**Frontloading Vocabulary in Core Content Classes: Instructional Strategies**

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**Scenario*:*** *Your students begin their cultural study of ancient Sumerians. You have provided a reader’s guide for individual completion by the end of the class period in preparation for a whole-group discussion the following day. You anticipate a lively discussion as you construct questions requiring critical thinking skills and application of knowledge. Thusfar, your students have given no indication that confusion exists.*

*The following day you ask the first question. Only a few hands are raised in response. By the end of the second question, rather than more raised hands, you view a sea of wide-eyed, closed-mouthed faces. Quickly rethinking, you ask a scaffolded question to stimulate the discussion. The only sound heard is a nervous cough. What do you do? Did they read the chapter? Did they complete the guided reading worksheet? When you ask the students if they read the text and understood every word, heads swung from side to side – no. How could you avoid this uncomfortable situation?*

**Solution:** Frontloading or pre-teaching vocabulary is a powerful before-reading instructional strategy to facilitate comprehension of a passage. Building this strategy into your lesson plan will reap benefits with students’ comprehension and expand learning for critical thinking activities. By giving students explicit instruction in vocabulary, teachers help them learn the meaning of new words and strengthen their independent skills for constructing meaning from text (Kamil,Borman, Diole, Kral, Salinger, & Torgeson 2008).

**Identifying Problematic Vocabulary**

The first step in teaching vocabulary pre-scanning the reading assignment to identify problematic vocabulary (Coffman, 2009). Matching your students’ Standards of Learning (SOL) testing results with their corresponding Lexile levels will prove invaluable to this task. For additional information on Lexile levels, use this link, <http://www.lexile.com/PDF/TheLexileFrameworkforReading.pdf> . (The correlation of SOL score to Lexile level is located on the VDOE website in Superintendent’s Memo #267; <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/info_centers/sol/lexile/resources/measure_relationship_to_sol/>.) The Lexile Analyzer ([www.lexile.com](http://www.lexile.com)) determines readability of scanned text, thus providing a selection guide.

**Instructional Strategies to Frontload Vocabulary**

Students must have a working knowledge of 95% of the vocabulary in a passage in order to comprehend it (Lyon, 2009). The more students understand the terms within a passage, the easier it is for them to understand information they may read or hear about the topic (Marzano & Pickering, 2005). A number of evidence-based instructional strategies are available to frontload targeted vocabulary to promote greater comprehension.

**The Frayer Model.**

<http://www.doe.virginia.gov/VDOE/middle-math-strategies/WorkingWithVocabulatory.doc>

The Virginia Department of Education lists the Frayer Model (see Figure 1) as an instructional strategy to teach math vocabulary. The targeted vocabulary word is placed in the center with the definition, characteristics, and examples surround the word. Identifying non-examples is helpful in developing a fuller understanding of that word.

Figure 1: The Frayer Model Strategy

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Definition  Word | Characteristics |
| Examples | Non-Examples |

This graphic organizer is available in a foldable or three-dimensional format, as well. Link for directions: [FoldedFrayerModelDirections\_000.doc](file:///C:\Documents%20and%20Settings\linda\Local%20Settings\Temporary%20Internet%20Files\Content.Outlook\QEZW9DQB\FoldedFrayerModelDirections_000.doc)

**Choiceboards.**

A choiceboard with inviting activities (see Figure 2) can be used to engage students in learning vocabulary. An example can be found on the Russell County School District website:

<http://www.russell.k12.va.us/itrt/Dan%20Mulligan/Vocabulary_Vitamins.ppt>.

Figure 2: Choiceboard Example

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Role-play the meaning of the word | Design a banner or flag for the word. | Sell the word by writing an advertisement for it. |
| Make a mnemonic to remember the word and its meaning. | Make a word puzzle or a game. | Contrast the word with something else. |
| Write a poem with the word, its meaning, and facts about the word. Illustrate it. | Tell a story using the word three times in the plot. | Teach the word and its meaning in a memorable way to a classmate or family member. |
| Explain how the word is used in the text. | Divide the word into syllables. Chant and tap the syllables. | Create a song, poem, cheer or rap using the word as the topic. |
| Connect the word with something in your world and discuss it. | Locate the word in the text and read the paragraph to get context meaning. | Create a design that depicts the meaning if the word. |

**RAFTS.**

Rick Wormeli has suggested a “RAFT” (Role, Audience, Format, Topic) to differentiate activities for diverse learners (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: RAFT Example

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Role** | **Audience** | **Format** | **Topic** |
| You are a second grade teacher. | You must teach this vocabulary to your second grade students. | You must provide the vocabulary word with a visual that conveys the meaning of that word. | Ecosystems |
| You are an eighth grade student. | Your peers | Charades | Selected vocabulary from The Outsiders |

In addition to the elements shown in Figure 3, two or three additional scenarios will be constructed on the “RAFT” to provide choices for the students (Wormeli, 2006). Additional suggestions for RAFTS and RAFT rubrics can be found at [daretodifferentiate.wikispaces.com/R.A.F.T.+Assignments](file:///C:\daretodifferentiate.wikispaces.com\R.A.F.T.+Assignments) (Retrieved September 1, 2009 from Dare to Differentiate Wikispaces). RAFTs might also be used with the headings on the left margin and the assignments given according to difficulty of task completion.

**Vocabulary Cards.**

Coffman (2009) suggests vocabulary cards, used at the Shelton School, to pre-teach vocabulary.

Figure 4: Vocabulary Card Example

Picture

Picture

Vocabulary

Word

Prior Knowledge: Meaning:

Syllable Type:

Coding:

Word origin:

**Vocabulary Instruction**

Marzano and Pickering (2005) recommend a “six-step” method for teaching vocabulary.

1. Teacher provides a description, explanation, or example of the new term.

2. Students restate the description in their own words.

3. Students construct a graphic representing the term.

4. Students engage in activities that add to knowledge of the term in their notebooks.

5. Students discuss the terms with one another.

6. Teachers engage students in games that allow play with the terms.

Use of the activities for frontloading vocabulary can facilitate deeper comprehension of critical content.

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Choiceboard Example - <http://www.russell.k12.va.us/itrt/Dan%20Mulligan/Vocabulary_Vitamins.ppt>.

(Retrieved from Russell County website August 31, 2009)

Frayer Model Examples -

<http://www.doe.virginia.gov/VDOE/middle-math-strategies/WorkingWithVocabulatory.doc>

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Department of Education website)

RAFT Examples - http://[daretodifferentiate.wikispaces.com/R.A.F.T.+Assignments](file:///C:\daretodifferentiate.wikispaces.com\R.A.F.T.+Assignments)