Book Study

Prepared by the
Kansas Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS) Project

Bringing Words to Life, Robust Vocabulary Instruction

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Book Description:
Bringing Words to Life **is an excellent resource that provides research-based strategies for vocabulary development with children from the earliest grades through high school. It explains why providing rich information about words and their uses enhance students' language comprehension and production. Teachers are guided in selecting words for instruction, developing student-friendly explanations of new words, creating meaningful learning activities and getting students involved in thinking about, using, and noticing new words both within and outside the classroom. "You Try It" sections are provided to give teachers exercises to bring the concepts to life. Appendices are included in the back. Appendix A gives lists of books rich in vocabulary for kindergarten through second grade. Appendix B offers lists of books for creating a lively verbal environment.**
Target Audience:
Tier 1 teachers or interventionists working with students who are accurate and fluent, but are not comprehending at grade level.

Chapter 1: Rationale for Robust Vocabulary Instruction

Overview

This chapter provides a rationale for teaching vocabulary in an explicit and systematic way. It provides a perspective for thinking about how students learn words, not just a variety of strategies to teach new vocabulary. It discusses why direct vocabulary instruction is important and what it means to really know a word.

Helpful Hints

To begin thinking about vocabulary, have group members read the preface before the first session and be ready to share a memory or experience with learning new vocabulary as a child or adult. Have the group leader bring an article described in the "You Try It" section on page 7. Also, continue thinking about the population you work with while discussing vocabulary. Where do they fall on the continuum of low or high word knowledge?

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the attributes of each of the three tiers of vocabulary words. How can this help educators narrow the focus of which words specifically to teach to their students?

2. Why is independent reading not adequate in order for students to develop their vocabularies?

3. Thinking of the Multi-Tier System of Supports, how can we support struggling readers to reinforce vocabulary they need in order to be successful in the regular education classroom?

4. Fill out the chart on page 12. As a group, discuss how a person could use these words in multiple ways in order to "own" their new word.

Chapter 2: Choosing Words to Teach

Overview
This chapter helps educators make sound decisions about what kinds of words are important to teach. Criteria are given for selecting words for instruction. Examples throughout the chapter help educators put the criteria to use. Remember: if you can explain what the word means, you can teach it to others.

Helpful Hints
The goal of this chapter is to be able to identify words for instruction. Come prepared to briefly share the "Your Turn" section on page 30 whether it's at an adult or student level. In step 3, be prepared to share which words you would focus on for struggling readers in a Tier-2 setting.

Discussion Questions

1. To gain practice in identifying Tier Two words, have your group select and discuss which words you would choose from the passage on page 18. Compare your words with the ones the authors chose. Did they fit the criteria for identifying Tier Two words by looking at importance and utility, instructional potential and conceptual understanding?

2. Share an example of a beginning reader text that has more Tier One vocabulary. Discuss how educators can enrich the vocabulary for struggling readers that are reading books with very limited text.

3. Discuss the distinctions between vocabulary work with primary and older students. How could understanding these concepts help with planning instruction with older struggling readers in a Multi-Tier System of Supports?

4. Discuss the criteria of knowing when a word is simply too hard for a student to understand.

Chapter 3: Introducing Vocabulary

Overview
Chapter 3 takes a close look at the foundation for all vocabulary instruction. Issues are raised about relying on dictionary definitions. Suggestions are given for teaching vocabulary so students can explain the word's meaning rather than its definition. This chapter presents ways to make vocabulary introduction more effective by making word meanings explicit and clear. Students need to be actively involved with thinking about and using the meanings immediately.

Helpful Hint
In pairs look up one of the following words in the dictionary: elute, obviate, sigil. After reading the dictionary definition, how well are you able to use or teach the word to someone else? Keep this activity in mind as you work through Chapter 3.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the problems of using dictionary definitions for teaching the meanings of words.

2. How would you develop student-friendly lessons so students can explain a word's meaning instead of providing a definition?

3. In small groups, do the "You Try It" section on pages 38-39.   Try these with your students and share the effectiveness at the next book study session.

4. Keeping your struggling readers in mind, how might scaffolding instruction be used with a Tier-2 group?

5. Choose one of the four vocabulary activities on pages 44-45 to do with the book study group. Discuss how each activity could be used during core instruction as well as a small Tier-2 group.

Chapter 4: Developing Vocabulary in the Earliest Grades

Overview
This chapter focuses on developing vocabulary for young children. A sequence of activities is included for introducing sophisticated words to young children and engaging them in interacting with word meanings. Enriching the listening and speaking vocabularies of young children can be found by selecting Tier Two words from children's trade books. Tier Two words are the ones that children will be able to use in many contexts and instructional activities to add to their repertoire of words.

Helpful Hints
Choose one of the books from Appendix A, pgs. 131-137, or a book that you are currently using. Bring it to the book study for developing a sequenced activity for teaching words to young children.

Discussion Questions

1. Review the concepts of the three tiers of words and how this relates to resources for vocabulary development for young children just beginning to read.

2. What are the two goals of implementing Text Talk in your classroom? Using the book you brought, use the criteria described in the "You Try It" section on page 50 to develop a Text Talk lesson.

3. For further vocabulary development to be used for students in a Tier-2 group, use the same book. Choose one of the activities that encourage children to interact with words listed in the "You Try It" section on page 59. Read through the samples on pages 60-66 for ideas on developing your activities.

4. Discuss how educators can ensure students will maintain their new vocabulary learning?

Chapter 5: Developing Vocabulary in the Later Grades

Overview

In Chapter 5 the focus changes to developing vocabulary activities for students in later grades. Providing rich information about words along with frequent opportunities to use and consider the words will help them understand new vocabulary. Extending attention to words beyond the lesson becomes even more critical at the upper grades because words become more complex.

Helpful Hints

As you're reading this chapter, take the time to actually do the word activities provided. Be prepared to create questions and assessment items for Tier Two words that are currently being used in your classroom.

Discussion Questions

1. Describe the kind of instruction that inspires and supports true word ownership.

2. Discuss the importance of the three features of frequency, richness and extended instruction for effective vocabulary instruction.

3. Explain the concept of "relationships among words" and explain why it's important to word knowledge.

4. Reflect on the "Results of Frequent, Rich, Extended Instruction" section that starts on the bottom of page 77. How can educators use these results to support struggling readers in Tier-2 vocabulary groups?

5. As a group, brainstorm five robust words around the theme of "words relating to heat". Using the examples on pages 79-85, create vocabulary activities for the five chosen words.

6. Discuss the similarities and differences in vocabulary work between middle school and high school students.

7. How will educators monitor the progress of their students' vocabulary development in a Multi-Tier System of Supports?

Chapter 6: Making the Most of Natural Contexts

Overview
Chapter 6 focuses on teaching students how to make the most of natural contexts in deriving word meanings. Educators will learn specific strategies for helping students use natural contexts appropriately. Because of the unreliability of natural contexts, instruction needs to be presented as a process of figuring out meaning, not simply the product.

Helpful Hints

Before discussing this chapter, review the four categories of natural context from Chapter One on pages 4 and 5.

Discussion Questions

1. Review the role and effectiveness of using context clues to derive word meanings.

2. Think about your targeted Tier-2 students. Complete the "You Try It" activity on page 108 to determine if they have similar characteristics as the low ability students described in this chapter. As a group, brainstorm an instructional sequence to best meet the needs of these students.

3. Compare and contrast the words product and process when thinking about word knowledge.

Chapter 7: Enriching the Verbal Environment

Overview

Chapter 7 provides techniques and resources for creating a rich verbal environment in which attention to word meanings and uses is ongoing. Educators who provide opportunities for using sophisticated, interesting and precise language are probably the most important element in this environment.

Helpful Hints

When reading this chapter, utilize Appendix B for finding resources to make students' learning environments full of lively, rich words. Bring a favorite poem or passage as an example of rich language.

Discussion Questions

1. Brainstorm different ways educators can apply sophisticated words to everyday situations. How can sprinkling new words in their environment help students become more interested in new words?

2. How could introducing the Word Wizard or The Suggestion Box into your classroom increase students' abilities to pay attention to words both in and beyond the classroom?

3. Brainstorm ways educators can bring forth their own curiosity about words to increase the ability of using more mature words in their classrooms.

4. How can you use these beyond the classroom activities and resources to target the interest of lower language students in your classroom?

5. As you leave this book study, focus on one of the activities from page 129 to implement what you have learned.