Strategy
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Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy

Promoting Word Consciousness

STRATEGY OVERVIEW

Teachers in content area classrooms know that robust academic vocabularies are required for students' success in learning content knowledge. They are also aware of the sheer volume of complex words across the disciplines that students need to know to support their learning. Therefore, strategies that promote students' word consciousness to support independent word learning are critical for their academic success.

The purpose of the *Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy* (VSS) is to motivate students to learn new words by promoting a "long-term acquisition and development of the vocabulary of academic disciplines" with the goal of integrating "new content words into students' working vocabularies" (Ruddell, 2005, p. 166). As students develop word consciousness, or an interest in words, as well as the strategy for becoming a word collector, they will increase their academic vocabularies when confronted with unknown words from varied disciplines. The primary purpose of the VSS is to deepen students' understanding of words, promote their interest in new words, and offer them a strategy to identify and learn new and fascinating words.

Many educators have argued for the need to develop students' curiosity of new and interesting words. Graves's (2006, 2008) model of a long-term vocabulary program argues for the need for developing word consciousness as one of its critical components for teaching vocabulary that promises to lead to increased word knowledge. Briefly, *word consciousness* is having "an interest in and awareness of words" (Scott & Nagy, 2004, p. 202). With an expanding curiosity in words, students become motivated to learn new words on their own. This is especially useful for students in content area classrooms where they are expected to learn a wide range of technical and nontechnical words to understand the discipline (Harmon, Wood, & Hedrick, 2006; Nagy & Townsend, 2012). Ruddell and Shearer (2002) demonstrated that the VSS with middle school students has been an effective means for "increasing the depth and breadth of student vocabulary knowledge and for developing students' ability to be strategic, independent word learners" (p. 361).

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**Common Core State Standards: English Language Arts>
College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Language**

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.4 Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.6 Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.

STEP-BY-STEP PROCEDURE

The VSS is most effective when it is used with small groups of students working together. Fundamental to its success is the role that academic talk plays throughout this procedure as well as the teacher's own demonstrative interest in words. Briefly, the strategy consists of selecting, defining, finalizing, and using words (Tierney & Readence, 2005). The following procedure presents what the teacher and students do before, during, and after reading using the VSS in content area classrooms.

BEFORE READING

The teacher selects the reading that is appropriate for the topic that will be developed and decides on the words that students need to know to comprehend the text. Through modeling the process of using the VSS, the teacher demonstrates how to use the strategy.

1. The teacher reads the first paragraph aloud to the students.

2. The teacher then projects a copy of the reading on the screen and uses a think-aloud as a way of modeling how to select words that are important for understanding the reading. The teacher indicates her or his interest in a word that may result from not knowing the word or finding it difficult or interesting. She or he shares with the class the need to know something more about the word to understand the text.

3. The teacher then projects a graphic organizer that includes a box for the word, the reason for selecting the word, and the definition of the word as shown in Figure 2.1, Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy Chart. She or he writes the word in the appropriate box, says the word, and asks the students why they think she or he chose this word as an important one for learning. The teacher then writes the reason in the appropriate box. Finally, the teacher defines the word, writing the definition in the next box.

Figure 2.1	Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy Chart

Name: _____   Date: _____

Topic: _____   Pages: _____

WORD	REASON FOR SELECTION	DEFINITION

During Reading

The teacher directs the students to read selected passages from the text and after reading the passages to do the following:

1. After reading, revisit the text and select at least five words that they think are important to their understanding of the reading or that they found interesting or challenging.

2. Complete the VSS Student Chart in Figure 2.1, which directs them to write the word, the reason for selecting the word, and a definition of the word if they know it.

After Reading

Students are divided into small groups that include students with varying reading abilities, ELL students, and those from different cultures. The groups will focus their

discussions on the words they have selected and their reasons for choosing the words. Using their texts and completed VSS charts, each group is directed to do the following:

1. The group appoints one student to act as leader, whose role is to keep the discussion moving as they focus their talk on the words they have selected.

2. Each student submits one word he or she has selected and provides the reason for choosing the word, which becomes the focus of the discussion. The discussion may center on the word's meaning, the importance of the word in understanding the text, whether other members of the group selected the word, or another reason. The group then decides whether the word should be selected for the group chart.

3. The group leader uses the group chart to record the word, the reason it has been selected by the group, and the word's contextual definition. Each group limits the number of words included on the VSS group chart to five.

4. Writing the contextual meaning of each word is the last step of using the VSS. Students then validate the meaning of each word through the use of a dictionary or the glossary that may be found in the text.

5. After the small-group discussion, the teacher brings the groups together for a class discussion. Each group leader reports to the class, providing the list of words selected by the small group. The teacher or student records the words on the VSS class chart, along with reasons for choosing the word and the contextual meanings.

6. The teacher may list additional words overlooked by students that are required for understanding the text. For words with a high difficulty level that students do not understand, the teacher provides direct instruction, focusing on the words' contextual meanings.

Extensions of Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy

To extend the VSS, (1) students use personal dictionaries to add the words and meanings selected by the groups and the teacher. They are encouraged to add their own words whether they were considered as a key word needed to understand the text or simply a word of interest. Another extension of VSS includes (2) the use of selected words by the teacher to create a thematic or topical word wall. One way that students make the word their own is through frequent use and exposure to the word. The teacher makes reference to the words during class discussions and encourages students to use the words in their writing assignments, discussions, and projects.

DIFFERENTIATING INSTRUCTION FOR STRIVING READERS

Students who are struggling readers may benefit from working with a partner when first using the VSS. Asking students who have difficulty reading the text to select words that they think are important in understanding the text or are challenging may be overwhelming to striving readers. To partner students with a proficient reader would provide a scaffold to less-proficient readers in learning the process of identifying key words or any word that is challenging or interesting. Through discussion, students articulate the reasons for selecting the words that lead to their understanding new words.

CONSIDERING THE LANGUAGE NEEDS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS (ACADEMIC DISCOURSE)

Students who are learning the English language benefit from engaging in discussion about the meanings of words when talk is sheltered and collaborative. Therefore, when teachers form small groups for discussion, it is important that ELL students are placed with other students who are supportive of members of the group and accept their contributions. When recording key words on their VSS charts, they may use the native language word along with the English word.

INTEGRATING THE NEW LITERACIES

After introduction to the VSS, students should be moving toward independence in their word consciousness. To ease the search for definitions of words aside from contextual definitions, students could be encouraged to use the visual thesaurus (www.visualthesaurus.com). For each word search, a word web is created on which adjectives, nouns, or adverbs and the definition are color coded and include examples of the word's use. The visual thesaurus has limited free access, but there are special fees for educators. Free online dictionaries are plentiful (Merriam-webster.com, dictionary.reference.com, and Oxforddictionaries.com), but the Free Dictionary (www.thefreedictionary.com) not only offers an English dictionary but also provides thesaurus entries, acronyms and abbreviations, idioms, a literature reference, and medical, legal, and financial dictionaries. In addition, foreign-language dictionaries are available in Spanish, German, French, Italian, Chinese, Portuguese, Dutch, Norwegian, Greek, Arabic, Polish, Turkish, and Russian.

AN APPLICATION FOR A BUSINESS LEARNING COMMUNITY

In an introductory business law class, students were introduced to the topic of *contracts*. The teacher directed the students to use the VSS to select important words from their readings that they needed to learn and to collect other words that were especially interesting and challenging. After students read the text, they reread the passages to find words they thought were important for knowing and understanding the text. Small-group discussions yielded the list of words found in Figure 2.2, Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy Chart: Contracts.

Figure 2.2	Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy Chart: Contracts	
Class: Period 3		Date: 2/3/2007
Topic: An introduction to contracts		Pages: 45–56
WORD	*REASON FOR SELECTION*	*DEFINITIONS*
Contract	We will be reading about contracts. So this is an important word.	A contract is an agreement between two people.

(Continued)

Figure 2.2	(Continued)	
WORD	*REASON FOR SELECTION*	*DEFINITIONS*
Breach	This sounds like it has to do with not keeping the contract.	To breach a contract means to break the promises made in the contract.
Executed contract	This is an important word because it has to do with carrying out the contract.	An executed contract is one that has been carried out by the parties that made an agreement.
Goods	This word sounds like it has to do with property that is part of a contract.	Goods are personal property that can be transported or moved.
Real property	This is a kind of property that must be part of an agreement.	Real property is property that cannot be moved, like a house or an acre of land.
Parties	Parties must be those who are part of the contract.	Parties are people who sign the agreement or the contract. They are part of the contract.
Informal contracts	These types of contracts will be studied.	Informal contracts are types of contracts that are not formal. A lease for an apartment is an informal contract.

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