struggle with reading are often resistant to it, and therefore do not receive the exposure to new words that is necessary to build their vocabularies. Explicit instruction, questioning, class discussions about words and multiple opportunities to practice new words are identified as important components of vocabulary
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instruction in the classroom (Ebbers et. al. 2008). The authors break vocabulary instruction into two main components: learning the meaning of words, and word learning strategies (Ebbers et. al. 2008). The focus of the article is on the later.

When teaching word learning strategies, and specifically morphology Ebbers et. al. (2008) advise teachers to select word parts, that are part of morphological families and appear across the curriculum. Two examples given are logic (logical, logically, illogical, etc.) and relate (relationship, related, relational, etc.) (Ebbers et. al. 2008). The recommended process for teaching morphology begins with explicit instruction, and modeling of pronunciation, especially of polysyllabic words (Ebbers et. al. 2008). The authors then recommend repeated guided practice opportunities with scaffolding appropriate to the students’ abilities (Ebbers et. al. 2008). It is important to ensure that students are actively engaged in the process of learning new words, and several strategies are given for ensuring this (Ebbers et. al. 2008). Students may engage in semantic sorting using synonyms, antonyms, root words, or concept (Ebbers et. al. 2008). Including a graphic organizer in such activities is often helpful as is use of small groups and verbal discussions about the words they are working with (Ebbers et. al. 2008). Ebbers et. al. (2008) recommend beginning morphological instruction with the most common affixes and root words and providing both examples and non examples during the explicit instruction portion of a lesson.

The use of context clues is often less effective in identifying word meaning than morphology, but, when combined, students are able to infer the meaning of most new words that they encounter (Ebbers et. al. 2008). For teaching of contextual analysis the authors describe the Outside-In strategy (Ebbers et. al. 2008). Students should first look for clues outside a word, in
the nearby sentences, then, they should examine the morphemes inside the word, and finally, reread the section and make an inference about the word’s meaning (Ebbers et. al. 2008).

**Support for Literacy Instruction**

The strategy of using word webs that Gill (2007) proposes is specifically geared towards the use of specific software, however, the creation of word webs does not require a specific software program. Students in the syllables and affixes stage of development need to be encouraged to use their prior knowledge about words to infer the meanings of new words, and the use of word webs is a terrific way to accomplish this (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, Johnston 2008). Bear et. al. (2008) also mention that syllables and affixes students must be actively engaged in new vocabulary acquisition, and this strategy certainly requires students to be active learners. Like Gill, Ebbers et. al. (2008) also recommend the use of graphic organizers and word sorts for students learning polysyllabic words. The use of graphic organizers, particularly in small groups allows for verbal discussions about words, and is more beneficial to students than dictionary activities (Ebbers et. al. 2008).

All three articles highlight the importance of both morphology instruction and contextual analysis in vocabulary instruction. Flynt et. al. (2008) provide a variety of strategies for upper elementary teachers to use to increase vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension in the content areas. These strategies correlate directly to the syllables and affixes stage as proposed by Bear et. al. (2008). The use of graphic organizers, word sorts, word webs, and verbal discussions all require students to be actively engaged in their learning; a key component of effective vocabulary instruction at this stage (Bear et. al. 2008; Ebbers et. al. 2008; Flynt et. al. 2008; Gill 2007). Furthermore, each of the articles stresses that students require direct, systematic instruction of word-learning strategies; and multiple opportunities to practice with words (Bear
It is particularly important for systematic vocabulary instruction to take place in the content areas, because at this stage students are encountering more and more difficult technical vocabulary. A strong understanding of how to use context clues, morphology, and other word learning strategies will ensure students are able to access the increasingly difficult vocabulary of the content areas.

**Peer Review Process**

The peer review process for this assignment was helpful for several reasons. First, the ability to view the work of others offers great insight into organization of the assignment. Often times the most difficult part of an assignment is organizing your ideas, and seeing how others approached it was very helpful. The second piece involves receiving constructive feedback on your own work. The feedback that was received on this literature review helped to narrow the focus and to make connections between the articles. Identifying the links between the strategies offered in each article proved to be an effective way to organize the literature review.
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References


