Topic: Vocabulary Development within an Oral Language Classroom

Oral language is the foundation of learning in the classroom. For effective learning to occur, many aspects of oral language must be considered, learnt and implemented. The ICPALER model provides a framework for the teacher to best identify oral language content applicable to his/her teaching.

Munro states *that language and the ability to communicate effectively is a key foundation to students' capacity to learn* (Munro, 2008). An appropriate level of oral language knowledge helps facilitate academic growth in both in all learning areas. As successful learners, students require an appropriate level of vocabulary. Therefore the acronym OLSEL (Oral Language Supporting Early Literacy) very clearly highlights this link between oral language and literacy development.

When a classroom learning environment is considered, the implications of oral language development become even more clear. Oral language is used to manage and direct all aspects of classroom life. Teachers use language to communicate ideas related to a wide range of contexts ranging from the management and direction of the classroom activities, to explicitly teaching various language skills through a big book activity.

A student's oral language development influences their ability to communicate with peers. His/her oral language development influences their social interaction skills, their self confidence and self image (Munro, 2008).

For students to possess strong oral language skills, they need to be able to use words and know what they mean. This is referred to as vocabulary knowledge. Vocabulary knowledge affects a student's ability to effectively communicate with their peers, but it also affects the student's capacity to identify and interpret discourse. Milton (2008) suggests that failure to gain an adequate vocabulary can have catastrophic consequences for one's communication skills later on in life.

Milton (2008) argues that vocabulary can be very successfully taught and learned with good materials among interested learners. Milton believed that learning new vocabulary need not be unpleasant for learners nor does it require a lot of time or effort from the teacher. Throughout this literature review I will examine many views on how to best facilitate vocabulary development in everyday classroom teaching.

How is vocabulary learnt?

New vocabulary can be learnt through both incidental and explicit learning experiences. Both forms involve both speaking and listening activities. Atay and Ozbulgan (2007) noted that students who successfully develop vocabulary are active strategists who are conscious of their learning and can implement steps to regulate their own learning, while poor vocabulary learners possess little awareness of how to learn new words or how to connect new words to old knowledge.

Explicit instruction on vocabulary learning strategies may help students to become more proficient with a broad range of strategies they can use when learning new vocabulary (Atay & Ozabulgan, 2007). Learning these strategies can be facilitated through learning experiences involving physical movement, linking new vocabulary to prior knowledge and allowing time for students to reconstruct their new vocabulary, rather than simply reproducing it.

When providing the students with memory strategies to help facilitate vocabulary development, the teacher must encourage students to use these strategies in their own vocabulary learning (Atay & Ozabulgan, 2007). It is also important for students to be guided to recall new vocabulary after the meaning of the new word has been discovered. Once the teacher has explicitly taught a range of vocabulary learning strategies, the students should be encouraged to choose and use the strategies which best suit their own learning style.

Husty and Jackson (2008) argue that each child's level of vocabulary development is dependant upon he/her learning experiences. Children should be guided through inquiry based, multi-sensory explorations that repeatedly expose them to unfamiliar words within a context (Husty & Jackson, 2008). Husty and Jackson (2008) believe visual strategies such as Windowpanes allow for greater vocabulary development. Windowpanes are graphic organizers that allow children to revise, clarify and support their vocabulary development, as well as enabling children to add new vocabulary to their existing knowledge (Husty & Jackson 2008).

Munro (2008) also supports the notion that visual strategies play a major role in vocabulary development, but also explores and links other aspects of quality teaching to vocabulary development. Munro suggests that for a student to learn to understand how to say new vocabulary, he/she needs to participate in explicit teaching procedures. These teaching procedures are clear and only focus on developing new vocabulary. Through identifying examples of what the new word means, saying and doing actions that characterize the new word and suggesting how the new word is like words they already know, students are able to more successfully learn new vocabulary (Munro, 2008).

Blasingame and Nilsen (2005) also discuss the value of visual prompts when learning new vocabulary. Vocabulary should be taught in related groups such as webs, ladders and gestalts. Learning new vocabulary is best achieved by starting with source or root words and then teaching terms related to that word (Blasingame and Nilsen, 2005). This teaching emphasis on visual learning strategies does not simply imply that by using visual prompts, students are better prepared to learn new vocabulary. Vocabulary needs to be taught through an 'action' learning context.

Munro (2008) explains this action learning context through action comprehension (a set of learning activities aimed at learning vocabulary). Students learn new vocabulary by doing the actions that define that particular word. For example, students pretend that they are a lion, they act out various sentences related to the word lion. Students can describe in sentences the actions they do when they are a lion. Other teaching strategies Munro

suggests include asking questions that cue students in to calling on their prior vocabulary knowledge. Questions such as *What is another word for it? A thing that is like it?* (Munro, 2008). Provide students with the opportunity to link the new vocabulary to their existing word knowledge. Similarly, Bond and Wasik (2009) argue that asking open ended questions allows children to explore the meaning of vocabulary words, the content of a story and interact with their peers and the teacher, using their new vocabulary.

Munro (2008) also notes that for a student to place a new word in their long term memory, the teacher must guide he/she through an action / picture / link with known word learning activity. This teaching approach involves many key ideas I have already discussed.

Visualisation plays an important role in helping students to remember words, but learning does not come so much from looking at a drawing or a sketch as it does from a multisensory experience such as drawing (Blasingame and Nilsen, 2005).

Learning new vocabulary in context is most important, it is the context that controls what vocabulary is appropriate, therefore students need to become aware of suitable contexts for their new vocabulary. Munro (2008) suggests that the ideas students use at any one time and the purposes they have for speaking and listening are determined by what they think is relevant and appropriate for that particular context. This provides a basis for always teaching new vocabulary within an appropriate context, new vocabulary cannot be successfully learnt through singular learning experiences that are not related to what the student already knows.

Blasingame and Nilsen (2005) noted that teachers can keep students' minds focused for much longer by teaching within a current context, teaching through related words based on a common topic relevant to the students. When teaching lists of words that are unrelated expect by alphabetical order, students' minds are forced to skip from concept to concept so that they spend so little time on any single word that the new vocabulary does not work it's way into long-term memory (Blasingame and Nilsen, 2005).

Blasingame and Nilsen (2005) support a principle-based approach to teaching vocabulary. A principle-based approach involves the teacher grabbing the students' attention with a story and then guiding students through a series of learning experiences aimed at linking the new vocabulary to the student's existing vocabulary knowledge. Students are encouraged to talk about related words and identify common features shared by the meanings and structures of words they already know. Munro (2008) supported this teaching approach when discussing a student's vocabulary knowledge as a network of meaning. Munro suggests that students need to be made aware that the words they know are linked together in their vocabulary. When students say or hear words in a message, they think o related words they know. As the learner, students are then stimulated to link the new vocabulary to words they have already learnt.

Munro also notes that these links between new and learnt vocabulary help students to think ahead and predict. With this knowledge, students are able to put something new in

their own words to help them make better sense of it (Munro, 2008).   This development of vocabulary is based on constantly build upon prior learning. Students will continually link new vocabulary, but the ways in which they do will change. Munro (2008) suggest that students will begin to link their word meanings in more abstract ways, in addition to the links based on their experiences.

What factors affect how vocabulary is learnt?

There is evidence to show that a child's use of deictic gestures in the early years of life is a predictor for vocabulary learning (Bavin et al. 2008). Deictic gestures are behaviours such as showing and pointing, common actions for infants of approximately 12 months of age. Bavin et al (2008) argued that these deictic gestures which they referred to as 'communicative behaviours', predict later levels of vocabulary use.

Bavin et al (2008) also noted that a child's gender also affects vocabulary development, with girls producing more words than boys at both 12 and 24 months of age. To follow on from this, vocabulary is learnt through language interaction (Neuman & Dwyer, 2009). A student's available vocabulary will directly influence their ability to participate in oral language learning experiences. According to Neuman and Dywer (2009), it's not only the quantity but the quality of talk that plays such an important role in student's vocabulary development.

Neuman and Dywer (2009) noted that learning vocabulary is cumulative and interactive, the more words a student knows, the easier it is to learn more words. Therefore a key factor in how vocabulary is learnt is the learner's ability to link concepts and words to their prior learning. Learning skills and concepts such as the link between words, meaning and actions together create a key factor in learning new vocabulary.

What learning strategies affect vocabulary development?

In general, quality explicit teaching will provide a classroom environment conducive to learning new vocabulary. Milton (2008) argues that learning new vocabulary is so important, anything that teachers can do to make sure it is learned is worth doing. While this may be correct, explicitly teaching new vocabulary within a context requires the implementation of a variety of teaching and learning strategies.

Memory plays an enormous role in the development of new vocabulary. Atay and Ozbulgan (2007) argued that after discovering the meaning of a new word through different contexts, students should be guided to recall it via different memory strategies. The teacher needs to guide students through a process which requires the students to link their new vocabulary with a meaning sentence, an action and also how to organize how to say the word (Munro, 2008).

Ebbers and Denton (2008) suggest there are two distinct teaching approaches that facilitate vocabulary development. These teaching principles are based upon teaching the meanings of specific words and learning the strategies for inferring the meanings of new

words students encounter in their reading. Teachers can provide a suitable teaching and learning atmosphere by simply providing opportunities for discussion. Ebbers and Denton (2008) noted that an accessible learning model includes discussions about word meanings, enabling students to translate complex definitions into their own language context. Within this learning model, the teacher is more able to provide instruction that includes discussion of texts and concepts. Furthermore, Ebbers and Denton (2008) argue that oral discussion of content and content vocabulary is a common component of many successful reading intervention strategies.

Vocabulary instruction must be more than just identifying or labeling words. It should be about helping children to build word meaning and the ideas that these words represent (Neuman & Dywer, 2008). By understanding words and their connections to concepts and facts, students develop skills that will help in comprehending text containing new vocabulary (Neuman & Dywer, 2008). As a result, teaching strategies need to be explicit and provide students with plenty of opportunities to use words in context within everyday classroom situations. Students also need opportunities to review vocabulary they have previously learned, recalling vocabulary through using the sentences and actions they used to place the vocabulary in long-term memory.

According to Bond and Wasik (2009), engaging students in play is a useful teaching strategy that can promote conversations and develop oral language skills. Play is a natural activity for children and is how they learn best. By encouraging students to talk aloud while playing, describing what they are doing, what they plan to do next and communicating to their classmates, provides students with opportunities to use language in fun, familiar contexts. By using props during play, students can also be guided and encouraged to use new vocabulary (Bond & Wasik, 2009). While playing with the props in a play situation, students can learn and reinforce vocabulary in a meaningful way. By using props and other play based learning experiences, the teacher is providing a meaningful context from which to build new vocabulary, both within the current learning experience and in future contexts.

For students to become successful vocabulary learners, students need to become word conscious (Ebbers & Denton, 2008). Students need to seek and make connections between words and build upon word relationships they have already examined. To promote this awareness of potential vocabulary to be learnt, teachers can help students understand the differences in the ways words are used in normal conversation, in classroom discourse and in the language of a text such as a big book.

A student's vocabulary development also heavily relies upon their ability to store new words in their long term memory. Munro (2008) suggests this is best achieved through object and action naming and storytelling. Students are guided to new vocabulary through reading a big book, and then students make links with the new vocabulary through sentences. This learning strategy helps the students to link new words with their existing vocabulary. As Munro (2008) notes, it is important for students to have the opportunity to link new words with distinctive actions and act out the meaning of the new vocabulary being learned.

The teacher is also able to suggest synonyms for new words and match with key content words. Students need to be able to ask themselves questions like *What are some other words for truck?* The teacher can guide vocabulary development through asking questions such as *Can you say this sentence by changing as many words as you can?* (Munro, 2008).

Along with long term memory development, visualizing strategies are critical learning skills when learning new vocabulary, simply hearing or seeing new vocabulary does not empower the students to new vocabulary. Teaching new vocabulary needs to be both explicit and engaging. Teachers need to teach students how to visualize new vocabulary. This can be done by asking students to look at a picture and make a photograph in their head (Munro, 2008). Students then need to talk about aspects of their picture, in doing so, students are exposed to new vocabulary within a context.

Ebbers and Denton (2009) also supported this need to engage students in learning new vocabulary. Ebbers and Denton argue that for many students, hearing or seeing new vocabulary is not enough for students to store the new word in their long-term memory. Students need to say the word aloud, clearly, deliberately and repeatedly, they may be more likely to remember it (Ebbers & Denton, 2008). Within this learning context, the student should not be a passive learner, students need to actively participate with their peers, constructing new vocabulary knowledge through prompts, questions and feedback.

Ebbers and Denton (2008) noted the link between a child's reading skills and vocabulary development. Ebbers and Denton suggest the development of proficient reading skills is the most effective independent word learning strategy and therefore teaching student's ways to support their vocabulary development is extremely important. Readers who struggle tend to avoid reading, resulting in limited word encounters and inadequate vocabulary growth (Ebbers and Denton, 2008). These students often have difficulties inferring the meanings of new words within a context because they simply do not have enough exposure to new vocabulary.

How will an OLSEL focus help vocabulary development?

Oral language connects all aspects of language development. As Neuman and Dwyer (2009) noted: *The most plausible explanation for vocabulary's connection to better literacy abilities is that vocabulary is more than words. It is knowledge. To know a word's meaning is to know what a word represents and to begin to understand the network of concepts that go with it.*

Bond and Wasik (2009) noted that conversations are a primary tool for oral language development with the classroom. Though this maybe the case, opportunities for children to talk with others and receive feedback can be limited. Within the classroom context, there are many factors that appear to hinder quality conversation, there are competing demands on the teacher's time and attention. Bond and Wasik (2009) highlight the role that student's oral language skills play in their later language and literacy development.

The teacher must consider how to create consistent, meaningful opportunities for conversations to occur in early childhood classrooms in order to develop and extend vocabulary development.

It is important to note that from birth to about the age of five, children acquire about 10,000 vocabulary words (Bond & Wasik, 2009). During this time, children begin with one word and then build their vocabulary to the point where they can communicate in complex sentences. The main medium for this development is oral, children are exposed to environments that are filled with numerous opportunities to participate in conversations (Bond & Wasik, 2009).

There are children however, who do not experience this level of interaction through conversation during their early years of life. In most instances, children's home experiences provide numerous opportunities for them to have many one-on-one conversations with adults. However, for many children, especially children living in poverty, language opportunities at home can be extremely limited (Bond & Wasik, 2009). Therefore a concerted focus on oral language with the aim of learning new vocabulary is of high importance. Students not only require quality learning opportunities to develop their vocabulary, students must receive quality feedback on their language use (Bond & Wasik, 2009)

A key aspect of an oral language focus within the classroom is strategic questioning. Through asking open ended questions, a big book activity becomes more than just reading words to children, it fosters conversations, allowing the students to explore the meaning of vocabulary, the content of a story and to interact purposefully with the teacher and other children. Teachers need to use open ended questioning strategies to engage students in conversations and promote opportunities to use language.

A key teaching strategy to promote cognitive engagement with words is through Strategic questioning, leading to deeper processing (Ebbers & Denton, 2008). Teachers may ask questions that encourage students to reason through new words or ask students to use their new vocabulary to answer questions within the learnt context. Asking questions that integrate two different vocabulary words also helps the students to make links within their vocabulary knowledge, helping to more effectively place the new words in long-term memory.

It is important to note that the teacher cannot possibly teach all the words the student will need, therefore some degree of the learning strategies implemented need to be taught in such a way that the students can transfer the learning strategy to an unfamiliar context, environment or situation. Students need to learn how to figure out what an unknown word might mean when reading independently. Students can apply the strategic analysis of context clues and morpheme clues (Ebbers & Denton, 2008). Students who are accomplished vocabulary learners are able to use a combination of both clues to help develop meaning of a new word. Morpheme awareness relates to a student's knowledge of word parts such as roots, prefixes and suffixes, while the clues a student uses to interpret the context that contains the new vocabulary is equally important.

Ebbers and Denton (2008) suggest that teaching strategies related to morphemic analysis has a strong potential for enhancing the vocabulary development for all readers, including those with reading difficulties. Effective use of context clues requires metalinguistic awareness, relating to a students ability to think about, plan and monitor the use of language. This is best achieved through explicit instruction in how to seek semantic clues from context by identifying synonyms, antonyms and prefixes. Students who have low reading skills find implementing these monitoring skills particularly challenging.

Finally, for long term vocabulary learning to take place, Ebbers and Denton (2008) suggest that if teachers are to integrate many of the teaching practices I have mentioned so far, students are likely to increase their vocabulary knowledge. If teachers work collaboratively to create vocabulary focus throughout their school, the results will be even stronger (Ebbers & Denton, 2008). As with any teaching initiative, a whole school approach to developing student's vocabulary will allow for a greater chance for vocabulary goals and outcomes to be achieved.

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