

Florida Center for Reading Research

Elements of Reading: Vocabulary

What is Elements of Reading: Vocabulary?

Elements of Reading: Vocabulary (Vocabulary) is an oral vocabulary instruction program, originally designed for kindergarten through third grade students. Added to this report is the review of the new fourth and fifth grade materials. *Vocabulary* is based on research and written by Drs. Isabel L. Beck and Margaret G. McKeown. *Vocabulary* is one component of a modular reading program by Steck-Vaughn, an imprint of Harcourt Achieve. Each of the components: Vocabulary, Fluency, Comprehension, and Phonemic Awareness and Phonics have been flexibly designed to use together or separately for supplementing specific areas of need. The focus of this report is *Vocabulary*.

Beck, McKeown, and Linda Kucan's years of research and classroom practice are described in their book, *Bringing Words to Life (2002)*. This widely read book was the catalyst behind the creation of *Elements of Reading: Vocabulary*. The authors use their research findings to provide the rationale for the content and strategies presented in *Vocabulary*. The study of rich, robust words that are not ordinarily found in a young child's speaking vocabulary but would most probably be in their conceptual lexicon is the hallmark feature of the program. Understanding the concept that children must be encouraged to take pleasure in language, and that new vocabulary words must be repeatedly heard and used in a variety of contexts before they become fixed in their vocabulary is the underlying theme of the instructional techniques presented in *Vocabulary*.

The program's layout, design, and pedagogy are consistent through out the grade level sequence. A scope and sequence for grades K-3 is presented in each of the Teacher's Guides. Standards for vocabulary, comprehension, writing, as well as the genre of each read aloud, are included in the scope and sequence. Grades 4-5 list the standards and genre separately as there is no scope and sequence.

While the program is designed to be taught to the whole class by the regular classroom teacher, teachers may choose to adapt all or portions of each lesson for small group instruction. Lesson implementation will require approximately 20 minutes a day. On day 1, each lesson begins with a read aloud selection from the anthology followed by a discussion of the new vocabulary words. The new words are posted on the Word Watcher Chart and tally marks are used to record the students' use of the words throughout the week. On day 2, photo cards that express the concept of the vocabulary words are presented to prompt engaging activities and discussion. Attention is focused on linking the words to the children's experiences. The discussions for grades 4-5 prepare students for an activity in the Writer's Log. This written activity is guided by the teacher and is intended to enable students to further their understanding of the new words through sentence completion. A tip for ELL support is included on this day. On day 3, interactive workbook activities provide the opportunity to use the words in various contexts. For grades 4-5, Day 3 starts with a discussion of the words in various contexts. Then, students independently read a new selection containing the words, and conclude by recounting their favorite part of the story incorporating the new words during a whole group discussion. This is followed by an activity from the Writer's Log which provides students with a prompt to encourage a written response to their reading, using as



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many of the words as possible. Day 3 also includes a Word Challenge which involves an exploration of the new words through synonyms, antonyms, roots, and multiple meanings, further serving to deepen their understanding. In K-5 graphic organizers are used to reinforce the meanings of the vocabulary words on day 4. Additionally, for grades 4-5, a Writer's Log activity involving a word puzzle concludes the lesson. An oral review, a weekly assessment, and an oral cumulative assessment encompass the lesson on day 5 for K-5.

Each grade level kit is stored in a tote box and contains: the Teacher's Guide which includes comprehensive lesson and instructional techniques for vocabulary instruction, the Read-Aloud Anthology with twenty-four selections of children's literature that span a variety of genre, a set of photo cards that illustrate the vocabulary words by depicting children in realistic photographs, the word watcher chart used as a motivational springboard for encouraging the students to document their daily use of the vocabulary words, and a student workbook to be used interactively with the teacher led activities and assessments. In grades 4-5, a Writer's Log replaces the student workbook and written assessments are found in the back of the Teacher's Guide. No Word Watcher Chart is included for grades 4-5; rather, the Teacher's Guide illustrates various types of charts that may be constructed and personalized. The materials are well organized and error free however, the flexibility in design causes some confusion as to when to first present the vocabulary words in the read aloud anthology in the K-3 materials. The 4-5 read aloud anthology provides clear information as to when to first present the vocabulary words.

The assessment piece in each lesson begins with a teacher directed oral review followed by a written assessment in the student workbook. The assessment format affords students practice for standardized tests (teachers read the assessment to kindergarten and first grade students). A cumulative review that combines the words from the previous week with the current vocabulary words for an oral assessment is found in the Teacher's Guide. The Word Watcher Chart provides an informal assessment tool, as teachers hear and analyze their student's acquisition of the words throughout the week.

How is Elements of Reading: Vocabulary aligned with Reading First?

Introducing robust vocabulary words through rich literature, explicit vocabulary instruction, oral instruction, personalization and active engagement, multiple contexts, ample practice, and links to reading comprehension are the cornerstones of this program. Traditional vocabulary instruction has been focused on teaching the words that students need to know in order to gain meaning from the material they are reading (e.g., teaching *peninsula* to understand the geographic description of the state of Florida). Typically, students have learned definitions, but have not been provided rich experiences in using words in a variety of contexts. So, although most educators assumed they were teaching vocabulary, they were in fact doing little to actually insure the acquisition of words. Realization of the need for direct vocabulary instruction targeted on words that will be most productive for expanding children's reading vocabulary led the authors to identify three tiers of words. Tier one words are the basic words found in most children's spoken vocabulary, words such as book, house, and baby. These words are used frequently and their meanings don't usually need to be taught (with the exception of students with limited English proficiency). Tier three words are used in specific arenas so are not used as often and are not as productive to teach in general vocabulary lessons. Words such as *cumulus* and *isotope* are considered tier three words, and should be taught in the context of specific lessons

in science, etc. Tier two words such as *occurrence* and *scrumptious* are used frequently and across many situations for expression in writing and to gain knowledge when reading. These words are often missing from the vocabularies of young children, but the underlying concepts they express are already understood. Thus, the second tier words were chosen for the explicit vocabulary instruction that is found in *Elements of Reading: Vocabulary*.

The program format is systematic with weekly lessons that are closely patterned after the activities described in *Bringing Words to Life*. The program embodies excellent literature that spans a variety of genres and is used to introduce the new vocabulary. Explaining the concepts of the words using every day language, not stiff dictionary definitions, and connecting the words to known concepts is an important part of the program. Photo cards are used to depict the concepts the words represent as they relate to the students' experiences. The program also includes a systematic method of providing repeated exposure to the words through lively activities and discussions to ensure the words become fixed in the students' vocabulary. The spontaneous use of the words among the children is celebrated through the Word Watcher Chart. Finally, parents are encouraged to become involved with the oral vocabulary development their children are experiencing at school through take home letters and a web-based parent place that provides activities for reinforcement.

Although, the content and activities for teaching vocabulary are explicitly described within each component of the lesson, there is some confusion regarding the method of delivery for grades K-3. Additionally, it would be beneficial in grades 4-5 for teachers to offer small group instruction to the most struggling readers who might have difficulty reading the text from Day 3 independently. Explicit professional development to direct educators in the best practice of delivery would strengthen this aspect of the program.

The professional development that is offered when a school or district purchases *Vocabulary* will vary according to the level of implementation. These levels include a simple half-day program implementation training conducted by the sales representative, a full day training conducted by consultant staff, and additional consultant services for larger implementations. The simple implementation training encompasses an introduction of the materials, management, getting started, and a walk through. District personnel may request specific adjustments, as program consultants will accommodate the needs while maintaining the integrity of the content in *Vocabulary*. *Vocabulary* does not require specific levels of implementation for purchasing. The fidelity of implementation is insured when teachers follow the strategies and routines that are specified in the teacher materials.

Research Support for Elements of Reading: Vocabulary



Vocabulary became available in January 2004, and is based on research that is linked to the recommendations of the National Reading Panel (2000) in the area of vocabulary development. During the 2004-2005 academic year, a study (Apthorp, in press) to determine the impact of *Vocabulary* on third grade students' vocabulary and reading achievement was conducted in fifteen classrooms from seven Title I schools in three districts, across two different sites.

Site A was situated in one district in a southern state. 92% of the students were African American with 90% qualifying for free and reduced lunch. McGraw-Hill

Reading was implemented in the classrooms. Dynamic Indicators of Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) (Good & Good, 2002) was used for progress monitoring.

Site B was situated in two neighboring districts in a northeastern state. 74% of the students were Caucasian with 24%-35% qualifying for free and reduced lunch. Two schools in Site B used McGraw-Hill Spotlight on Literacy while the third school used Scholastic Literacy Place. Guided Reading with books leveled according to Fountas and Pinnell (1996) and embedded skills instruction was implemented in these classrooms. Progress monitoring was completed with running records.

The study consisted of a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Third grade teachers within each site and in each school were randomly assigned to receive either the vocabulary program or to continue with their typical daily instruction. Treatment classrooms received 24 weekly lessons from *Vocabulary*, taught daily for approximately 20 minutes in addition to reading instruction described above. Control classrooms varied in their vocabulary instruction. Site A control teachers either did not teach vocabulary, thought of spelling instruction as vocabulary instruction, or followed the vocabulary instruction from the Teacher's Guide of the basal program. For Site B, control teachers taught vocabulary in the context of reading and writing activities.

The vocabulary and comprehension subtests of the Early Reading Diagnostic Assessment (ERDA, 2nd ed.: The Psychological Corporation, 2003) served as the assessment tool for pre- and posttests. In addition to the ERDA, the vocabulary and comprehension subtests of the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test (GMRT; 4th ed.) Level 3 (MacGinitie, MacGinitie, Maria, & Dreyer, 2000) were administered as posttest measures of reading achievement.

According to the statistical analyses provided in the report, the students who received the vocabulary instruction at Site A showed greater growth in reading vocabulary and comprehension outcomes than did students in the control group. In contrast, the vocabulary instruction did not have a significant impact on growth in these areas for treatment students from Site B.

Although treatment students from Site A performed significantly better than control students, they were still unable to meet grade level standards in reading comprehension, suggesting that further research is needed to explore the amount of instruction that might be necessary to bring students to grade level. In sum, this study provides some initial evidence of effectiveness for *Vocabulary*. However, future well-designed studies, using random assignment, with equivalent scores on pretests between the experimental and control groups, would strengthen the efficacy evidence for this program.

Strengths & Weaknesses

Strengths of *Elements of Reading: Vocabulary*:

- High quality, realistic photo cards used for compare and contrast activities promote the use of the vocabulary words.
- Oral vocabulary instruction is systematic and explicit, and instruction is extended over several days to encourage deep processing.
- The program design encourages repeated use of the vocabulary words.
- The Writer's Log for grades 4-5 offers a wide variety of interesting and motivating writing activities to reinforce understanding.
- The read aloud anthology offers prompts and suggestions to increase students' comprehension, such as building background knowledge before reading, and posing questions strategically during reading.

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Weaknesses of *Elements of Reading: Vocabulary*:

- The instructional delivery lends itself to whole group response answers, which negatively affects the teacher's ability to insure individual mastery of the vocabulary words. However, the weekly assessment piece in the student book may, in part, overcome this.

Which Florida districts have schools that implement Vocabulary K-3?

* Counties that implement Vocabulary K-5

Bay	850-872-7700	Hendry	863-674-4642	Orange*	407-317-3202
Broward*	754-321-2600	Hernando	352-797-7001	Osceola	407-870-4008
Calhoun	850-674-5927	Highlands	863-471-5564	Palm Beach	561-434-8200
Charlotte	941-255-0808	Hillsborough	813-272-4050	Pinellas*	727-588-6011
Clay	904-284-6510	Holmes*	850-547-9341	Polk*	863-534-0521
Collier*	239-377-0212	Indian River*	772-564-3150	Putnam	386-329-0510
Columbia*	386-755-8003	Jackson*	850-482-1200	St. Lucie	772-429-3925
Dade	305-995-1430	Lake	352-253-6510	Sarasota*	941-927-9000
Desoto	863-494-4222	Lee*	239-337-8301	Seminole*	407-320-0006
Dixie	352-498-6131	Manatee	941-708-8770	Suwannee	386-364-2604
Duval*	904-390-2115	Marion*	352-671-7702	Union	386-496-2045
Gadsden	850-627-9651	Martin	772-219-1200	Volusia*	386-734-7190
Glades	863-946-2083	Monroe	305-293-1400		
Gulf	850-229-8256	Okaloosa	850-833-3109		

For More Information

www.harcourtachieve.com

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