The Effects of Purposeful Vocabulary Instruction

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The Effects of Purposeful Vocabulary Instruction

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Abstract

The goal of this action research project was to identify the effects of purposeful Tier II vocabulary instruction in a second grade classroom in a suburb of Minnesota. The study participants included 21 second grade students. Students took a baseline assessment to identify comprehension and vocabulary skills before the study was done. After the baseline assessment, students participated in the following interventions focusing on Tier II vocabulary words: once weekly shared reading with Tier II vocabulary words, learning and incorporating ten Tier II vocabulary words into sentences, and completing a partner performance assessment on one Tier II vocabulary word from the teacher led read aloud. The researcher also kept teacher observational notes to record notes on implementation and student engagement. At the end of the study, students took a post assessment to determine the effects of purposeful vocabulary instruction. Analysis of the data indicated the most effective intervention was the performance assessment. The Tier II vocabulary words for the performance assessment were connected to the class read aloud and therefore, allowed for students to build background knowledge and better understanding of the Tier II word in context. Further research is needed to determine how instruction based on Tier II vocabulary words found in connected curricular areas can positively affect students’ comprehension.

Keywords: Tier II vocabulary, second grade, effects, comprehension
Literacy is the ability to read, write, listen and speak to communicate with others. A majority of the elementary school day focuses on teaching students literacy skills. Students apply literacy skills while reading independently, reading with peers, discussing what they read, writing stories, listening to reading, reading math story problems, exploring social studies texts through reading, writing and speaking or following steps for a science experiment. In all of these subjects, students experience new vocabulary. There are three classifications of vocabulary words: Tier I, Tier II or Tier III words. Tier I words are words that often appear in children’s books and are heard in colloquial language. An example of Tier I words include “clock, baby, happy and walk.” These words are everyday words that most children have a basic understanding of without explicit instruction. Tier II words are more difficult words that are not heard in colloquial language. An example of Tier II words include, “absurd, novice, vacancy and complex.” These words often appear in print and can be challenging for students. Tier III words are domain-specific vocabulary that is found commonly in academic journals. Students are not exposed to Tier II vocabulary words in the primary elementary classroom. In the primary elementary classroom (K-2 grade), teachers do not often have purposeful lessons to introduce students to vocabulary (Duke & Block, 2012). Primary teachers focus on word-reading skills such as phonemic awareness, sight word recognition and the ability to decode words rather than working on specific instruction for Tier II words that are more difficult and often new to students. Without purposeful vocabulary lessons that encourage students to interact with new words, students become confused and frustrated when exposed to new vocabulary, and their comprehension suffers.
This study researched how a 2nd grade teacher could enhance literacy instruction through purposeful Tier II vocabulary lessons into the literacy framework as measured by benchmark assessments, performance assessments, weekly word check-ins, and teacher observational notes. This research studied 21 second grade students in a suburban school in Minnesota. Students’ initial comprehension and vocabulary skills were assessed with a benchmark test to establish a starting point for the study. A variety of ways to interact with new Tier II vocabulary were implemented including, shared readings, read aloud, incorporating the vocabulary words in sentences for more in-depth understanding and reflected through teacher observational notes. The purpose of the study was to see if, through these interventions, students had a better understanding of Tier II vocabulary words, better comprehension with literacy work and the skills to tackle difficult words in new ways.

**Review of Literature**

In the primary elementary classroom, literacy is a paramount skill. Students are learning how to interact with phonemic awareness, becoming more knowledgeable with decoding words, learning comprehension strategies and transitioning their skills of learning how to read into reading to learn. These developments are influenced by many factors including literacy instruction, interactions with literacy independently, with peers and through technology, and in content areas such as science, social studies and health. Despite these multiple opportunities to interact with literacy, vocabulary instruction is often neglected in literacy instruction (Duke & Block, 2012).

Vocabulary is an important part of the learning to read process in the primary elementary grades. Unfortunately, teachers do not often have purposeful lessons to
introduce students to vocabulary (Duke & Block, 2012). In most cases, new vocabulary is introduced during read alouds in vague and potentially confusing ways that do not allow students to interact with the words being introduced to them. Many primary teachers believe incorporating word-reading instruction in their daily literacy lessons will help improve students’ vocabulary and reading comprehension skills (Duke & Block, 2012, Mahdavi & Tensfeldt, 2013). While it is important to include word reading instruction in the primary elementary classroom, there is a difference between teaching word-reading and vocabulary instruction. With word reading instruction, students are interacting with sight words, learning what they look like, how to say them and how to write them. This straightforward learning is essential to developing reading skills. Vocabulary instruction, on the other hand, provides students the opportunity to interact with more difficult words not often heard in colloquial language. It requires more attention and active learning from the students (Beck & McKowen, 2013). It is important to not only include vocabulary but also make students more word conscious (Owocki, 2012). Making students more word conscious encourages them to notice words they are not familiar with and seek understanding. If students are not word conscious, the reading comprehension of a text suffers. According to Murnane, Sawhill & Snow (2012), vocabulary instruction is similar to developing student background knowledge. The schema associated with vocabulary instruction can make the difference in a student’s comprehension skills (Murnane, et al., 2012, Mahdavi & Tensfeldt, 2013). Without schema and exposure to new vocabulary words, students will be at a disadvantage to their peers. Hart & Risley (2006) argued, as noted in Fien et al. (p. 308, 2011), vocabulary differences are due to background differences starting as early as 3 years old. Students
who struggle to read and therefore read less are exposed to less words and even fewer vocabulary words (Mahdavi & Tensfeldt, 2013, p. 77). By second grade the difference in word knowledge can range from 4,000 to 8,000 words (Fien, 2011). Therefore, it is vital that primary elementary teachers incorporate purposeful vocabulary instruction into their literacy lessons to expose students to more vocabulary, deepening their schema and creating opportunities to interact with text.

There are limitations to the studies done in relation to vocabulary acquisition as a comprehension strategy. In comparison to other comprehension strategies, vocabulary previewing is not shown to be as effective (Hawkins, Musti-Rao, Hale, McGuire & Hailley, 2010). With this limitation in mind, it must be noted that vocabulary instruction should be taught in addition to the regular language arts curriculum to continue to develop the student as a well-rounded reader.

Current research on vocabulary instruction indicates that teachers must have purposeful vocabulary lessons planned for students, both orally presented and through print. This can be done in the primary classroom with teacher read alouds, shared reading and incorporating more exposure to informational texts. According to Mahdavi & Tensfeldt, (2013) a common way to incorporate vocabulary instruction and knowledge in the primary elementary grades is through teacher read alouds. With teacher read alouds, a teacher orally introduces students to new vocabulary and uses repetition, word banks and pictures to support the new learning (Mahdavi & Tensfeldt, 2013, Fien et al., 2011). Students must also be using new vocabulary words in receptive (illustrations) and expressive ways (acting out the words) to show understanding (Mahdavi & Tensfeldt, 2013). Beck and McKeown argued, as cited in Mahdavi & Tensfeldt (p. 81, 2013),
students must actively use new words to develop genuine understanding of them. In addition to teacher read alouds, using a shared reading in the classroom has also shown a positive relationship with vocabulary acquisition and comprehension strategies through collaboration and social interactions throughout the whole class (Kesler, 2011). The teacher covers up key vocabulary and leads the students in a discussion about what reading strategy students are using to determine the hidden word. During this time, the teacher gives the students work time to collaborate on possible words and their synonyms and eventually reveals the word. This allows students to draw correlations between words, print, and the meaning of the text as a whole. The other suggestion in improving vocabulary is through the implementation of information texts in the elementary classroom. There is a dire need to incorporate informational texts into the primary classroom. It allows students the opportunity to interact with nonfiction knowledge and develop vocabulary skills in addition to comprehension, and overall reading strategies (Duke & Bennett-Armistead, 2003). One reading strategy that can be practiced while reading informational texts is the close reading strategy. In this strategy, students (with teacher help) reread a text three times to determine different information. On the second read, the focus is on vocabulary and the key ideas associated with new vocabulary (Fisher & Frey, 2014). Lastly, in research done by Hawkins, et al., (2010) the researchers studied the effect of silent previewing, listening previewing and vocabulary previewing on fourth grade comprehension scores. The study showed the strongest relationship between listening previewing and vocabulary previewing on the student’s later performance on reading and comprehending the passage (Hawkins, et al., 2010). Overall, these vocabulary lessons are important to be used with vocabulary words that will
challenge and push students’ learning to the next level. According to Beck, McKeown and Kucan (2013, p. 24), it’s important to prioritize “tier two words” that students will encounter more often in the academic setting rather to challenge their word knowledge bank. When selecting words to use in the above mentioned solutions, teachers must be explicit and purposeful about the words they choose to identify and examine more closely in vocabulary instruction.

Based on my findings in this literature review, I will measure my students’ initial comprehension skills and vocabulary knowledge. After analyzing the results, I will intervene in different ways. I will pay closer attention to the words that I choose in my vocabulary instruction. I will pay attention to and prioritize tier two words that students will encounter more often in the academic setting. First, I will continue to use shared reading in my classroom as an instructional strategy once a week and incorporate the importance of determining vocabulary words and identifying synonyms for hidden words. I will also pay purposeful attention to the new vocabulary words that appear in the classroom read aloud. I will develop a system for my students to record and make the new words meaningful to their learning. Second, I will use interventions within my guided reading groups to target struggling students and their vocabulary through the use of background knowledge building, more exposure to informational text and practice with close reading strategies.

**Description of Research Process**

The study included twenty-one participants between the ages of 7 and 8. Each family received a letter describing the research and any potential risks and was given the opportunity to opt out of the research (see Appendix A).
Data collection began by having the entire group of participants take the baseline assessment. The baseline assessment, as dictated by the district as a benchmark test, included a reading passage, comprehension questions, a section on high frequency words (that test Tier I words) and a section on Tier II vocabulary (see Appendix B).

After the test was evaluated, the teacher was able to synthesize students’ strengths and weaknesses in regards to Tier II vocabulary words and comprehension to identify purposeful vocabulary instruction. The synthesis was based on what students demonstrated as their background knowledge in relation to Tier II vocabulary words. The common mistakes made informed instruction and intervention for the whole class while minor mistakes made by specific students received small group instruction on the Tier II vocabulary.

For the next seven weeks, instruction included the following activities; once weekly shared reading, weekly word lists, read aloud vocabulary, performance assessments and teacher observational notes.

The first intervention that students participated in was a whole group shared reading lesson. Students gathered on the carpet and choral read (all students read aloud at the same time) a short passage on the smartboard with Tier II vocabulary words hidden. The purpose of the covered word is to teach students what good readers do when they come to an unknown word. When the class got to a covered word, they stopped, turned and talked to a partner about what they predicted the word could be, and after partner talking, the whole class shared their hypothesis of what they thought the word might be. After each prediction was shared, the teacher has the class answered the same three
questions for each guess, “Does that sound right? Does that look right? Does that make sense?” These questions encouraged students to think about the printed word on the page (Does that sound right? Does that look right?) and the meaning the story conveys (Does that make sense?) when reading an unfamiliar Tier II vocabulary word. The covered word would be revealed, and the students would check their word hypothesis, and the class would choral reread the sentence filling in the Tier II word. At the end of the lesson, the teacher encouraged students to identify which strategy (print or meaning) they will use during their independent reading time when presented with an unfamiliar word. The shared reading lesson helped students learn how to decipher a Tier II vocabulary word using print or meaning and check their work without the support of a teacher.

The next intervention was weekly words. Weekly words are ten Tier II vocabulary words identified by the teacher from the Scott Foresman weekly story (district literacy resource). The ten weekly words were listed in a PowerPoint with student-friendly definitions, an image for better understanding and reviewed every day after the morning meeting. The students were given the task of learning the ten weekly words and using them in complete sentences by the end of the week. As the week continued, one way the teacher formatively assessed student understanding of the weekly words is using the Tier II vocabulary word in a question to the class. For example, “Would it be absurd to have a snow day tomorrow?” In addition to teacher led questions, the students build more in-depth understanding of the Tier II weekly words by using the word in a sentence. The summative assessment on the weekly words includes students taking a picture of all ten words (listed on the whiteboard all week long), posting a picture to Seesaw (an app that allows students to post to their digital portfolio) and recording themselves using all
ten words in a complete sentence. The students were graded based on the Weekly Words Rubric (see Appendix C).

The third intervention was teacher directed instruction on new Tier II vocabulary words from the read aloud text. The purpose of a teacher read aloud is for the teacher to model fluent reading on an above grade level text. The books read aloud during the study were *The Year of Billy Miller* and *The Mouse and the Motorcycle*. Once a week, instead of teacher read aloud, the class previewed five new Tier II vocabulary words from the upcoming chapter in the read aloud book. The words were introduced to students using student-friendly definitions introduced by the teacher. Then the class chorally reread all five new words and definitions together. The teacher gave examples in a complete sentence of how each word is used and let the students share other ways to use that word in a sentence. The teacher incorporated ways for students to interact with the new Tier II vocabulary words using strategies suggested from Beck & McKowen (2013) such as word associations, partner activities and questions including the new vocabulary words (see Appendix D). At the end of the week, the students were randomly paired together by pulling names out of a jar to complete a partner performance assessment on one of the five Tier II vocabulary words studied during teacher led read aloud time. The students defined the word, wrote the definition in their own words, and drew a picture to show what the word meant. Partners were assessed based on the performance assessment rubric (see Appendix E).

At the end of each week, the teacher recorded notes on observations and implementation of Tier II vocabulary interventions. The observational notes included
what activities were used that week, observations/notes/details regarding implementation of Tier II interventions and observation/notes/details regarding student engagement as a result of the implementation of Tier II interventions. For example, student engagement was high when Tier II vocabulary words were noticed outside of the intervention instruction. These notes were kept as a log for the teacher to reflect on how the purposeful vocabulary lessons were affecting students and the effectiveness of the interventions being used.

These interventions and data collection methods continued for seven weeks. At the end of the seven-week period, students completed a post baseline assessment, as dictated by the district as a benchmark test, to identify growth on their ability to read a story, answer comprehension questions, identify and use high frequency words and complete a section on Tier II vocabulary words (see Appendix F).

Analysis of Data

During the first week of the research, the participants completed a district benchmark test for baseline data. The baseline assessment included a reading passage, comprehension questions, and a section on Tier II vocabulary (see Appendix B). The chart below shows the data from the baseline benchmark test. At least one child was missing during the baseline assessment due to illness or unforeseen circumstances. Figure 1 shows two percentages for each participant. The blue line indicates the percent correct on comprehension questions, and the red line shows the percent correct on the vocabulary questions. Each student is labeled on the x-axis with his or her “secret agent number.” On the vocabulary section on the test, 95% of the participants got the average
amount correct. Out of the 21 participants, two students were significantly below grade level, one student was approaching grade level scores on the baseline assessment, and the other 19 students scored at grade level for the baseline vocabulary assessment. On the comprehension questions, 80% of the participants got the average amount correct. When the scores are broken down further, three students are significantly below grade level, eight are approaching grade level, and nine students were at grade level.

Figure 1 shows most students scored near or at grade level on the vocabulary section of the baseline assessment. This indicates that the students were able to understand the vocabulary words, however, their ability to understand the Tier II vocabulary words in context of a reading passage was below grade level causing their comprehension scores to be lower.

Figure 1. Baseline Data from Benchmark Test.
Over the next seven weeks, data was charted on two of the four interventions to understand the effects of purposeful vocabulary instruction. Data was collected on the weekly word assessment at the end of each week. Figure 2 shows a summarized version of the weekly word data from the first week of intervention (week 1) and the last week of intervention (week 7). This intervention required students to learn ten weekly words and use them in complete sentences by the end of the week. Regardless of a student’s high score on the baseline assessment, using the new Tier II vocabulary words in a complete sentence was a challenging task. Many students began the intervention at week 1 with a very low score. The students struggled to utilize the Tier II vocabulary words in sentences because they did not have enough background knowledge on the words and needed more scaffolding around creating sentences. As the study continued, it was important that the students receive instruction on the ten weekly words more often throughout the week and scaffolding of how to build a sentence around a word. Through scaffolding and building background knowledge, students grew to have a better understanding of how to incorporate the words into sentences. According to Appendix C, the rubric required students to correctly incorporate all ten words into complete sentences. Students were graded on an overall look at their work with all ten sentences. A few students had a keen understanding of Tier II vocabulary words at the beginning of the study and showed small to no growth after the seven-week study.
Figure 2. Weekly Word Assessment.

The second data collection was the performance assessment. At the end of each week, the students worked in randomly assigned pairs to define one of the five new Tier II vocabulary words, explain what the word means in their own words, write it in a sentence and draw a picture of what the word means (see Appendix G). Although the students worked in pairs, each student was graded separately to indicate his or her personal growth throughout the study. The teacher was able to grade separately through observations of students while working on the performance assessment, conversations with individual students and anecdotal notes taken during this weekly task. The chart has been minimized to show the first week and last week of data collection. It is clear that most students struggled the first week of this intervention. Again, this is due to the complex task of utilizing a Tier II vocabulary word in a sentence, writing what it means in their own words and drawing a picture to show the word meaning. Throughout the
study, students grew to have a better understanding on how to write a definition in their own words, write the word in a sentence and draw a picture to show that particular word through scaffolding and repeated practice each week. At least one student was absent on the day of the final performance assessment due to illness or unforeseen circumstances.

Figure 3. Performance Assessment.

At the end of the seven-week study, a second benchmark test was given to evaluate the effects of purposeful vocabulary instruction on students’ ability to understand Tier II vocabulary words and their reading comprehension. The chart shows the results from the post assessment data gathered from a benchmark test. At least one child was missing during the baseline assessment due to illness or unforeseen circumstances. Figure 4 shows 87 percent of the participants got the average amount correct on the vocabulary questions. One student was attempting, one student was approaching and the other 20 students scored at grade level. In comparison to the
baseline assessment, one student improved his/her score moving from significantly below grade level to at grade level, however, there was a bigger decrease in average percent correct on the vocabulary questions. Like the baseline assessment, students were able to perform better on the vocabulary section than the comprehension questions. The chart also includes an overall summary of comprehension scores, where 78% of the participants got the average amount correct. When the data is broken down further, three out of the 21 students are significantly below grade level, three are approaching grade level, and 16 students are at grade level on the assessment. In comparison to the baseline data, the post assessment data shows five students improved their scores moving from approaching grade level to at grade level while the overall percent correct had a two percent decrease. This shows that despite the interventions, students still struggled to understand the Tier II vocabulary words in context of a story and their comprehension scores decreased.
Throughout the study, the researcher took observational notes on what activities were used each week, observations/notes/details regarding implementation of Tier II interventions and observation/notes/details regarding student engagement as a result of the application of Tier II interventions. These notes were kept as a log for the teacher to reflect on how the purposeful vocabulary lessons were affecting students and the effectiveness of the interventions being used. Figure 5 shows the common themes present in notes regarding implementation. The most common was the modifications made throughout the study. Most of the modifications revolved around the weekly words. As mentioned above, students had a hard time incorporating the weekly words into sentences correctly; therefore, they were given more instruction on the Tier II vocabulary words each week and the researcher used scaffolding to help students incorporate the weekly words into sentences. The excitement in the way the students’ responded was another

*Figure 4. Post Assessment from Benchmark Test.*
common theme when working on the Tier II vocabulary words and noticing these words in other contexts beyond the literacy block.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Observational Notes on Implementation</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Modifications made throughout the study</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excitement</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>42.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for background knowledge</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 5. Qualitative Data from Notes on Implementation.*

Figure 6 shows qualitative data from notes regarding student engagement throughout the study. The chart indicates the top two categories were excitement about new knowledge and increased engagement when hearing the new Tier II vocabulary words in other settings than the literacy block. For example, students were excited to hear the vocabulary word *absurd* in a science journal while reading about solids and liquids. Students were proud of their ability to understand the word in context and felt confident about their comprehension skills, which increased engagement during lessons on Tier II vocabulary words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Observational Notes on Student Engagement</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excitement hearing the words in other settings</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>42.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excitement about new knowledge</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>42.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wide discrepancy in scoring with students</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewing the words during breaks in the day</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents mentioning their hard work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 6. Qualitative Data from Notes on Student Engagement.*

The data collected throughout the seven week study indicated a variety of results. The baseline assessment and post assessment showed students were able to understand Tier II vocabulary words in isolation. Students had the most difficulty with their ability to understand the Tier II vocabulary words in context of a reading passage on both of
Effects of Purposeful Vocabulary Instruction

these assessments. On the weekly words assessment, students started with low scores due to their lack of background knowledge and need for more teacher scaffolding. As the study progressed, students were able to improve their knowledge of how to incorporate Tier II vocabulary words into sentences and built a deeper understanding of the words. The performance assessment had the biggest impact on students’ ability to understand Tier II vocabulary words by having them write the definition, rewrite it in their own words, use it in a sentence and draw a picture. The Tier II vocabulary words used in this assessment were also present in the teacher led read aloud text which positively affected student engagement and implementation as noted by the teacher observational notes. It is clear that this intervention (performance assessment) was the most powerful on students’ ability to generalize knowledge of Tier II vocabulary words.

**Action Plan**

This study set out to determine the effects of purposeful Tier II vocabulary instruction on second grade students. Based on the data analyzed, there were three conclusions made on the impact of the interventions. The first was that students scored very high on the vocabulary section of both the baseline and post assessment. It is clear that students had an easier understanding of Tier II vocabulary words in isolation. In comparison, students struggled to comprehend the Tier II vocabulary words in the context of a story, which affected their comprehension scores. Both the baseline and post assessment scores for the comprehension section were lower than the vocabulary. Second, students were more successful when learning Tier II vocabulary words when they were able to make connections outside of learning the vocabulary word. For
example, during the performance assessment students focused on Tier II vocabulary words found in the class read aloud text. Students learned a Tier II vocabulary word, and during the week they heard that same word again during the teacher led read aloud. The connection made between learning the Tier II word and hearing it in context not only improved their scores on the performance assessment, but it also positively impacted their engagement according to teacher observational notes. Lastly, the teacher observational notes regarding the interventions used, implementation of interventions and student engagement were a way to be reflective at the end of each week and focus on modifications for students moving forward. The results of this study showed through building background knowledge and scaffolding there were positive effects of purposeful vocabulary instruction in the primary elementary classroom on students’ ability to learn and utilize Tier II vocabulary words.

These results will influence how I plan to continue to incorporate Tier II vocabulary instruction in my classroom. In many primary elementary classrooms, students do not have the opportunity to be exposed to Tier II vocabulary words due to the vocabulary focus only being on sight words and phonics. Although I will continue with work around sight words and phonic skills, I will begin the school year with introducing and focusing on Tier II vocabulary words found in our curricular areas. By doing this, my students can build background knowledge of a Tier II vocabulary word, understand the word and comprehend the word in the context of a subject area to deepen their comprehension. For example, while working on liquids and solids in science I could teach the students two Tier II vocabulary words, translucent and transparent, before we study these two properties. After learning the words and building our knowledge around
the word, when we begin the study of these two different properties in liquids, students
will hopefully have a better understanding of these Tier II words. In addition to building
background knowledge, I plan on continuing to use a once weekly shared reading. This
intervention will allow students to work in a whole group setting on a more difficult
grade level text. The purpose of the shared reading exercise is to teach students what
good readers do when they come to an unknown word. Students practice thinking about
the printed word on the page (Does that sound right? Does that look right?) and the
meaning the story conveys (Does that make sense?) when reading an unfamiliar Tier II
vocabulary word. The shared reading lesson helps students learn how to decipher a Tier
II vocabulary word using print or meaning and check their work without the support of a
teacher.

There are a few opportunities for further research. First, I would like to focus on
pulling Tier II vocabulary words exclusively from a read aloud text. In this study, it was
clear that this intervention was most successful for students. Focusing on these specific
Tier II vocabulary words heard in context of a story could be a powerful way to impact
students’ comprehension of the story and vocabulary word. Another area of study would
be to continue the research for the entirety of the year. This study was limited to seven
weeks and the results could have been altered with more time spent on digging into
various Tier II vocabulary words. Finally, when looking at student demographics, there
is an achievement gap between students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Hart
& Risley (2006) argued, as noted in Fien et al. (p. 308, 2011), vocabulary differences are
due to background differences starting as early as 3 years old. Students who struggle to
read and therefore read less are exposed to less words and even fewer vocabulary words
(Mahdavi & Tensfeldt, 2013, p. 77). By second grade the difference in word knowledge can range from 4,000 to 8,000 words (Fien, 2011). In further research, I would like to see how purposeful vocabulary instruction with Tier II vocabulary words affects test scores for low socioeconomic students in comparison to their peers.
References:


and vocabulary. *Psychology In The Schools, 47*(9), 903-916. doi:10.1002/pits.20513


Appendix A

Parental Permission Form

Dear Parents,

In addition to being your child’s second grade teacher, I am a St. Catherine University student pursuing a Masters of Education. As a capstone to my program, I need to complete an Action Research project. I am going to study the effects of purposeful vocabulary instruction on student’s literacy skills because vocabulary instruction is an important part of literacy development but is often overlooked in primary elementary grades (kindergarten, 1st and 2nd grade). I’m wondering how incorporating purposeful vocabulary instruction will affect my student’s literacy skills in second grade.

In the coming weeks, I will be: incorporating weekly word lists in the classroom based on texts we are reading; creating partner/group activities based on vocabulary words found in our read alouds; directing students to record themselves reading new vocabulary words in their own sentences into SeeSaw (where you will be able to hear their success as well!) and, using our benchmark assessments as a regular part of our classroom activities. All students will participate as members of the class. In order to understand the outcomes, I plan to analyze the data obtained from the results of these activities to determine how purposeful vocabulary instruction affects literacy skills. All the strategies I am using and the assessments given are part of normal educational practice.

The purpose of this letter is to notify you of this research and to allow you the opportunity to exclude your child’s data from my study.

If you decide you want your child’s data to be in my study, you don’t need to do anything at this point.

If you decide you do NOT want your child’s data included in my study, please note that on this form below and return it by 9/22/17. Note that your child will still participate in the activities--but his/her data will not be included in my analysis.

In order to help you make an informed decision, please note the following:

- I am working with a faculty member at St. Kate’s and an advisor to complete this particular project.
- Vocabulary instruction is an important part of the literacy framework. It helps students become more word conscious, have better understanding of what they are reading and encourages them to make sense of more difficult words. As students move from “learning to read” texts to “reading to learn” vocabulary will be an essential part of their learning success.
● I will be writing about the results that I get from this research. However, none of
the writing that I do will include the name of this school, the names of any
students, or any references that would make it possible to identify outcomes
connected to a particular student. Other people will not know if your child’s data
is in my study.

● The final report of my study will be electronically available online at the St.
Catherine University library. The goal of sharing my research study is to help
other teachers who are also trying to improve their teaching.

● There is no penalty for not having your child’s data involved in the study, I will
simply delete his or her responses from my data set.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, 763-734-5958. You may ask
questions now, or if you have any questions later, you can ask me, or my advisors, Amy
Adams – aeadams@stkate.edu or Julie Williams - julie.williams@isd728.org, who will
be happy to answer them. If you have questions or concerns regarding the study, and
would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you may also contact Dr. John
Schmitt, Chair of the St. Catherine University Institutional Review Board, at (651) 690-
7739.

You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

Kelsey Raasch ___________________________ Date ________________

OPT OUT: Parents, in order to exclude your child’s data from the study, please
sign and return by SEPTEMBER 22, 2017.

I do NOT want my child’s data to be included in this study.

______________________________   ________________
Signature of Parent       Date
Appendix B

VOCABULARY

Directions
Fill in the circle beside the word that best fits in the blank.

Sample E
My cat sleeps ____ my bed.
○ full
○ under
○ which

1. The big rock was too ____ to move.
   ○ loud
   ○ green
   ○ heavy

2. My father ____ our house.
   ○ built
   ○ thing
   ○ button

3. Lisa ____ the question.
   ○ fed
   ○ pleased
   ○ answered

4. I will ____ be a baby again.
   ○ always
   ○ never
   ○ without
Maybe Next Week

A cat named Indy stayed in all winter. She looked at the snow, but she did not go out. Indy hated to get wet. All winter, she slept on her green chair.

One morning, the air was warm. Robins sang new songs. The girl who lived in the house held the door open and said, “Indy, do you want to go out?”

Indy walked to the door. She sniffed the air. Indy smelled birds nesting and flowers growing. She smelled spring.

Indy stepped outside. The sun was as warm as her chair. She took another step. Then she felt a DRIP and then a DROP! Snow was melting off the roof.

Indy ran back into the house. Maybe next week she would try again.

What did Indy do first?
- She ran back into the house.
- She stepped outside.
- She sniffed the air.

Indy would probably not like
- hearing a bird.
- taking a bath.
- walking in a garden.
7. What made Indy run inside?
   - the girl calling to her
   - the chilly spring air
   - water dripping on her

8. What is this story mainly about?
   - nesting birds and growing flowers
   - the smell of spring
   - a cat that hates to get wet
Appendix C

Weekly Words Rubric:
Name: ____________________________   Date: _________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>0 Incomplete</th>
<th>1 Beginning</th>
<th>2 Developing</th>
<th>3 Approaching Grade Level</th>
<th>4 Grade Level</th>
<th>5 Distinguished</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student correctly incorporates weekly words into complete sentences.</td>
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Notes:
Appendix D

Read Aloud Tier Two words:
1. **Vacancy** - empty space - in this case an open room
2. **Quaint** - unusual or old-fashioned.
3. **Protest** - disapproval of or objection to something - not liking something and saying so
4. **Momentum** - speed when something is moving
5. **Eager** - wanting to do or have something very much

1. Introduce the new word
2. Use student friendly definition
3. Have the students say the word to improve memory and definition
4. Use examples in other sentences of the word
5. Create ways for the students to interact with the word in different ways
   a. Tell something to your partner that would be *absurd*. “It would be *absurd* to….”
   b. Word Associations (p. 53) -- for example: “which would go with *kindergartener*? (*novice*)
   c. Have you ever….? -- This helps student associate new words with their background knowledge.
      “Tell me about a time you might *urge* someone”
   d. Applause, Applause! -- “Clap the most for a word you would like to best describe you, clap the least for a word you would like to not describe you”
   e. Which would…? -- “Which would you rather *anticipate* a holiday or going to the doctor? Why?”
### Performance Assessment Rubric:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>0 Incomplete</th>
<th>1 Beginning</th>
<th>2 Developing</th>
<th>3 Approaching Grade Level</th>
<th>4 Grade Level</th>
<th>5 Distinguished</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student’s work together to complete a performance assessment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student shows active understanding of the new vocabulary words.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student applies knowledge to other scenarios or schema.</td>
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Appendix F

An Afternoon with Lin

Lin and Susan are friends. They go to the same school, and they like to play together.

One day Lin asked Susan, “Would you like to come to my house after school tomorrow? My mother will give us tea.”

“I’ve never had tea,” answered Susan. “What is it?”

“Tea is a drink made with hot water and dried leaves,” replied Lin.

So Susan asked her mother if she could go to Lin’s house after school. Her mother said yes.

“Lin’s mother will give us tea,” said Susan.

“That will be fun for you,” said Susan’s mother. “I’ll call Lin’s mother and ask about this.”

Susan’s mother called Lin’s mother on the telephone.

Lin’s mother told Susan’s mother, “In China, the country where we used to live, drinking tea was very important. Now we are making new friends and doing new things, but we still like to drink tea and remember our time in China.”
The next day, Susan went to Lin's house. Lin showed Susan the small cups that her family brought from China and used for drinking tea. They were very beautiful.

The two girls drank their tea and ate small, sweet cakes.

"Do you like the tea, Susan?" asked Lin.

"I think it's very good," answered Susan. "Thank you for asking me to drink it with you."

"You are a nice girl," said Lin's mother. "I am glad you're Lin's friend."

"And I am glad Lin is my friend!" said Susan.

9. Where is Lin's mother during the story?
   A. at her own home
   B. in China
   C. at Lin's school

10. What happened first?
   A. Susan's mother called Lin's mother on the telephone.
   B. Lin asked Susan to come to her house for tea.
   C. Lin's mother asked Susan if she liked tea.

11. Why did Lin invite Susan to come to her house?
   A. Susan asked for some tea.
   B. Susan's mother called Lin's mother.
   C. Lin and Susan are friends.
12. What happened after Lin showed the small cups to Susan?
   A. Susan and Lin drank some tea.
   B. Lin and her parents came from China.
   C. Susan asked to go to Lin’s house.

13. The story “An Afternoon with Lin” is
   A. a fantasy that could never really happen.
   B. a make-believe story that could not happen.
   C. a realistic story that could actually happen.

14. Which words describe Susan?
   A. noisy and funny
   B. afraid and disappointed
   C. polite and nice

15. Giving someone tea is a sign of
   A. wishing they would go home.
   B. showing that you like them.
   C. wondering where they are from.

16. Why did the author tell us about tea?
   A. so that we could learn about something new
   B. because it was a funny thing to write about
   C. so that we could see how sad Lin was
PART 2: HIGH-FREQUENCY WORDS

17. Dad said I could bring a friend to the game. I ___________ my pal Steve.
   A. break
   B. bought
   C. brought

18. "I'm going shopping," said Pat. "You may ___________ stay at home or come along."
   A. either
   B. enough
   C. everybody

19. Tim liked to look for shells in the sand.
    ___________ he found a sand dollar!
   A. Worst
   B. Once
   C. Above

20. What will Mom give us for a snack?
    She will ___________ give us an apple.
   A. promise
   B. probably
   C. brought

21. My parents like to work in the yard.
    Many other ___________ on our street do too.
   A. people
   B. pleasant
   C. promise

22. "It's very cold out," Dad told us.
    "___________ going to need to take your coat."
   A. Sorry
   B. Worst
   C. You're
Appendix G

Names: ____________________________________________________________

Word: ____________________________________________________________

The definition of the word in our own words: ____________________________________________________________

The word in a sentence! ____________________________________________________________

A picture that helps me understand the word: ____________________________________________________________