

Vocabulary Intervention Program (VIP)

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Intervention programs have been developed and implemented in classrooms to track student progress and improve specific skills learned in the classroom. When determining if a practice or program is valid and reliable to implement, the educator needs to research and examine if the program is applicable to their specific classroom needs - thus, indicating a higher probability for success with students - and prepare for the training, time, money and resources that may have to be invested into the implementation (Iris Center). When evaluating intervention programs, the purpose of the program, understanding of implementation, and analysis of the practice and researches that were done for the program should be examined for purposeful use for the classroom.

Investigation of the Intervention Program

The Vocabulary Intervention Program for English Language Learners and Their Classmates (VIP) is a 15 week vocabulary development curriculum for English language learners (ELLs) and native English speakers developed between 1997-2000 (WWC, 2006). Vocabulary acquisition is a strong predictor of reading comprehension skills, and explicit vocabulary instruction is a strategy which can support the ELL population. Through this instructional method, a developing gap between vocabulary knowledge of ELLs and native English speakers can be moderated to promote academic success for all learners in the classroom regardless of background language skills and experiences (Green, et al., 2015); mediating this gap is crucial in predicting the student's academic achievement in secondary and tertiary educational settings (Carlo, et al., 2004). According to What Works Clearinghouse (2006), the VIP program is designed to be implemented in the 4th to 6th grade levels (WWC, 2006) - a period which has been identified as vital in the development of a vocabulary acquisition gap between native English speakers and ELLs. It is also

a crucial time for an increased focus on vocabulary acquisition intervention for ELL students, due to the grade-level expectations set on them to read more complex grade level texts and understand tier III vocabulary words across all content areas. Furthermore, the vocabulary knowledge will transfer to students' speaking and writing skills inside and outside of the classroom. The VIP can prevent students from falling behind grade level reading and writing expectations by enhancing and supporting vocabulary knowledge. Students must develop a "breadth" and "depth" (p.190) of vocabulary knowledge to create less disparity between their knowledge and that of native English speakers (Wallace, 2007).

The VIP intervention targets all students in the classroom, including ELLs and native English speakers simultaneously during instruction. Research studies that were designed and implemented to evaluate the program's effectiveness were based in Massachusetts, Virginia, and California (WWC, 2006). According to the What Works Clearinghouse website (2006), the program has a total of three volumes – one volume per grade level. The total cost of the intervention program is \$99 for all three volumes or \$39.95 each when sold separately (WWC, 2006). In addition, each volume includes detailed lesson plans, quasi-scripted lesson guides, overhead transparencies, worksheets, homework assignments, and all necessary reading materials for the full duration of curriculum implementation.

Lessons are scripted with content directly aligned to the strategies which form the foundation strategies of the intervention program. Monday, the students review a text in their native language; Tuesday, a whole group lesson is implemented with a focus on vocabulary development with the text in English; Wednesday, students conduct small group work and complete cloze activities; Thursday, small groups are again created and students "complete word

association, synonym/antonym, and semantic feature analysis activities;" (WWC, 2006, p.5); Friday, is a review which encompasses a range of topics to further study the morphology of the word.

Carlo, et al. (2004) used six outcomes measures to gauge the effectiveness of the VIP strategy for ELLs' reading achievement. These measures were distributed twice during the program's implementation. These measures were cloze passages, polysemy production, morphology, word mastery, word depth knowledge and Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised (PPVT-R); the latter is a "widely used standardized test" (WWC, 2006). The other assessments, with the exception of the word depth knowledge test, are all research-developed forms of assessments.

Understanding of Implementation

As with any evidence-based program, following implementation guidelines is critical to the intervention's success. This twofold process begins with teacher training. Every two weeks, teachers meet as part of a TLC (teacher learning community) where they will not only receive necessary curriculum materials, but also be given the opportunity to discuss how the intervention will work in their classrooms. During these conversations, teachers are invited to share both their successes as well as their concerns with the VIP (WWC, 2006).

The second part of implementation is directed towards students via instructional delivery. In order to ensure student achievement, the VIP should be carried out over a period of 15 weeks with 30-45 minutes of instruction, four days a week. During these four sessions, students focus on 10-12 "target words" through the use of authentic readings related to immigration. The use of readings related to the topic of immigration, which demonstrates cultural relevancy, would be

purposeful in engaging students into the reading as well as retaining vocabulary more effectively.

In addition to immigration related articles, other texts may include newspaper articles, diary entries or even documentaries. On the first day of the week, readings are given in Spanish, followed by the same text translated to English on the second day. On the third day, students collaborate with their peers with varying levels of English proficiency to discuss the week's article, while also working on activities that strengthen students' contextual skills in English. In additional lessons, students focus on other core linguistic skills such as word association, synonyms and antonyms, and deriving meaning from root words. All of these lessons are scripted for the teacher to implement and come with full materials to allow the teacher to implement with fidelity (WWC, 2006).

Analysis of the Practice of the Intervention Program

In order to determine whether or not the VIP would qualify to be an evidence-based program, WWC investigated and reviewed the outcomes of one study conducted in 2004 (Carlo, et al., 2004). This study took place in classrooms across California, Virginia, and Massachusetts. It lasted two years and focused on 16 classrooms, which included 142 fifth grade ELLs (WWC, 2006). The classrooms participating in the study served students coming from working class Mexican-American, Puerto Rican, Dominican, Caribbean, and Central American backgrounds. In this study, 94 of the fifth graders were randomly put in an intervention group and received the fifth grade intervention curriculum. The rest of the fifth graders were randomly put in a comparison group and received their regular classroom instruction.

The study identified skills required to acquire vocabulary knowledge, as well as presented strategies which foster word acquisition for ELLs in the classroom. The five strategies named by

Carlo, et al. (2004) are choice of academic words that can be “accessed across domains” (p.192), meaningful access to words within texts, presentation of words through “thematic units” (p.192), focus on teaching “polysemy, morphological structure, cross-language relationships, spelling and pronunciation” (p.192), and use of explicit instruction to teach the vocabulary. These five strategies were chosen in order to create multiple contexts and applications in which the students could access and use the words. In doing so, the students are able to acquire and understand the vocabulary with an ever-deepening meaning each day. Native English speakers are able to acquire vocabulary indirectly through multiple exposures in listening and reading at home, but this opportunity is not available to students who speak a language other than English in their home and community (Carlo et al., 2004). To mediate this difference, the VIP intervention strategy uses methods which increase indirect exposure to vocabulary while explicitly teaching content through the five strategies.

The WWC reviewed the student outcomes from the study in two domains: Reading Achievement and English language development. Based on the students’ pretest and posttest means and standard deviations on each outcome measure (Carlo, et al., 2004), the WWC found that the effect on students’ reading achievement (assessed through cloze passages) was large enough to be “substantively important” (WWC, 2006). The findings from the study had a +19 improvement index, which is the study’s average standard deviation score compared to the average student standard deviation score for the reading achievement domain. The effects of students’ English language development were reviewed through five measures of the domain: Knowledge of Multiple Meanings of Words, Morphology, Word Mastery, Word Association, and the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test- Revised. The WWC analyzes the average effect across all five measures

of the domain to have potentially positive effects on English language development, with an improvement index of +11.

In order for teachers implementing the VIP into their classroom to have full fidelity, they are required to use the program curriculum as clearly stated within the intervention program. Three lesson plans were observed in Carlo's, et. al (2004) study to determine the fidelity of implementation, and fidelity was measured by noting the amount of key lesson elements present throughout the lesson implementation (Carlo, et al., 2004). From these observations, two-thirds of the teachers included over 70% of the key elements in their implementation. The remaining one-third of the teachers included less than 50% of key elements throughout their lesson implementations (WWC, 2006). From these results, adherence to program implementation may have affected achievement results of the students, and will be considered as a factor when interpreting the conclusions from this intervention program.

Conclusion & Lessons Learned

The support for explicit vocabulary instruction to remediate ELLs word content knowledge is well-supported in reviews of educational research literature (Wallace, 2007), but there is a need for additional evidence-based practices in order to validate this as an effective method for intensive interventions (Green, et al., 2015). All in all, the effectiveness of the practice/program is reliant on one single research study and thus is not as strongly supported by evidence and data as it could be. All data results were relatively positive, indicating a promising intervention method, but not substantially significant. In order for the program to have a stronger standing as an evidence-based program, more research studies should be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of this

intervention strategy and determine if the impact of these results could be administered with success to all ELL populations.

As rising first year teachers entering classrooms with ELLs, it is important to take into consideration whether this evidence-based program is feasible to implement. It would be important to consider that the research behind this study targeted one specific group of ELLs: native Spanish speakers. Therefore, this program would be most feasible to implement if the ELLs in our classroom were 100% native Spanish speakers. This program would not be feasible to implement if students were of a more diverse background. Furthermore, it is important to consider the fact that the student outcomes from the study were based on the lack of complete fidelity from teachers implementing all the key elements of the program. With additional teacher training and accountability, along with the understanding of the needs of all the ELLs in the classroom, this program would be appropriate to implement.

For any educator who desires to use this intervention program, the first step is to understand the group of ELLs for which the program is designed and see if it is a fit for their classroom population. The second step is for the educator to look into whether they would want to use an intervention that is supported by only one research study. The outcome of the presented research study and related articles in this analysis of VIP is relevant to evaluating the effectiveness of the program. These two steps are necessary to choosing an appropriate evidence-based practice/program, in addition to considering the training, intervention, resources, time, and money that is needed to implement the program. Doing the research and planning ahead to incorporate the intervention program into the classroom will support the teacher in personalizing their lessons for the specific group of students in need.

The VIP program has developed and organized an explicit teaching curriculum which is geared towards Whole-Language Movement frameworks of learning, but uses techniques that could be more closely related to the explicit practices found in Whole-Word Method and Phonics instruction. It has blended the two philosophies into an instructional strategy which teaches metacognitive features - or whole-language and meaning-making - of reading by teaching the reader to dissect a word across domains and in multiple contexts by highlighting the structure of English writing - morphology, roots/bases, spelling and punctuation. This is an important feature to be cognizant of as teachers serving a large percentage of ELLs in Dallas schools. Interestingly, a connection could be made to content-based ELL instruction and Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol. Both of these ELL programs use a similar blending of frameworks because these two ESL programs deliver concepts and language embedded into instruction with explicit content, making the classroom curriculum accessible and comprehensible for all learners within the class - regardless of native language.

Though the findings from this VIP study were tied most closely to a limited body of research studies, it is largely supported indirectly through other methods which also utilize a similar concept. Namely it is seen in other best practices from programs and models, such as Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol and content-based ELL, which target second language acquisition in the classroom; the effort to deliver the concept in a way which explicitly teaches a metacognitive strategy to all students in the classroom using scaffolded skills and ideas. Similar to the process of a think aloud that models for students how to approach content or a passage or a problem, explicit instruction for reading and vocabulary models for students how learners can interact with language

within a range content and contexts, placing the student in the position to utilize the available knowledge to build more understanding and to not be limited by any unknown.

Resources

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