

**Professional Development Reflection:
Connecting the Science of Reading to Vocabulary**

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To complete my required hours of professional development related to literacy, I chose to attend a webinar hosted by Really Great Reading on May 1, 2024. The webinar was focused on connecting the research on vocabulary instruction to the research behind the science of reading. Multiple speakers, discussions, polls, and forum questions were featured as aspects of the three-hour webinar. The webinar focused on three key topics. Firstly, the impact of vocabulary on oral and writing comprehension and expression was discussed. Secondly, we learned about what the research suggests are the ideal conditions for learning new vocabulary. Lastly, we discussed how teachers can create the ideal conditions for learning vocabulary and teach the “right” words to their students. I am glad I selected this webinar as my professional development content because it felt relevant to both this course and my future practice in the classroom.

After some reflection, I have identified three main takeaways that I will carry into my teaching practice. From birth to age five, most vocabulary is learned through the oral language environment a child experiences (Really Great Reading webinar, personal communication, May 1, 2024). However, not all oral language environments are created equal. Some children do not experience many “serve and return” interactions where their speech is repeated back to them and then expanded with new or more precise vocabulary by the adults in their lives (Really Great Reading webinar, personal communication, May 1, 2024). This may seem obvious, but it was highly impactful for me. Children come into school with a wide range of baselines and this complicates vocabulary instruction to some degree.

Secondly, understanding how children learn to read is also critical to vocabulary instruction. This is because students need to comprehend 98% of the words in the passages they read to understand the content of what they are reading and maintain meaningful interest in their tasks (Really Great Reading webinar, personal communication, May 1, 2024). We have touched on similar statistics in our lectures for EDUC 397 and related courses. This webinar also helped me deepen my understanding of the Simple View of Reading. Effective vocabulary instruction has the potential to improve students' language comprehension and word recognition which will help improve their reading comprehension overall (M. Baerg, personal communication, May 6, 2024; Moats, 2020).

Finally, and perhaps more importantly, vocabulary instruction can be fun and highly relevant to students! Vocabulary instruction, especially relating to curricular content, is critical for the success of all students so finding ways to make it dynamic and exciting while remaining relevant and effective is crucial. In a digital world, it can be difficult for teachers to compete for students' attention. The Really Great Reading presenters suggested a few online websites and resources such as, "InferCabulary," which can support vocabulary instruction and practice. Additionally, they encouraged teachers to make a point of using their target vocabulary words in context and allowing students to engage in hands-on activities and discussions relating to the target words. My understanding is that most target words are what Moats would refer to as content words. Content words typically carry most of the meaning in a sentence and often must be explicitly taught (Moats, 2020). Helping students to see why they should know the target words makes vocabulary tasks more impactful and relevant to students and their

daily lives. Ensuring vocabulary instruction is well integrated and relevant to students is also in line with the First People's Principles of Learning because such instruction would support the well-being of the self, and be holistic, experiential, and relational (First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2006/2007).

This webinar left me feeling excited to develop engaging ways to teach vocabulary in the classroom. The tools and information I picked up from this webinar will help me to uphold Professional Standards 3, 5, and 6 by making me a more informed, knowledgeable educator.

References

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