

Bringing Words to Life in Kindergarten and First Grade Classrooms

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captivate

enthusiastic

mesmerize

soar

awe



Overview of Our Vocabulary Work

- **Analysis of basal readers' vocabulary lessons (1979).**
- **Development of vocabulary program and study of effect on comprehension (1980, 1982, 1983).**
- **Study of effect of type and frequency of instruction (1985).**
- ***Conditions of Vocabulary Acquisition (1991)***

Overview of Our Vocabulary Work cont.

- **Analysis of dictionary definitions, development of alternative definitions, and comparison of their effects (1993)**
- **Study of students' ability to learn from context and development of instructional approach(1999).**
- **Putting above together for instructional purposes—*Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction* (2001).**
- **Design and study of vocabulary instruction for kindergarten and first grade children (in preparation).**

What is vocabulary development in the early grades?

In practice “vocabulary” often means

- sight word instruction

give, have, were

- pronunciation of words with new or hard spelling patterns

pour, head, how

There is great need for instruction

- that adds the meanings of new words to children’s word stores

absurd, commotion, immense

Sources of Words for Vocabulary Development in the Early Grades

- for the most part not words from the texts that young children read
- words from books that are read to children
- teacher's (other adult) language

The specific questions in two very recent studies:

- To what extent can instruction increase young children's knowledge of the meanings of sophisticated words (Study 1)?**
- Are there differential results for varying amounts of instruction (Study 2)?**

What are sophisticated words?

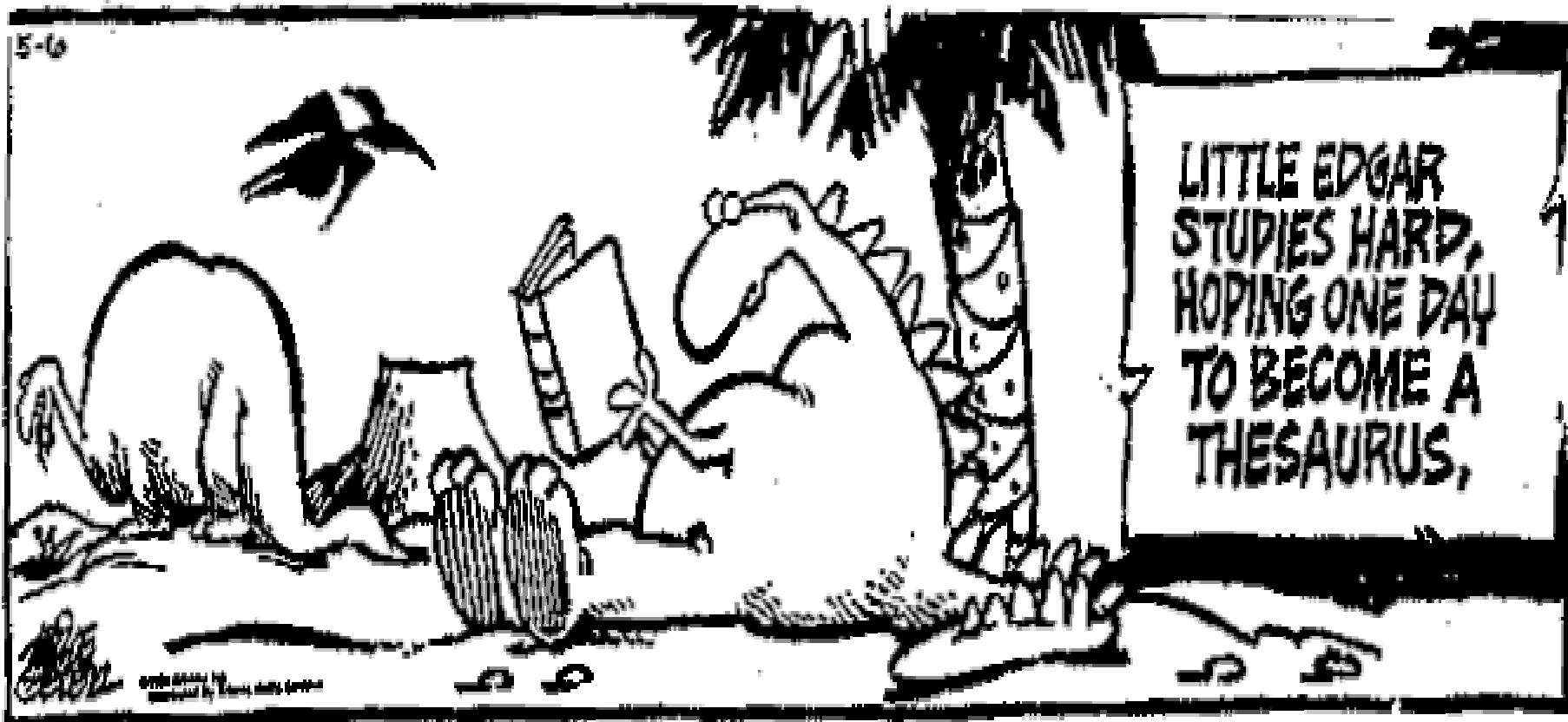
- also labeled Tier 2 words
- new words not common to young children's oral language
- high-frequency words for mature language users
absurd, commotion, reluctant
- mature or more precise labels for concepts young children have under control
- words more typically found in written language

Why vocabulary instruction is needed

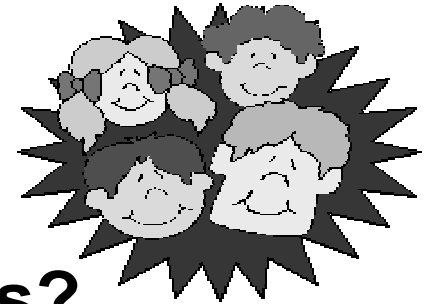
- **High-knowledge third graders had vocabularies about equal to lowest-performing twelfth graders (Smith, 1941).**
- **Linguistically “poor” first graders knew 5,000 words; linguistically “rich” knew 20,000 words (Moats, 2001).**
- **Once established, such differences are difficult to ameliorate (Biemiller, 1999; Hart & Risley, 1995).**

This is clearly v ery bad news!

5-6



A More Cheerful Perspective



What's the present situation of vocabulary instruction in the schools?

Why may this not be bad news?

What should the schools do?

What did we do?

How did we address the present situation in vocabulary instruction in schools?

Text Talk

Context for the Present Studies

A read-aloud approach to enhance children's comprehension and vocabulary acquisition.

- **Introducing the story**
- **Stopping and asking open questions**
- **Following up childrens' response (e.g. rereading, revoicing)**
- **Strategic use of pictures**
- **Wrapping up**
- **Vocabulary**

Tradebooks are excellent sources of sophisticated words

**appropriate
charming
concentrate
forlorn
exhausted
absurd
dignified
exquisite
rambunctious
leisurely**

Two kinds of vocabulary interactions

During reading

On the spot brief explanations to forestall comprehension problems:

- **exquisite means very very beautiful**
- **forlorn means to be very sad**

After story vocabulary development

Direct, rich, lively instruction of several story words

- **direct means explaining meaning**
- **rich means requires processing**
- **lively means “not boring”**

Sheepish Tale

sensible: In the story, Fred said “very sensible” when Monty thought the sign said “Help prevent forest fires.” Preventing forest fires *would* be sensible. If something is sensible, it is the right thing to do; it makes sense.

Let’s say the word together: sensible

Something sensible is safe to do or good to do. Like it would be sensible to make a list of what you need before going shopping.



Sheepish Tale cont...

- **Let's say it's raining out--what would be sensible to do?**
- **If I said we were going on a long, long walk and you should wear sensible shoes, what kind of shoes would those be?**
- **What kind of shoes would not be sensible for a long walk?**

Text Talk

Rich Vocabulary Instruction

Each word is contextualized for its role in the story.

The word's meaning is provided through student-friendly explanations.

Examples beyond the story context are provided.

Children are asked to think about examples and to provide their own examples.

Study 1

- **To what extent can instruction increase young children's knowledge of the meanings of sophisticated words?**

Participants:

Poverty District

One school

4 kindergartens

2 experimental

2 control

4 first grades

2 experimental

2 control

Study 1

Complete data for 98

24 experimental kindergartners

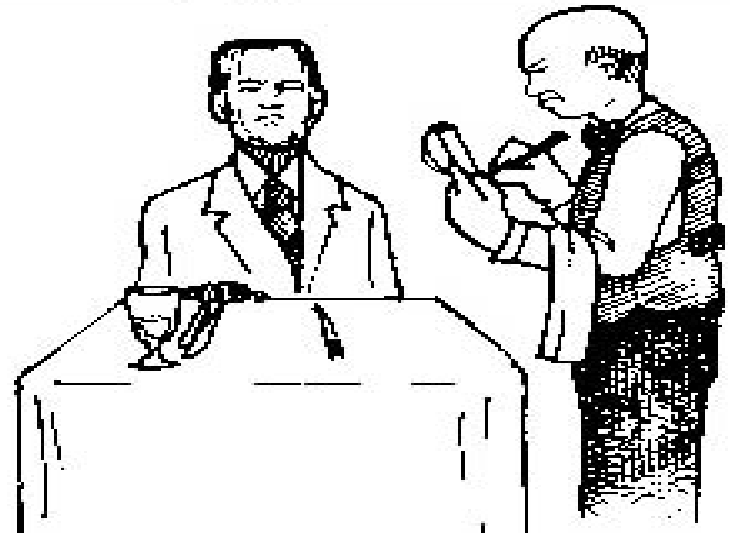
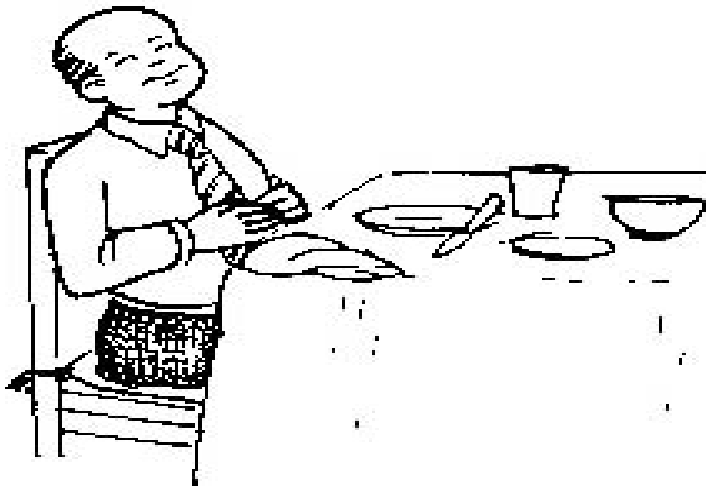
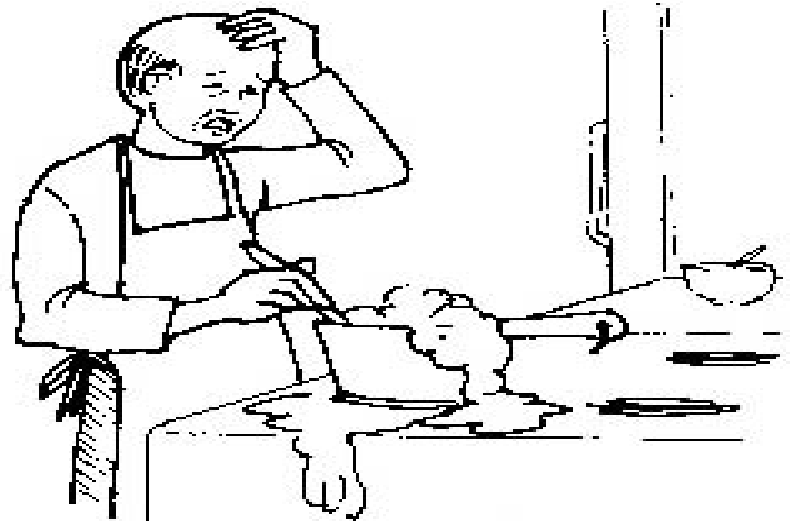
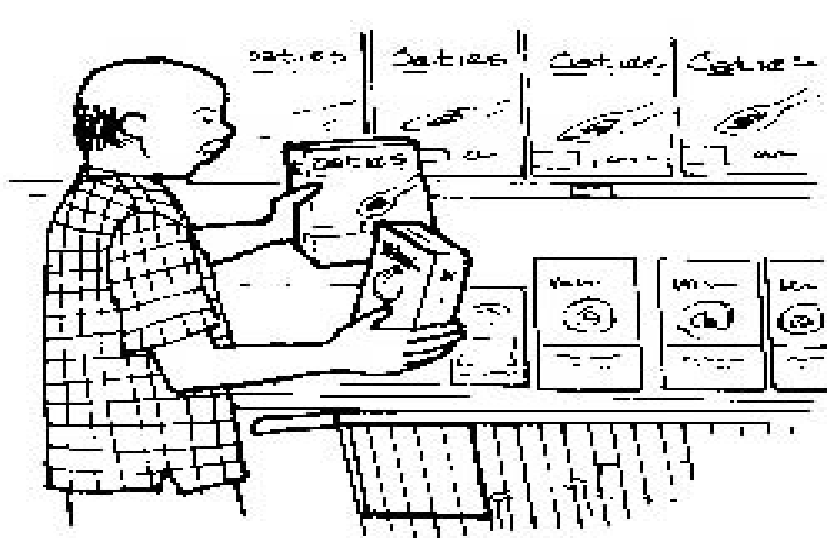
22 control

28 experimental first graders

24 control

Word sources

22 words from 8 stories

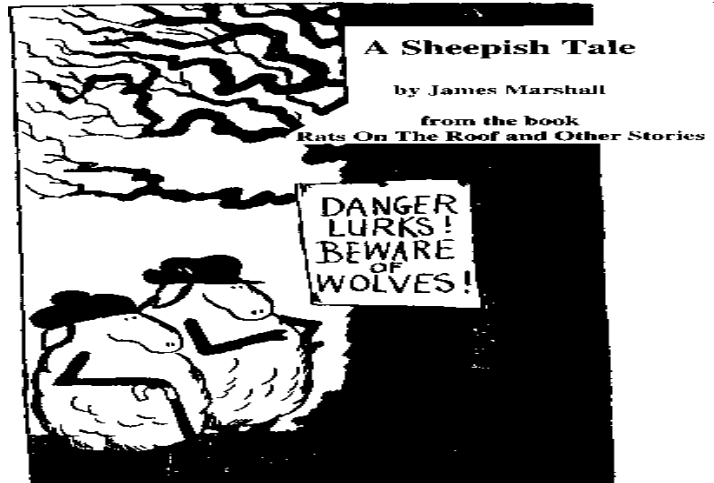


Informally maintained

After kind of introduction exemplified for sensible. . .

teachers encouraged to post words and record use.

teachers encouraged to use words.



sensible

pounce

raucous

Compared to a control group there was learning, both statistically and educationally.

There was room for a lot more learning.

We reasoned why there wasn't more learning.

So---Study 2

Are there differential results for varying amounts of instruction?

Study 2

Participants:

Same poverty district as Study 1, different school

3 kindergartens

3 first grades

Complete data for 40 first grade children.

Within subject design

Children were introduced to 42 words from seven trade books.

21 words in the “Rich Instruction” condition

21 words in the “More Rich Instruction” condition

Study 2

All words received Rich Instruction as exemplified for *sensible* (Sheepish Tale).

Words in the More Rich Instruction condition received MORE of the same kind of instruction (distributed across several days).

Six words selected from 7 trade books.

Each word in a set of six words was randomly assigned to one of the two conditions:

- Rich Instruction
- More Rich Instruction

Amos and Boris

	Rich Inst	More Rich Inst
miserable	x	
immense	x	
leisurely	x	
evade	x	x
stranded	x	x
necessities	x	x

Rich Instruction for all 6 words

More Rich Instruction for 3 of the 6 words

Rich Instruction for immense *(Amos and Boris)*

- **Word contextualized for its role in the story.**
- **Meaning of the word explained.**
- **Examples in contexts other than the one in the story were provided.**

Children are asked to think about examples.



More Rich Instruction

Conceptually the same as Rich Instruction

- **What might be good about having an immense book bag?
What might be a problem about having an immense book bag?**
- **Why might someone describe a basketball player's shoes as immense?**
- **Which new word does supersize make you think of?**

Students who received more “rich instruction” showed more than twice the gains than students who received “rich instruction”.

Some Questions and Answers

Are the results accurate?

Is it worth it?

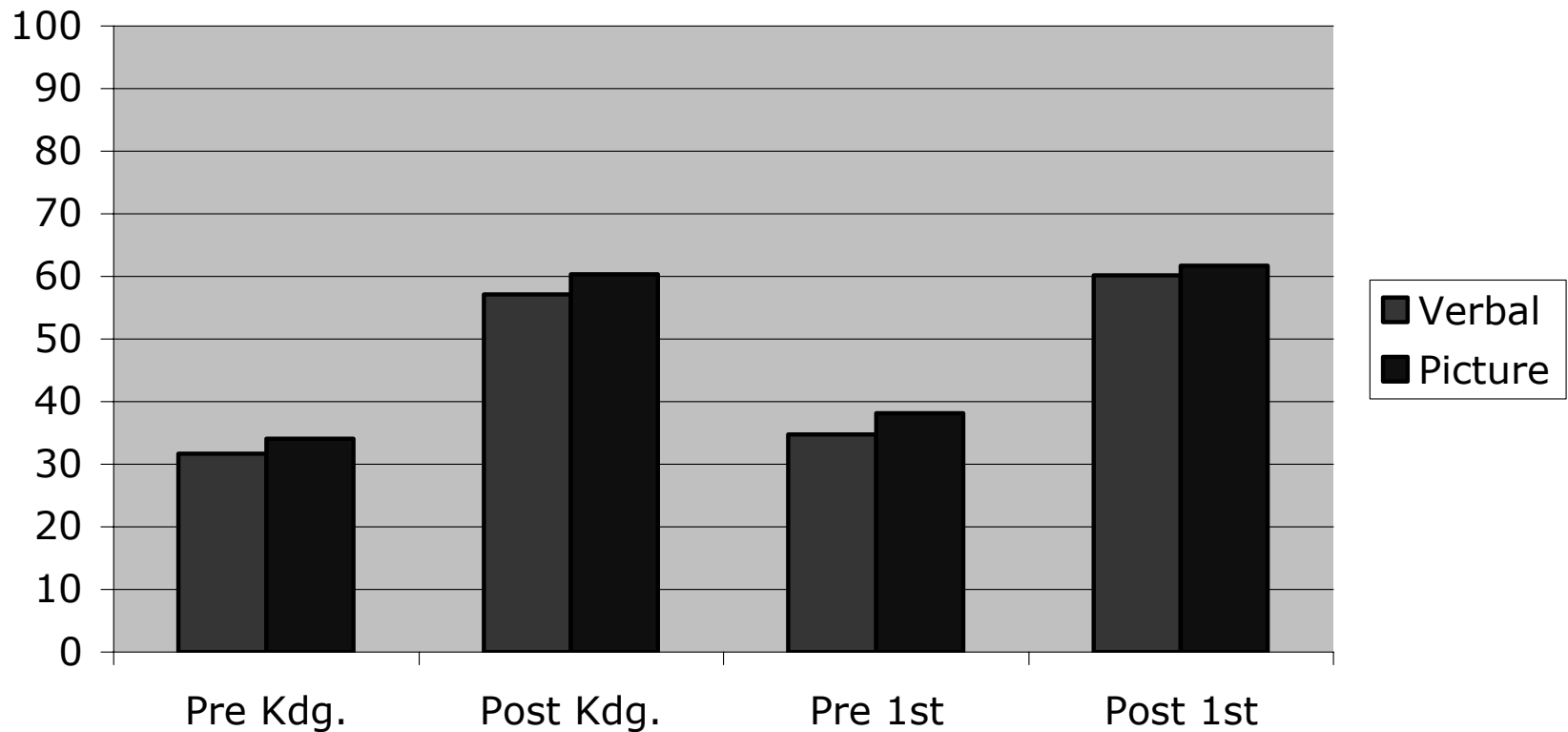
Why didn't children learn more words?

Where does this all leave us?

First Grade Verbal Tasks

1st Grade	Question Yes	Question No	Definition Yes	Definition No
Amos & Boris				
miserable	If you missed going to a party because you had the flu... would you feel miserable?	If your team won its first game... would you feel miserable?	Does miserable mean feeling very unhappy?	Does miserable mean feeling very excited?
Immense	What if you saw something the size of an elephant... would it be immense?	What is you saw something the size of an ant... would it be immense?	Does immense mean very big?	Does immense mean very happy?

Comparison of Pre & Post Picture Task and Verbal Task on all words for Kindergarten and 1st Grade (Study 2)



What are good sources of rare words?

Adapted from Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998

Source	Rare words per 1,000
Newspapers	68
Adult books	52
Children's books	31
Television shows	21
Adult conversation (college graduates)	17

Examples of words at about the rank of 10,000:

- nation
- narrow
- alias
- robust

Examples of words in the top (i.e., most frequent) 1,000:

- fish
- flood
- shot
- near
- voice

Effects of Reading Aloud on Vocabulary Learning

Effects reported in studies range from 4% to 40%

Repeated reading or direct explanation is needed

Greater effects occur if:

- word is repeated in story
- word is pictured
- word is a noun
 - 24% of nouns learned
 - 6% of verbs and adjectives learned

Effects vary widely depending on the story:

- 4% - 15% if words are not explained
- 15% - 40% if words *are* explained

So Why Don't Children Learn More Words?

Learning words that are not typically part of oral language is difficult.

Much evidence that it takes lots of repetitions to learn new words.

It is not surprising that learning not easily pictured words and non nouns is most difficult.

What the role of learning not easily pictured and non nouns in language development?

Word Learning may get more efficient as Vocabulary Grows

There is evidence that the more words one knows the more words one learns.

This may have to do with interrelationships among words.

Where does this all leave us?

Children learned a modest but significant amount of the words

- children who are not surrounded by language rich environments can and do learn sophisticated words**

Additional instruction did not reach the point of diminishing returns

6 words is not too many per week

. . . .but what else did they learn??