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TARGETED VOCABULARY STRATEGIES

FOR SECONDARY SOCIAL STUDIES

TINA HEAFNER & DIXIE MASSEY

Project Coordinator: Dr. Aaron Willis
Editor: Roberta Dempsey
Editorial Assistant: Lindsey Drager
Cover Illustration and Layout Design: A.R. Harter

10200 Jefferson Boulevard, P.O. Box 802
Culver City, CA 90232-0802
United States of America

(310) 839-2436
(800) 421-4246

Fax: (800) 944-5432
Fax: (310) 839-2249

www.socialstudies.com
access@socialstudies.com

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PREFACE

Twenty years ago I (Tina) began my journey as a high school social studies teacher. While my path led me to pursue university teaching after seven years in the classroom, I am still entrenched in the belief that my preparation of teachers has to be grounded in the realities of American public schools. As a result, I have spent much of my time in higher education observing how teachers teach and exploring how students learn in secondary social studies classrooms. Over the past eight years I have taught a social studies methods course at a local high school and facilitated an afterschool tutoring program to help struggling secondary students learn social studies. The lessons that I gleaned from these experiences are the impetus for writing this book.

Originally, I thought the source of student frustration and lack of academic achievement was related to missing reading comprehension skills; however, over time I came to understand that most high school students are in general good readers and exercise sound literacy skills. The students that I worked with in tutoring could read a social studies text aloud well, but struggled to put into their own words the meaning and significance of the narrative. As I guided tutors and their students each week, a reoccurring emphasis on vocabulary instruction resonated. Despite curriculum changes, grade level differences, and student literacy skill-sets, the main function of each tutoring lesson served to teach and reinforce social studies word learning. While the format of lessons might vary from review of word lists, geographical mapping of terms, to textbook reading, the main source of student struggles was the gap in familiarity with social studies terms and concepts. Overwhelmingly, student comprehension and content understanding was tied to social studies word awareness.

In my constant professional challenge of honing my knowledge and skills so that I might better direct the work of teachers, tutors, and students in more targeted work, I immersed myself in examining current vocabulary research. I also sought the expertise of a dear friend and literacy expert, Dr. Dixie Massey. Together we ploughed through a wealth of information to find that, while there were tons of strategies available, an organizational structure for purposefully integrating these methods into the curriculum was missing. Vocabulary teaching as we observed through our tutoring projects had to be consistent, frequent, and easily replicable. Additionally, we noted that there were specific points in the learning process in which certain strategies were more meaningful and effective. The vocabulary strategies that students used to be familiar with words were not the same methods they used to connect words to broader concepts. While students were learning words with isolated strategies, they were not able to translate vocabulary learning into consistent improvement in academic achievement. They could recognize words, define words but could not use words to promote comprehension while reading or in other contexts.

In our ongoing collaboration to understand what might be creating this learning-achievement gap, one thing stood out to both of us. Although students were systematically learning words, they were not getting repeated and authentic exposures to words throughout a unit of study. As we shifted our preparation of tutors we noted a significant change in how our students began to teach vocabulary skills and in student success. Emphasizing the significance of interconnected and relational word learning strategies, we

developed a targeted process that provides the means for multiple exposures to words and word meanings. Unlike the other vocabulary frameworks, our approach provides teachers with a guide for exposing students to the same set of words in new and meaningful ways over the course of a unit.

Furthermore, implementation of other projects such as Literacy for Democracy, and interaction with content area literacy specialists have led us to recognize that contextually-based word learning is not consistent for all subject areas. Students encounter new words in different text genres than those used in other subjects. For example, when a student reads a primary source in a social studies class, unfamiliar words can not only be interpreted through contemporary definitions, but they also have meanings that may have changed over time. These words may also be no longer in use in everyday language. Of even greater significance is the role perspective writing plays in learning word meanings within a historical context. As Dixie and I concluded eight years ago in an article we co-authored, social studies teachers are literacy teachers. They teach content literacy skills that students need to be successful both in academic environments and in their broader role as citizens in a complex and ever-changing society.

Recognizing that teachers exercise the amazing craft of taking a complex process and breaking it into understandable increments, we sought to develop a social studies vocabulary book that would guide teachers and students in a purposeful approach to unraveling word learning. We hope to equip teachers and students with a vocabulary tool kit that maximizes student academic achievement. We chose to target high school social studies learners so that we could provide replicable content specific applications and examples of multiple word exposures. This book presents five instructional routines for teachers to use at key intervention points within a unit of study. Each instructional routine is aligned with recommended vocabulary strategies that effectively achieve identified word learning outcomes. Implemented together, the five instructional routines help teachers provide students with the multiple exposures necessary for true conceptual understanding. To demonstrate how these interventions work, we offer specific social studies examples that target vocabulary development.

There have been many individuals who have been instrumental in bringing this project to fruition. First and foremost, we would like to recognize the importance of the support of our families. The long hours that we devoted have been family sacrifices, too. Thanks to Victor, Victoria, and Caleb as well as John, John Patrick, and Laney for your understanding. I would also like to thank the contributions of Michelle Plaisance, an urban education doctoral candidate who provided extensive collections of research in the early stages of this project. We appreciate the support of the editorial staff at Social Studies School Service for their helpful feedback that shaped this project into our vision for a practical and meaningful teacher resource. Finally, we are grateful to our institutions who provided nurturing environments for exploration of new research and writing opportunities.

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INTRODUCTION

What Do We Know About Vocabulary Learning?

Academic vocabulary, the language of social studies, is essential to discipline-specific learning. For secondary students to comprehend and explore the rich narrative of social studies, they need a vocabulary tool kit that will enable them to develop the skills to understand the words they encounter as they navigate various sources of information. Academic vocabulary opens doors for students to become social studies insiders (Moore, Readence, & Rickelman, 1989) by providing the academic knowledge and skill-set necessary to effectively communicate individual perspectives drawn from multigenre and diverse texts. Learners are able to successfully contribute to a social studies dialogue in meaningful and purposeful ways using the language of the discipline. Moreover, those who have ownership of academic vocabulary possess the cultural capital and literacy skills necessary for success in a globally dynamic and interdependent society. These learners become "powerful" thinkers (NCSS Position Statement, 2009) and embody the social studies goals set forth for competent citizens and effective decision-makers. Moreover, academic knowledge is essential in developing the Common Core State Standards and national policy objectives of *NCLB*. In sum, the importance of vocabulary in social studies goes uncontested as a way to improve student academic and educational success.

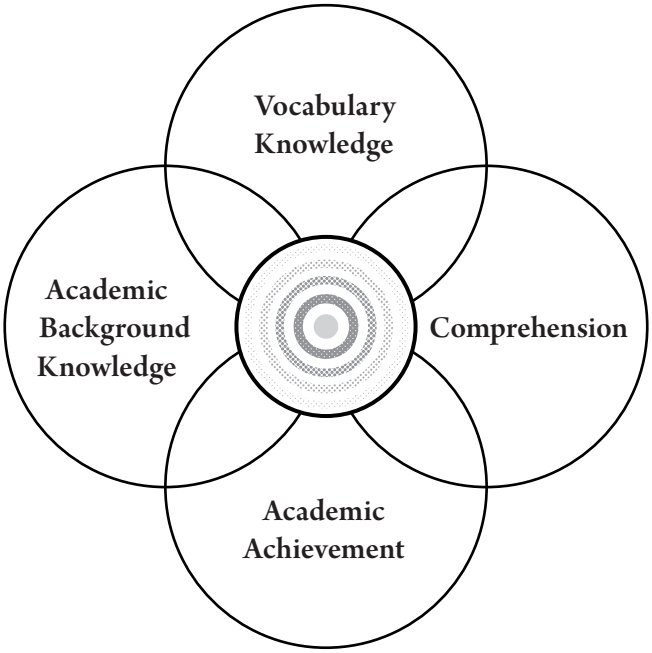
Drawing upon literacy and social studies research, we present four statements that articulate what we know about vocabulary learning and its connection to content understanding. These four research-based points support our view that vocabulary learning is central to all learning, especially in social studies. We know that:

1. There is a strong relationship between vocabulary, knowledge, comprehension, and achievement.
2. The bigger the vocabulary, the greater the comprehension.
3. Vocabulary knowledge is cumulative and generative.
4. Students need frequent and authentic interactions with words.

1. There is a strong relationship between vocabulary, knowledge, comprehension, and achievement.

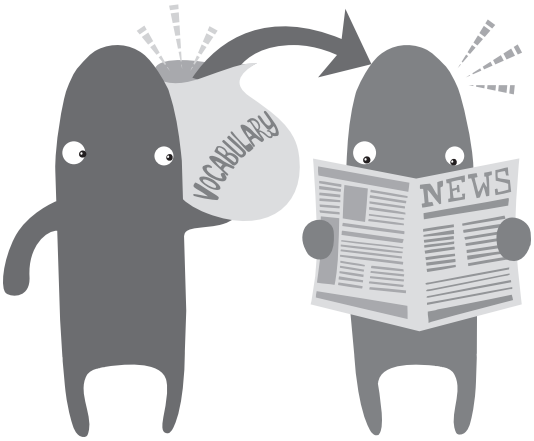
Student knowledge of words impacts academic achievement and directly relates to content comprehension (Baumann, Kame'enui, & Ash, 2003; Graves, 2009; Lehr, Osborn, & Hievert, 2004; Stanovich, 1986, 1993). Leading researchers (Allen, 2007; Allen & Landaker, 2005; Marzano, 2004; Stahl & Nagy, 2006) maintain that there is a strong relationship between vocabulary knowledge, academic content background knowledge, and comprehension (Anderson & Freebody, 1981; Beck & McKeown, 1991; Beck, Perfetti, & McKeown, 1982; Davis, 1994; McKeown, Beck, Omanson, & Pople, 1985). This interconnected process of learning makes vocabulary essential to improving student academic achievement.

Strong Relationship Between



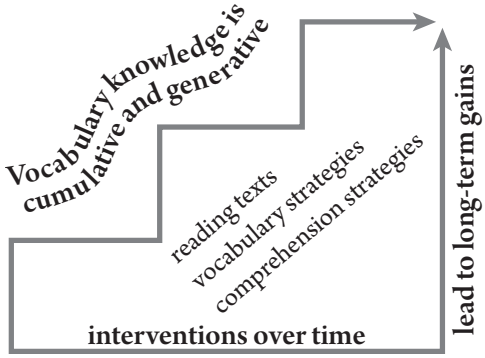
2. The bigger the vocabulary, the greater the comprehension.

The more words students know in a content area, the more able they will be to comprehend subject-specific texts they encounter in high school classes. As Stahl and Nagy (2006) summarized, "having a big vocabulary" makes students better readers (p. 9). Given the amount of reading secondary students are assigned in social studies classes, vocabulary knowledge becomes an important indicator of student success.



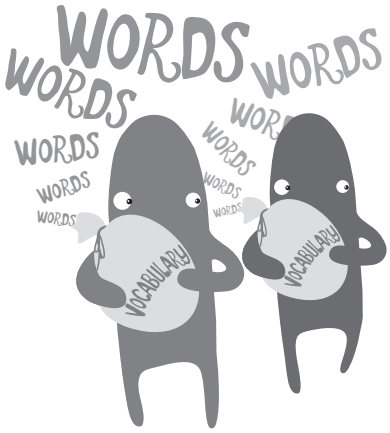
3. Vocabulary knowledge is cumulative and generative.

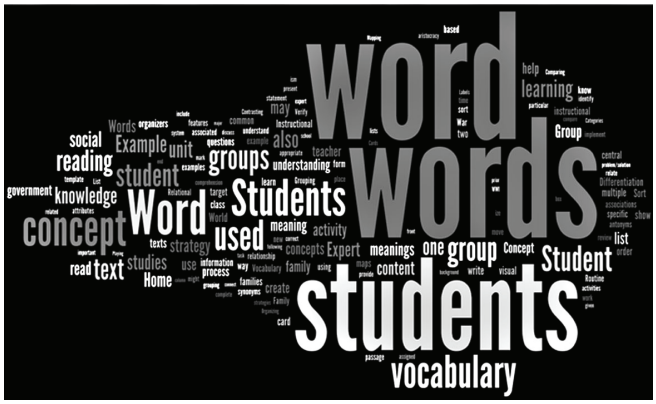
Additionally, vocabulary knowledge is cumulative and interventions over time lead to long-term gains. Yet, realized gains are not equitable for all students. Stahl and Nagy (2006) further documented that a student who has a large vocabulary learns new words more easily than a student with a smaller vocabulary. This trend of "the more words a student knows, the broader the vocabulary a student will acquire" widens over a student's school career, making dense texts such as those found in social studies difficult to access and understand for many secondary students. In this sense, vocabulary becomes the information base from which students will make inferences by connecting to prior knowledge, whereby cumulative content learning outcomes are realized. Further, vocabulary knowledge is generative. For example, students who recognize Greek and Latin roots are able to understand new words based on recognition of word parts. Generative word learning expands students' ability to recognize new words and to decipher word meanings from existing schema.



4. Students need frequent and authentic interactions with words.

To build vocabulary knowledge, students need a minimum of four to twelve interactions with words to move from awareness of words to a definitional understanding (Allen, 2007; Allen & Landaker, 2005; Marzano, 2004; Stahl & Nagy, 2006). If your goal is for students to have a complex understanding of word meanings, then you have to provide frequent and purposeful vocabulary exposures throughout each instructional unit. Furthermore, the teaching of words must be accompanied by the reading of content texts and opportunities to build comprehension strategies for academic achievement to be maximized (Stahl & Nagy, 2006). Students need opportunities to interact with words in context and in difficult texts, such as primary sources and other informational texts found in social studies classes.





We know that words represent concepts and that concept understanding is central to critical thinking in social studies and in other content areas. Thus, vocabulary learning becomes a foundation for achieving Standard 10 of the Common Core State Standards for English/ Language Arts:

> By the time students complete high school, they must be able to read and comprehend independently and proficiently the kinds of complex texts commonly found in college and careers.