DEVELOPING VOCABULARY USING SMALL GROUP COOPERATION AND ORAL PRESENTATION

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in
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by
Alisha L. Nelson
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ABSTRACT

DEVELOPING VOCABULARY USING SMALL GROUP
COOPERATION AND ORAL PRESENTATION

by

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Master of Arts in Education

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This action research intended study to effects of developing vocabulary through cooperative group work and oral presentation in the context of a Kindergarten classroom. The purpose of this study was to research engaging methods to develop vocabulary so that students had a true understanding of them. Cooperative learning, constructivist teaching, the acquisition of vocabulary, and work by Vygotsky were used to inform teaching practices. Methods led to gains in vocabulary knowledge. Through small group cooperation students interpersonal, cooperative skills improved. Using small group cooperation and oral presentation affected students’ vocabulary by providing a rich context for word learning which lead students to taking ownership of the words.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

The acquisition of vocabulary is important for many venues of learning and life. Building knowledge of words and word meanings is important for reading, including both reading comprehension and reading fluency (Stahl & Nagy, 2006; Tompkins, 2010). Having a variety of words and a deep understanding of them is also crucial to the ability to convey thoughts, feelings, and meaning in writing. We cannot understand anything we read or hear without first having understanding of the words being used. We also cannot convey a thought without first having the words to say it. Vygotsky (1962) expressed the importance of word meaning by saying, “A word without meaning is an empty sound, no longer a part of human speech” (p. 5). The work of Vygotsky in Thought and Language (1962) can also be connected to the importance of speaking and listening in vocabulary development, in the understanding that words and word meanings are interrelated with thought and speech. Under these premises, it is beneficial to provide structured and meaningful opportunities for students to collaborate to construct meaning. It is also beneficial for students to speak and listen more in order to enhance their understanding.

Listening is valuable in order to gain knowledge from peers. Classrooms structured for student-directed, small group cooperation provides more opportunities for students to collaborate, construct knowledge, enhance understanding and communicate
meaning. According to Presseisen (1992), “Cooperative learning is an instructional approach that integrates social skills objectives with academic content objectives in education” (p. 1). The work of Vygotsky in *Thought and Language* (1962) also supports speaking and language by building oral fluency through the opportunity for oral presentation. Oral fluency and interpersonal skills are important for the growth and development of children as both people and students. Although students need these crucial skills in upper grades as well as in the professional world, these critical life skills are often overlooked when students are expected to acquire shallow knowledge learned by rote.

This action research thesis intends to address the issue of developing vocabulary through cooperative group work and oral presentation in the context of a Kindergarten classroom. The study was implemented using the co-teaching model with one teacher, Jana (all names are pseudonyms), and myself. We implemented this research by using cooperative group work and oral presentation to develop both vocabulary and interpersonal skills in a way that was mutually beneficial for both skill areas. Ideally, this means that vocabulary development has lent itself to cooperative interaction and oral fluency, while cooperative learning and oral presentation will enhance vocabulary development. Cooperative group work was the venue in which vocabulary development was taught. Embedded in this delivery students can construct knowledge, share knowledge, and orally present knowledge. Jana and I have monitored students’ interpersonal growth through their work and cooperation in groups and, most significantly, their vocabulary knowledge.
This action research project stemmed from my desire to make vocabulary meaningful and to create vocabulary development lessons that were enriching and engaging for students. I built this idea on the knowledge that students build enduring understandings when the presentation of the material is engaging and the content is made meaningful. The idea to include cooperative group work began as I watched the students interact and share knowledge in their first group activity. In one initial cooperative activity Jana, an experienced teacher, sat with and guided a group as they used their newly acquired knowledge to draw an ocean. After the lesson, she said that it was great to hear their reasoning and thinking out loud, something that they do not do enough. While my interest in cooperation was increasing, a group of teachers gave a presentation on the Common Core Standards that would be adopted within the next two years. One of the kindergarten teachers stated that collaboration and speaking are more important in the new standards, which is good because so many adults cannot speak in front of others. As children grow, they are expected to collaborate or cooperate with others and there are also times when they are expected to talk in front of others. They cannot speak in front of others because they have not been taught to do so. People end up lacking critical life skills because these skills are overlooked and left untaught.

Statement of the Problem

During the process of this action research, I have examined the question, “What are the effects of using small group cooperation and oral presentation in kindergarten vocabulary development?” In addition to this central question, I have also examined underlying questions that are significant in understanding the impact of the
main question. The question that will be addressed under the umbrella question of cooperation in vocabulary development is: “Can Kindergarteners effectively work in cooperative groups and gain content knowledge?”

Vocabulary development will be monitored using consistent definitions for the involved components. Vocabulary development is the acquisition of new word meanings including new concepts or new words for familiar concepts (Stahl & Nagy, 2006). Vocabulary development will include cooperative group work. To research cooperative group work the term cooperative learning will be used. Cooperative learning is a method that includes several models of learning with common characteristics. These include students working together toward a common goal while each individual is still being held accountable. Also, all students have an equal opportunity to succeed and each member of the group has a task (Slavin, 1990). To be more suitable for kindergarteners, cooperative learning will be done through cooperative group work. Interpersonal skills are skills necessary for positive interaction with others, specifically skills needed for interaction during group work. These include appropriately speaking thoughts and opinions, listening to other group members and the ability to give feedback kindly without hurt feelings. Having the ability to engage in thoughtful conversation is also important. Children should ask for and give help in a kind manner. Finally, children need to be able to resolve conflict and work together (Solomon, Davidson, & Solomon, 1992). Interpersonal skills also include fluently speaking to others and respectfully listening. Oral presentations will be defined as speaking to others to present an item or idea. Fluently speaking and respectfully listening are important skills to develop.
Purpose of the Study

This study is significant because it looks how to effectively develop vocabulary by using methods that focus on using oral language. It seems that sometimes while trying to make students great readers, writers and mathematicians, the children themselves get overlooked in the push for good scores. Using cooperative work and oral presentation as a vehicle for vocabulary development would not only provide an understanding of vocabulary words but also serve the purpose of developing the children themselves. An important piece in this study was to find a balance between vocabulary growth and individual development.

This study focused primarily on ensuring that students acquired an understanding of words. Vocabulary development is important because research shows that children with more vocabulary knowledge are better readers (Tompkins, 2010). Vocabulary is essential to reading comprehension because it is impossible to understand what you are reading when you do not know what enough of the words mean. Several studies have found high correlations between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension (Stahl & Nagy, 2006). For similar reasons, vocabulary knowledge is also important to fluency; if students automatically recognize a sufficient amount of the words then they can read more easily (Tompkins, 2010).

The children in the class studied were emergent readers. They were not yet reading text word for word, but they had some level of knowledge about books and print. This knowledge level varied among students and impacted them as beginning readers. There were also discrepancies in vocabulary knowledge among students. One explanation for this discrepancy is that vocabulary knowledge tends to correlate with the
socioeconomic level of the family. At this school, 79% of students were eligible for free and reduced lunch program. This number was considerably higher than the state average of 52% (Great Schools). Studies show that financial poverty can often lead to what Stahl and Nagy (2006) call “linguistic poverty” (p. 5). According to a study by Hart and Risley (1995) children from advantaged homes have a vocabulary that is five times larger than children in families with low incomes. This gap is contributed to children of wealthier families being exposed to more vocabulary and more elaborate sentences. Tompkins (2010) reiterates this by saying that affluent children have more than twice the number of words in their vocabulary as students from low-income homes. Not only is the number of words in their vocabulary affected but also the depth of conceptual understanding of the meaning of words.

There is also importance in that this study addressed the current issue of adopting the Common Core Standards. The Common Core State Standards involve more speaking, listening, and collaboration that were expected in previous State Standards. Common Core State Standards Initiative (California Department of Education, 2012) says of the listening and speaking standards, “The standards require that students gain, evaluate, and present increasingly complex information, ideas, and evidence through listening and speaking as well as through media” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d., “Speaking and Listening,” para. 1). The focus of listening and speaking standards include academic discussion in small group instruction, formal presentations, and informal discussions that occur while students collaborate to meet an objective (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.). A kindergarten “Speaking and Listening” standard for Comprehension and Collaboration is, “Participate in collaborative
conversations with diverse partners about kindergarten topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups” (California Department of Education, 2012, p. 10). The first “Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas” standard is “Describe familiar people, places, things, and events and, with prompting and support, provide additional detail” (California Department of Education, 2012, p. 10). Followed by, “Add drawings or other visual displays to descriptions as desired to provide additional detail” (California Department of Education, 2012, p. 10). The last one is, “Speak audibly and express thoughts, feelings, and ideas clearly” (California Department of Education, 2012, p. 10). This study will be helpful for teachers researching ideas to include new standards in instruction.

Theoretical Bases and Organization

Developing vocabulary through cooperative group work and oral presentation is supported by several theories. One of these theories is that of the “greatest discovery” by Stern (as cited in Vygotsky, 1962). This discovery refers to when a child realizes that everything has its very own name. It is marked by two things, first a curiosity of what objects are and second a rapid increase in vocabulary. Vygotsky (1962) states that, “The child feels the need for words and, through his question, actively tries to learn the sign attached to objects” (p. 43). This theory states that students are naturally curious to learn about words. This curiosity can and should be nurtured in meaningful, authentic ways.

Using cooperative group work and oral presentation is supported by many authentic learning theories including constructivist teaching. In constructivist teaching, students build their own knowledge as the teacher facilitates rather than the teacher
passing knowledge to their students to be absorbed (Cathcart, Pothier, Vance, & Bezuk, 2011). According to Cathcart et al. (2011) constructivist learning involves, “a high level of interaction” and “frequent group work” (p. 115). According to Chapin (2009), “cooperative learning is a viable strategy you can use to deliver content and to teach skills” (p. 273). This is because, as Chapin (2009) states,

Students may learn from peers and increase their academic knowledge. They may increase and learn skills form listening to others, offering ideas, asking questions, compromising to resolve conflicts, and improving intergroup relations. Cooperative learning may be especially favorable in helping English language learners and increase cross-ethnic/race relations. The class climate can improve with both the teacher and students liking the class more. (p. 273)

One way to provide opportunity for authentic learning in a structured and well-monitored approach is through cooperative learning. Cooperative learning combines both social skills and academic content (Presseisen, 1992). Presseisen (1992) says that when used while teaching, “cooperative learning becomes an extension of cognitive research and the pursuit of more intelligent learning outcomes from instruction” (p. 1). One goal of teaching vocabulary through authentic learning is for students to develop a meaningful understanding of the words rather than just being able to recognize them or memorize a stale definition. According to Nagy and Herman (1987), “Instruction must aim at establishing rich ties between new words and prior knowledge and must present new words and concepts in the context of larger domains of knowledge” (p. 30). Motivational factors are also attributed to the success of cooperative learning. Motivational theories credit students’ high level of motivation to both individual and whole group goals. Group goals contribute to student motivation by encouraging a desire for group success (Slavin, 1990).
Limitations of the Study

The primary limitation of this study is its specificity to the kindergarten classrooms at this school. The number of participants in this study is also a limitation as there are 27 participants. The researcher was only a full time co-teacher in the class for half of the study. For the second half of the study the researcher remained involved in the class but only taught in the class during vocabulary development time. This is also a limitation of the study as it lessoned opportunities for research and observation. Although this study does have limitations, there are many aspects of it that can be generalized to other classrooms including the use of cooperative group work and oral presentation in kindergarten. There is also an advantage of perspective in this study because the researcher is teaching and involved in the classroom.

Definition of Terms

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning models all have groups working toward a common goal. Students work together toward these goals, but each student is held accountable. In this situation, all students have an equal opportunity to succeed and each member of the group has a task (Slavin, 1990). In this study cooperative group work was used to make cooperative learning more appropriate for kindergarten.

Interpersonal Skills

For the purposes of this study, interpersonal skills were defined as skills needed for positive interaction in groups. These include appropriately speaking thoughts and opinions, listening to other group members, engaging in a thoughtful conversation,
giving feedback kindly, being able to take feedback without having feelings hurt, asking
for and giving help in a kind manner, and resolving conflict and working together
(Solomon et al., 1992). Another definition that contributes to interpersonal skills is
fluently speaking to others and also respectfully listening.

**Oral Presentation**

Oral presentation is defined as speaking in front of others to present an item of
work or an idea.

**Vocabulary Development**

Vocabulary development is defined here as acquiring new word meanings
including new concepts or new words for familiar concepts (Stahl & Nagy, 2006).
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Sometimes in the search for academic success, the significance of the development of children as individuals is buried under the importance of check marks and scores. This makes it essential that we do not underestimate the impact that authentic learning can have on the acquisition of both content knowledge and personal skills. Finding a balance of curriculum knowledge and child development can be complicated but it is important. As teachers, we are challenged to advance crucial subject knowledge in ways that are authentic and meaningful to students on a deeper level of understanding and development.

Development of vocabulary is crucial for the development of reading and writing proficiencies in young students. Small group cooperation and speaking can serve as meaningful methods to build vocabulary knowledge. This way, while acquiring vocabulary students will also be developing important educational and interpersonal skills. To adequately study the combination of these three areas it is imperative to understand the significance of vocabulary development, cooperative learning, and oral presentation.
Vocabulary Development

The foremost significance of having a well-developed vocabulary is the essential role it plays in reading comprehension. Several authors attribute larger vocabularies to better reading ability and comprehension (Biemiller & Boote, 2006; Kameenui, Dixon, & Carnine, 1987; Stahl & Nagy, 2006; Tompkins, 2010). The impact that vocabulary has on reading comprehension is emphasized in the finding that vocabulary is the most significant indicator of the difficulty of a text (Stahl & Nagy, 2006). Therefore, the knowledge that a reader has of vocabulary could be the deciding factor in a child’s ability to read a text. Even in the pre-reading stage when students are just learning how to read, developing vocabulary is essential because a strong oral vocabulary will later lead to a strong print vocabulary. Goodson, Wolf, Bell, Turner, and Finney (2010) explain,

To understand the meaning of the text, the beginning reader must be able to map an oral representation of a known word to the written word . . . learners who have a larger set of oral vocabulary are more likely to be able to apply that knowledge to print materials. (p. 4)

The ability to connect oral vocabulary to written vocabulary and construct meaning not only involves knowing a word but the meaning constructed around a word.

To enhance working knowledge of words vocabulary instruction should not be focused only on the “quantity” of words that are learned but also the “quality” of knowledge constructed for those words (Kameenui et al., 1987). Graves (2006) defines two types of vocabulary knowledge. Productive vocabulary knowledge is being able to use a word. Receptive vocabulary knowledge is being able understand a word when used by someone else. Although they both play a role in reading comprehension, receptive
vocabulary knowledge has a greater impact. The role of vocabulary knowledge in comprehension has the same implications of the knowledge hypothesis of Anderson and Freebody (1979). The knowledge hypothesis is that comprehension does not come from just knowing the words but also knowing the concepts that those words represent. Anderson and Freebody (1979) explain other hypothesis involving the role of vocabulary in reading comprehension. The first is the instrumental hypothesis which says that the number of words known influences comprehension. Second is the aptitude hypothesis, which explains that vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension are connected because they are both affected by the learners “verbal aptitude” (p. 4). This hypothesis would serve to imply that some children just have a higher aptitude for acquiring vocabulary and comprehending text or that some children can just learn more or know more words than others.

Some authors and researchers argue that not only is vocabulary connected to comprehension but it also correlates with intelligence tests. According to Anderson and Freebody (1979) the correlation between intelligence and vocabulary knowledge is so significant that a verbal IQ test is often replaced with a vocabulary test. Chall (1987) supports this by saying that psychologists will use a vocabulary test score for a verbal test score. Knowing that a person’s intelligence can be judged on vocabulary knowledge creates an even greater need for vocabulary development. Vocabulary development in the classroom is especially important considering all the outside factors that affect a child’s vocabulary knowledge. Some factors of vocabulary knowledge do not correspond with intelligence, including socioeconomic status or a lack of academic language due to less proficiency in the English language.
Children start Kindergarten with various levels of vocabulary. Some students have significantly less vocabulary acquired than others (Biemiller & Boote, 2006). The gap in vocabulary among students is strongly related to the socioeconomic status of a child’s home. Students from disadvantaged households generally have significantly less vocabulary than others (Biemiller & Boote, 2006; Stahl and Nagy, 2006; Tompkins, 2010). According to Stahl and Nagy (2006), “Differences in word knowledge occur early in life, and there are dramatic differences in the exposure to new words among families of different social classes” (p. 5). This leads to a dramatic difference in both the number of words and the level of understanding a child has of words. Students from more affluent homes have more than twice the vocabulary as their less-fortunate peers (Tompkins, 2010). Without proper vocabulary development, this gap will continue to grow, creating a larger vocabulary and general academic gap between students from affluent homes and their socioeconomically disadvantaged peers (Stahl & Nagy, 2006). Stahl and Nagy continue, “This does not mean that children from poor homes are condemned to linguistic poverty. On the contrary, it is not hard to find successful people from humble beginnings. Education can make a difference” (p. 5).

According to Biemiller and Boote (2006),

If appropriate word meanings could be taught at a successful rate and continued to do so for the 3 primary years, a child could acquire 1,000-1,500 additional word meanings. This would significantly improve the vocabulary of children with initially low vocabularies. (p. 55)

Teaching vocabulary in the classroom can benefit children, even those with low vocabularies. When teaching vocabulary toward acquisition of new words and meanings, knowing how children acquire new vocabulary is beneficial.
New vocabulary can be learned orally or by reading a text. According to Nagy and Herman (1987) it is easier to learn new words from a verbal context than from written context because the object might be present, physical gestures might be used and the person speaking will usually be aware of the listeners’ background knowledge. Written context cannot provide meaning in these ways. Chall (1987) makes a distinction between two types of vocabulary, word recognition and word meaning. Chall (1987) says, “At the preliterate stage, before reading skills have been acquired, knowledge of words and their meanings is considerable” (p. 7). As children start reading, their level of word recognition increases and surpasses their level of word meanings (Chall, 1987).

Beimiller and Boote (2006) make a distinction between word meanings learned and word meanings that are actually acquired. For word meanings that are heard in a specific story, the context of the word has to be usable outside of the story. Twenty five percent of word meanings that are taught in such a way will end up being acquired (Beimiller & Boote, 2006, p. 51). Stahl and Nagy (2006) highlight the connections that need to be made for a new word meaning to be acquired. Word meanings are not stored separately in the brain, instead they are “stored as a semantic network” (p. 11). “Each word is connected to other words, and to other concepts, facts, and specific memories. When a word is recognized, the connections to other words in the network are also evoked” (Stahl & Nagy, 2006, p. 11).

Stahl and Nagy (2006) use a “Vocabulary Growth Pyramid” to illustrate levels of vocabulary acquisition. At the lowest level of acquisition, level one, more words are taught with less effort being put toward each word. At the highest level of acquisition, level three, fewer words are taught with more effort being put toward each word. At level
one there is, “Increasing breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge through experiences with rich oral and written language.” Level two is seen as, “Taking incremental steps to increase knowledge of specific words.” The highest level of vocabulary acquisition, level three, is, “Achieving productive control and precision of meaning for new words and concepts” (p. 51). Taking into consideration the levels of vocabulary knowledge and how vocabulary is naturally acquired and stored into networks and not as words conveying stale definitions, it would lead to the importance of vocabulary being taught in ways that are authentic and meaningful.

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is an effective means of developing content knowledge as well as other life skills in a meaningful and engaging way. Presseisen (1992) defines cooperative learning as, “an instructional approach that integrates social skills objectives with academic content objectives in education” (p. 1). According to Presseisen, “It seems that cooperative learning combined with cognitive instruction is capable of creating a user-friendly approach to conceptual development” (p. 3). According to Holliday (2005) cooperative learning promotes a positive school climate, decreased absenteeism, acceptance of individual differences, improved peer relationships, self-esteem, personal responsibility and increased achievement.

Johnson and Johnson (2009) state that, “five variables mediate the effectiveness of cooperation: positive interdependence, individual accountability, promotive interaction, the appropriate use of social skills, and group processing” (p. 366). They elaborate on the role that each of these takes in the effectiveness of cooperation.
Positive interdependence is all individuals knowing that reaching their goal is interconnected with others also reaching their own goal; members can only reach their goal, if others also reach their goals. The effect is referred to as “responsibility force,” knowing that one’s personal achievement affects the success of the whole group. Johnson and Johnson (2009) found that, “Individuals achieved higher with positive goal interdependence than when they worked individualistically but had the opportunity to interact with classmates” (p. 367). “Responsibility force” does not only come from group accountability but also from individual accountability, the second aspect of cooperation. This means that not only does the group need to meet its goal but each individual is also held accountable for their own performance. The third aspect of positive cooperation is promotive interaction. “Promotive interaction occurs as individuals encourage and facilitate each other’s efforts to accomplish the group’s goals” (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Also important to positive cooperation are social skills such as clear communication, acceptance of each other, support, and conflict resolution. These skills contribute to positive relationships and higher achievement. The final aspect of cooperation is group processing, or reflecting on members and actions and what should continue or change to improve effectiveness (Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

In a cooperative learning setting students are constantly working on their collaboration skills. Ciampa, Farr and Kaplan (2000) state that, “Collaborative skills are an essential part of life . . . cooperative interactions are unavoidable” (p. 22). Although these skills are essential, Ciampa et al. (2000) found that students start school lacking crucial social skills. In a program promoting social skills through cooperative learning, Ciampa et al. (2000) found that helping others increased as did sharing belongings and
giving support. Over all, there was growth in interpersonal skills and the ability to work cooperatively. In concluding the study, they state that,

Cooperative learning should be an ongoing activity that will enable children to become happy, successful team players. Children must constantly be involved in working with each other to solve problems. They need to develop the resources to get along with others. Taking turns, sharing, and empathizing are some of the necessary skills that are needed to succeed in life today. (Ciampa et al., 2000, p. 46)

In addition to promoting social skills, cooperative learning enhances students’ self esteem. According to Slavin (1990) the two most prominent factors of self-esteem are feeling liked and feeling as though they are doing well academically. Cooperative learning positively affects both of these components of self-esteem, shaping students belief that they are valuable and important (Slavin, 1990). Cooperative learning has also been shown to have positive effects on behavior. Ciampa et al. (2000) found an increase in verbal manners, ability to follow directions as well as an improvement in the area of interrupting others. Cooperative learning is also thought to increase time on task and engagement in academic content (Slavin, 1990). Burhorn, Harlow, and Van Norman (1999) found similar results in a study involving cooperative learning and engagement of multiple intelligences, including improvements in on-task behavior, social skills, and students getting along. They also came to the conclusion that there was enhancement in classroom climate in that it was more manageable and enjoyable. Students also showed improvement in their attitudes and interpersonal behaviors demonstrated by taking turns, listening, and contributing to group discussions (Burhorn et al., 1999).

Cooperative learning also has positive effects on students’ academic content learning. Cooperative learning has been found to be beneficial to internal locus of control, the belief that academic success is dependent on personal efforts. Internal locus
of control is considered to have a significant impact on academic performance (Slavin, 1990). In the area of academics, cooperative learning has been found to produce much better educational results than competitive or individualistic learning. Cooperative learning also promotes higher academic achievement as indicated by mastery and retention of content being studied, reasoning strategies used to complete tasks, new ideas or solutions and transferring knowledge gained form one situation to another (Johnson & Johnson, 1992). According to Johnson and Johnson (1992) cooperative learning has a profound effect on cognition and metacognition as well as academic achievement for several reasons. One reason is that students know they might need to explain or summarize what is being learned. The discussions that take place during cooperative learning promote oral summarization, explanation, and elaboration of knowledge. Divergent and creative thinking also increase as students work on a problem with diverse group members. Students are also working with peers who have different perspectives from their own. Reasoning out loud with other group members can also help keep individuals focused and students receive feedback for contribution. Conflicting ideas are significant because these result in involvement of students in communication within groups.

**Speaking and Oral Presentation**

Communication with peers can be done in several ways to enhance educational experience. Giving oral presentations of observations or results is significant because when a person discovers something they naturally want to share it with others so they can receive feedback, questions or constructive criticism (Wells, 1992). Wells
(1992) adds to the benefits of presentation, “However, even more important is the motivation that the expectation of such critical attention gives to the presenter to clarify his or her own understanding so that the presentation will be intelligible to others” (p. 10). Presentations are also beneficial for the audience because even if they have knowledge on the topic they can gain a broader picture or more valuable information (Wells, 1992).

Speaking and the use of discussion also play an important role in vocabulary development. Children can learn much about words from their peers. Speaking with peers can help clarify misunderstandings and meanings (Stahl & Nagy, 2006). It is especially important to take advantage of oral language for students in the pre-reading stage to facilitate vocabulary growth which will be crucial to vocabulary and concepts when students are reading (Stahl and Nagy, 2006). Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) recommend oral language activities for both expressive and receptive language skills.

Conclusion

Vocabulary acquisition is critical for children as it affects reading comprehension and fluency as well as other areas of their lives. Meanwhile, acquiring vocabulary is highly impacted by the financial status of their families and their proficiency in English. Vocabulary instruction is highly beneficial for students and can improve vocabulary knowledge, which is crucial for students who start with a lack of vocabulary. Through cooperative learning and the use of presentation, vocabulary knowledge can be improved in an academically and personally meaningful way. In this structure of learning, vocabulary knowledge is enhanced through cooperation and the use
of language. According to Vygotsky (1962), “The meaning of a word represents such a close amalgam of thought and language that it is hard to tell whether it is a phenomenon of speech or a phenomenon of thought” (p. 120).
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This action research study attempted to find an effective method for teaching interactive vocabulary development through the inclusion of cooperative group work and oral presentation. The initial questions for this study began while considering how to make vocabulary development more authentic for kindergarten students. This study was designed to include cooperative group work and oral presentation with direct instruction to enhance both word meaning and concept knowledge. The question was more thoroughly developed through researching the work of Vygotsky in *Thought and Language* (1962) in which the correlation between thought and speech as connected to the acquisition of words and word knowledge are discussed. The question was further informed by findings of Nagy and Herman (1987) which show that new words need to be connected to prior knowledge and presented in larger bodies of knowledge. The goal of this study was to find an effective means of developing true understandings of vocabulary while also developing students’ interpersonal skills through cooperative group work and oral presentation.
Population

The 27 students included in this study were enrolled in three different kindergarten classes at the same school. The classes were combined because the English Language Learners were leveled at this time, and five students from each class went to reading intervention to help them with specific academic needs. The majority of the students were from my class and participated in interactive, cooperative lessons for nearly the entire school year. The others include six students, all Early Intermediate to Intermediate level English Language Learners, whose teachers recommended them for vocabulary focused language instruction. The co-teacher in this scenario was partly responsible for focusing on the English Language Learner group and providing extra support in their language development. These students and their classmates participated in this study starting in January. The study occurred in a school in a socioeconomic disadvantaged area, with 83.3% of students from homes that were considered socioeconomically disadvantaged (Educational Results Partnership, 2011). Students who come from less advantaged homes have less vocabulary knowledge in both number of words and conceptual understanding of the meaning of words (Stahl & Nagy, 2006; Tompkins, 2010).

Treatment

Data regarding vocabulary development, small group cooperation, and oral presentation was gathered through tests, teacher observations, anecdotal notes, and student work.
Tests

To assess and monitor vocabulary development for the sake of both student learning and action research data, tests were given at the beginning of the week and at the end of the week. A pre-test was given at the beginning of the week to gauge student’s background knowledge of the vocabulary words. At the end of the week, after target word vocabulary lessons had concluded, a post-test was given to measure word knowledge gained. Assessment started as orally asking what a word meant, they eventually developed into multiple-choice and picture tests. Changes were made according to research in vocabulary knowledge and observations of differences in student knowledge as compared to their performance on assessments. Students’ attitudes toward tests also informed the form of test used to measure vocabulary gains. I also found it necessary to test all students at the same time due to limited time and also to keep the attention of students.

As observations and knowledge regarding vocabulary increased, the tests evolved into a more applicable and practical measurement of vocabulary development. These assessments used pictures whenever possible, so students could circle a visual representation of a given word. When pictures were not an effective representation, multiple-choice questions were used. Symbols, such as triangles and stars, were used in place of the traditional letters to make multiple-choice questions easier for students to follow. To discourage guessing, “I don’t know” was given as an option. In some cases, students were prompted to draw a representation of a word. Pre-tests and post-tests were given in the same manner using the same test form. Each student received a test sheet and a pencil, and then they were instructed not to talk or look at their peers’ papers. Student
test sheets were black and white as allowed by the copier. I used the document camera to
project a color copy of the assessment as I orally went through the assessment one
question at a time, wording the question a couple different ways in an attempt to make
the question understandable and for students. For multiple-choice questions, I then read
through the options referring to the symbols. I had them listen once to the question and
options of answers; then I read through the question and answer choices again for them to
circle an answer. An example of one of these tests is shown in Appendix A.

Teacher Observations

Assessments and oral presentations were kept track of using a checklist. This
checklist included a column of student names followed by columns labeled for each piece
of the activity. For tests, columns were labeled for each vocabulary word with a column
for other notes and an area for observations at the bottom. This checklist was used to
keep a record of student performance on tests.

Anecdotal Notes

Anecdotal notes were kept to record thoughts and reflections about lessons
and student progress. Notes were also used to record observations of student learning,
vocabulary word use, cooperative skills, and oral presentation. Anecdotal notes of
anything that seemed pertinent to students learning or action research was also kept.
Entries included information about tests, behavior, progress, use of vocabulary,
interactions between students, and observations of both presenters and audience during
presentation. Observations of student work, and reflections on what was witness while
students worked, was also recorded.
Student Work

During the research, student work was evaluated for evidence of cooperation and representation of the vocabulary words. Anecdotal notes were taken following the activity to record observations made during the activity and observations made of the work itself. Anecdotal notes of student work also included reflections about what was witnessed during the creation of the product as compared to the final product itself. Student work was also kept or photographed. In using student work as data, the progress made in work as it reflects cooperation was also considered. Student work was used to measure student’s ability to share space, share materials and to stay focused on the vocabulary topic. Work was also evaluated for evidence of students working together to make one cohesive representation, rather than each student coloring their own representation on the group’s large paper.

Design of the Investigation

The vocabulary development/English Language Learner block lasted about 20 minutes, four days a week. The study took place during this time. During the span of a week, a group of four or five target vocabulary words was taught in lessons designed specifically to develop vocabulary using small group cooperation and oral presentation. Words were chosen according to a theme that corresponded to classroom instruction. Themes sometimes corresponded with the focus letter or with the content that was being taught to support classroom learning and vocabulary knowledge. For example, penguin vocabulary was used while students were learning the letter “p,” travel was used as the vocabulary theme while classroom instruction was focused on transportation, and a farm
theme was used for vocabulary while the class was learning about farms. Groups of words were either introduced at the same time as corresponding classroom content or vocabulary was taught in advance to support classroom learning. According to Stahl and Kapinus (2001), “students are more interested and motivated when instruction is an integral part of classroom activities” (p.14). Words being taught for vocabulary development were not explicitly taught during the rest of the school day, but they were sometimes used and included in learning. Teaching individual words within a theme is supported Graves (2006). According to Graves (2006) teaching words individually is beneficial to students because it lessens the amount of words they have to learn on their own, and also provides students with more words to “explore and understand their environment” (p. 59). Teaching individual words enhances comprehension and the quality of their written and oral communication skills (Graves, 2006). An engaging and interactive approach to teaching vocabulary in themes is beneficial because, “teaching them in engaging and interesting ways fosters students’ interest in words” (Graves, 2006, p. 59).

To answer the focus question (What are the effects of using small group cooperation and oral presentation in kindergarten vocabulary development?) I designed vocabulary development lessons to support students learning through enriching lessons which included direct instruction, cooperative group work, and oral presentation. Each week of lessons started with students taking a pre-test. Words were then introduced by a means of direct instruction that were appropriate for the words or in a manner allowed for by availability of books and other materials. In some lessons, this included speaking with a partner in Think-Pair-Share. After explicitly reviewing the definitions of words and
showing examples, students would collaborate in their groups to make one final project to represent a vocabulary word. This process was used to investigate an effective way to implement cooperative group work in kindergarten and also how to balance cooperation and direct instruction in a given amount of time.

Cooperative group activities were done using pictures to draw and color a representation of that word. For example, when drawing a penguin’s habitat, students used pictures of a habitat to draw what they saw. These activities provided opportunities to share resources and space and to talk about what they noticed. These are all important skills in cooperating with others. These methods were chosen to better understand the effects of group work on students’ cooperative skills and the influence that small group cooperation has on vocabulary knowledge. In some instances, lessons included direct instruction and individual work. Individual work occurred in the context of groups where speaking was allowed and encouraged. At the conclusion of a vocabulary unit, products were orally presented. When work was completed in groups, each group presented its project to the other groups. If work was completed individually, students presented to their group or to their whole class. To increase engagement and excitement about presentations, making a secondary, personal objects was also included is some weeks instruction. For penguins, each student made a penguin out of constructions paper; for lions, each students made a paper plate lion mask; then for ants, each students made a clay ant. For a summary of lessons, see Appendix B.

Data Analysis Procedure

Data were analyzed using grounded theory. According to Glasser and Strauss (as cited in Dey, 1999) grounded theory uses a procedure of categorizing data, then
making connection between data in the categories. Vocabulary pre- and post-test results were put into graphs. Graphs were used to represent growth made in vocabulary knowledge. Data were also examined for evidence of students using the vocabulary words when unprompted. Cooperative group interactions and final product of their illustrations were also used to measure evidence of cooperation. Cooperative interactions and presentations were used to study students’ oral language use as well.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

The intent of the action research presented is to answer the question: What are the effects of using small group cooperation and oral presentation in kindergarten vocabulary development? To research this question, I designed vocabulary development lessons that included cooperative group work and oral presentations. While enacting these lessons, I studied the effects of interactions with in cooperative groups and the use of oral language in vocabulary learning for kindergarten students.

Vocabulary development lessons were carefully designed to provide opportunities for group work as well as productive and receptive oral language. Data was collected during instruction to show the level of vocabulary knowledge gains as well as the correlation between vocabulary gains and cooperative group work and oral presentations. These data were used to show the significance that receptive and productive oral language might have on the development of vocabulary. Data was analyzed using grounded theory. Grounded theory uses a procedure of categorizing data, then making connection between data in the categories (Dey, 1999). This form of data analysis is applicable to this action research study because the data is qualitative. According to Dey (1999) grounded theory also, “focuses on how individuals interact in relation to the phenomenon understudy” (p. 1). This applies directly to the current study.
which questions how student will interact with a particular form of vocabulary development.

Forms of data collected and analyzed included pre-tests and post-tests, observations and anecdotal notes, as well as students’ work. Tests were administered to directly measure the number of vocabulary words students could define before and after the vocabulary words were taught. Tests were initially used to inform teaching practices and effective forms of assessing vocabulary knowledge. These tests were later used to study the effects of the teaching methods used. Observations and anecdotal notes were also kept as data to study students’ use of language and cooperation during vocabulary development as they correspond to the gains in vocabulary knowledge. Observations were used to inform teaching practices and effective forms of assessment. Student work was kept and studied to compare students work to gains in vocabulary knowledge and to gauge the progress of interpersonal skills in cooperation. The results of datum collected were first studied independent from each other. Then the results of the data were compared to find patterns and connections between the different items of datum.

Results

Vocabulary Tests

The first form of assessment used to measure gains in vocabulary knowledge was to ask individual students what a word meant. Not only was this time-consuming but it also proved to be an unreliable display of their knowledge. I heard students using the words, and they could tell what a word meant, then when I spoke to them individually and asked them for a word meaning many students would look nervous and shy. This
form of assessment put too much pressure on them and made them too nervous to retrieve
the information they knew. This became apparent during the week when penguins were
used as the theme for vocabulary. One of their vocabulary words was “down feathers.”
Directly before the post-test one student brought a small down feather to me and said,
“Look a feather.” I asked, “What do we call that?” The student responded, “A down
feather.” This showed that she could accurately identify one of the vocabulary words in a
true-to-life context. While administering the post-test I asked her what down feather
meant, and she shrugged her shoulders. Although she could identify a down feather, she
could not tell me what the word meant, either because it was taken out of context or
because she was nervous when I asked her.

A student not responding when asked a definition of a word is addressed in
research on how people store word knowledge. Words are stored as part of a larger
network of words. They are stored in a context, not as individual definitions (Stahl &
Nagy, 2006). Not only does asking students the definition of a word put them in a
position of more pressure to retrieve and speak the meaning of a word, it is also not
conducive to finding the meaning of a word from the context in which it is stored. This
realization led me to create a test that aligned with the storage and retrieval of vocabulary
knowledge. To accurately measure student vocabulary knowledge, paper and pencil tests
that aligned with the context of knowledge were used. These tests were each designed for
the target words of the week. They used a combination of multiple-choice questions and
question in which students would choose the picture that represented the correct
vocabulary word. Some tests also included questions were students drew in the
representation of the vocabulary word themselves. According to Read (2000) it is
necessary that words be learned in context, so vocabulary should also be assessed in context. The test used to assess knowledge of farm words, “orchards,” “field,” “crops,” “plant,” and “harvest,” used both pictures and multiple-choice (see Appendix A). To test “orchard,” “field,” and “crops” three picture options were given for each. Students were asked, “Which picture shows an orchard?” and they circled the picture that showed the orchard. They were told to not circle one if they did not know, but students still guessed. Multiple-choice questions were given for “plant” and “harvest” because these actions were harder to depict in pictures and were more accurately measured through words. The question was asked, “What does ‘plant’ mean?” Students were given four options including “run,” “dig,” “put a seed or plant in the ground to start growing,” or “I don’t know.” Each of these options was preceded by a shape to be referenced because students could not read.

After pre- and post-tests were administered the results were put on a chart which had each student’s name in the first column and each of the vocabulary words across the top. The results were graphed according to correct answers marked by students in the class for each word. They were also graphed according to the difference between pre-tests and post-tests. These graphs are used to visually represent students’ increase in vocabulary knowledge and show the tested results of vocabulary instruction.

Figure 1 shows the results of the first paper-and-pencil test administered to students, which was used to assess knowledge of “environment” words. On the test, a multiple-choice question was used to assess students’ knowledge of the word “environment.” The options were: “all the plants and animals that live in a place,” “a planet,” “a nest,” or “I don’t know.” The four environment types were assessed by having
Figure 1. Results of “environment” vocabulary tests.

The graph on the left shows the number of correct responses marked for each vocabulary word on pre-tests and post-tests and the total number of students tested. The graph on the right shows the improvement in correct responses between pre-tests and post-tests.

Students draw what they knew about each environment in a box on the paper. To measure their knowledge of each word, key elements from each environment were looked for in their illustrations. For desert, these key elements included the sun, a cactus, and flat land. For forest, trees were expected. To show knowledge of a prairie, students were to draw grass and possibly an animal that they learned about. For a jungle, students were expected to draw trees and another element to show a jungle, which showed that it was different than the forest. Several students drew a monkey with a tree or a monkey swinging from vines, both of which had been used during instruction.

As shown in Figure 1, the most significant vocabulary gains were made in environment and prairie, in which students had little background knowledge. An increase of 71% of students showed knowledge of prairie on the post-test as compared to 0 on the pre-test. It is important to note that on the pre-test students were given crayons to draw their pictures and the groups of English Language Learners had the co-teacher supporting
them. When the post-test was given it was rushed; students did not have crayons like they should have, and the co-teacher was not actively supporting the groups of English Language Learners. This could have had a negative influence on student post-test scores.

The second test administered was to measure gains made in “travel” vocabulary words. This test used three multiple-choice questions and two draw in questions. One word that was part of this vocabulary was “trip,” was used in the sentence, “I took a trip to the store,” because it has more than one meaning. The options provided were: “fall” (the other meaning of the word trip and the meaning that my students would be more familiar with), “go somewhere,” “run,” and “I don’t know.” There was a square for students to draw both a suitcase and luggage. To assess the word “pack” the question, “What do we do with a suitcase?” followed the drawings of suitcase and luggage. The options for this multiple-choice question were: “play,” “run,” “pack,” and “race.” As seen in Figure 2, the largest gains were made on the word “luggage,” which the fewest number of students knew on the pre-test.

The scores from the week when students learned cattle words showed less of a gain. For this test the first five words were tested through multiple-choice. Herd was tested in the same question; students had the option to circle two meaning for the word. Pasture and range were tested by giving students boxes to draw them in. As shown in Figure 3, students made the highest improvement on the word ranch and no improvement on the word range. Fewer students marked cattle correctly in the post-test than on the pre-test. In this set of vocabulary words there were more words than usual. There was also a word with more than one meaning and the words cattle, which is a singular plural. All of these factors probably had a negative influence on students’ test scores.
Figure 2. Results of “travel” vocabulary tests.

The graph on the left shows the number of correct responses marked for each vocabulary word on pre-tests and post-tests and the total number of students tested. The graph on the right shows the improvement in scores between pre-tests and post-tests.

Figure 3. Results of “cattle” vocabulary tests.

The graph on the left shows the number of correct responses marked for each vocabulary word on pre-tests and post-tests and the total number of students tested. The graph on the right shows the number of difference responses between pre-tests and post-tests.
The words for the following week stayed with the farm theme. For this test, “orchard,” “field,” and “crops” were tested though pictures while “plant” and “harvest” were tested through multiple choice. As seen in Figure 4, students made significant gains on the word “harvest” and 95% of students correctly marked “crops” on the post-test compared to 14% on the pre-test.

**Figure 4.** Results of “farm” vocabulary tests.

The graph on the left shows the number of correct responses marked for each vocabulary word on pre-tests and post-tests and the total number of students tested. The graph on the right shows the improvement made between pre-tests and post-tests.

Scores on “ant words” vocabulary tests showed a steady improvement on each word. On this test gather and worker were tested through multiple choice, the other three were tested using pictures. As seen in Figure 5, as students pre-test to post-test score ratio increased at about the same rate for all words. The words “hill” and “antenna” were correctly marked by 100% of students on the post-test. “Gather” and “worker” were correctly marked by 86% of students on the post-test, and 48% of students correctly marked “tunnel.” A large majority of students correctly answered these vocabulary words on the post-test.
Figure 5. Results of “ant” vocabulary tests.

The graph on the left shows the number of correct responses marked for each vocabulary word on pre-tests and post-tests and the total number of students tested. The graph on the right shows the improvement made between pre-tests and post-tests.

Students’ post-test scores on dinosaur vocabulary words stayed consistent, as seen in Figure 6. On this test, pictures were used for “fossil,” “past,” and “present.” Dinosaurs were used to represent “past” and lizards were used to represent “present.” The word “extinct” was tested through both pictures and multiple-choice. Students scored higher on the multiple-choice question than the picture question on the post-test, after they had learned the word. A small majority of students knew the vocabulary words on the post-test.

During explorer vocabulary, five students who usually go to reading intervention were included in vocabulary development and took the pre- and post-tests. For the test, “explore” and “discover” were tested though multiple-choice and “observe” and “journey” were tested though pictures. As seen in Figure 7, 100% of the number of students who usually participated in vocabulary development correctly marked “discover” and “journey” on their post-test. Of all students included in vocabulary that
Figure 6. Results of “dinosaur” vocabulary tests.

The graph on the left shows the number of correct responses marked for each vocabulary word on pre-tests and post-tests and the total number of students tested. The graph on the right shows the improvement made between pre-tests and post-tests.

Figure 7. Results of “explorer” vocabulary tests.

The graph on the left shows the number of correct responses marked for each vocabulary word on pre-tests and post-tests and the total number of students tested. The graph on the right shows the improvement made between pre-tests and post-tests.
week, 76% knew “explore,” and 65% knew “observe,” showing a majority of students knew the vocabulary words at the end of instruction.

**Observations and Anecdotal Notes**

Throughout the course of this study, observations were made and anecdotal notes were taken to record thoughts and reflections. Many meaningful observations were made of students using their vocabulary words outside of vocabulary development time and in the correct context. They used them both in speaking and in writing. Students used vocabulary words nine times. Six of these words were from different sets of vocabulary words and eleven different vocabulary words were used. Six of these instances were after instruction of the given word had been concluded.

Cooperative skills as seen in group-work were also observed and recorded. On their first group assignment, students argued over material and space on the paper. One group ended up splitting the paper and each working in their own space. Students still ended up drawing in each other’s space. Subsequent activities brought decreasing levels of argument. On one activity toward the end where students “planted an orchard” (paper trees in a bucket of sand) I saw one students ask the person across from him, “Is that yours?” She nodded and he straightened up her tree in the sand for her. On the last group assignment students were to sort picture cut-outs into past and present. They did this silently, taking a picture and sliding them into their correct space. I heard one student ask his group members, “Who wants the last one?” In another group a student said, “Here’s the last one, want to row-sham-bow for it?” Students also actively used vocabulary in their small groups, as had been intended but also as an unintentional product of instruction. While working on independent projects students were talking about what they
were making and what they were drawing. After drawing a side view of an anthill with tunnels, students used clay ants to play on their drawing, interactively using their vocabulary words.

Observations and anecdotal notes were also recorded during student presentations. These included both characteristics of the presentations and students’ use of the vocabulary words. In presentations, when students were in groups speaking simultaneously, the speaking characteristics of each student were recorded. In presentations, when students chose what to say, the vocabulary words that were used were recorded. For example, when students were presenting their dinosaur projects, the word that was used by the highest number of students was “fossil.”

**Student Work**

Student work was used to observe both students use of vocabulary and their ability to cooperate to reach a common goal. On initial group projects not only did students argue and fight over space they also ended up with drawings that were scattered and disorganized. Illustrations showed little orientation with pieces of “sky” interspersed with pieces of “ground” and multiple suns. As students had more experience working in their groups, illustrations showed more cohesiveness in their products, with on sky over one solid piece of ground.

**Discussion of the Findings**

Through vocabulary instruction, student knowledge of vocabulary increased. This is shown through test scores and authentic use of vocabulary words. Students made positive gains on all but one word during the action research. Overall, students made the
highest gains, as shown on the post-test, on words which fewer of them knew on the pre-
test. This was a trend in four out of seven tested word-sets. Figures 8 and 9 show this
trend in environment words and travel words, as previous knowledge increases the
difference in pre and posttest scores decreases.

Figure 8. “Environment” vocabulary words.

A trend between previous vocabulary word knowledge and student vocabulary growth shows that students make the most growth in words that they had less knowledge in before instruction; as shown here with “environment” vocabulary words.

Cooperative Group Work and Oral Presentations

Students successfully worked cooperatively in groups to accomplish a common goal. Although small group work started with arguments and unorganized groups project they made impressive improvement in their ability to cooperatively work with other and showed development in interpersonal skills. Test scores and students’ correct use of vocabulary words suggest that cooperative group work was effective in
Figure 9. “Travel” vocabulary words.

A trend between previous vocabulary word knowledge and student vocabulary growth shows that students made the most growth on words that they had less knowledge in before instruction; as shown here with “travel” vocabulary words.

teaching vocabulary words. Students were able to gain vocabulary knowledge by speaking with their peers in cooperative groups because of the amount or oral language being used. I also observed the benefits of using oral presentations. I noticed that students were excited to show their work. In one instance, only two students were able to present their projects one day, and when I said it was over the students on the carpet were outwardly disappointed. In a small group situation when students were working on individual work, they were telling each other excitedly about what they were doing. Students showed that they wanted to share and they want acclamation.
Effects of Instruction

A significant sign of learning vocabulary was students’ use of them outside of vocabulary development time. When they were unprompted and used the words properly in context, showing that students had ownership of the words. When students have owned a word it is more available for use and communication. Owning a word means that a student truly knows it beyond the knowing the definition for a test (Stahl & Kapinus, 2001). Students used the words when they were triggered by a source connected to the context they were stored in. The reason for this is that through themed sets of vocabulary, students stored words in networks having to with concepts, not singular words. As Stahl and Nagy (2006) point out, word meanings are not stored separately in the brain. Instead they are “stored as a semantic network” (p. 11). “Each word is connected to other words, and to other concepts, facts, and specific memories. When a word is recognized, the connections to other words in the network are also evoked” (Stahl & Nagy, 2006, p. 11).

In several situations, students showed that through instruction that included small group cooperation and oral presentation they not only knew a word for a test but that they “owned” the word. Production of a word shows evidence of knowing a word at the highest level of vocabulary knowledge, level three. According to Stahl and Nagy (2006) level three is, “Achieving productive control and precision of meaning for new words and concepts” (p. 51). In one instance following volcano week a student brought a model volcano to me. He pointed to the inside and said “magma,” then pointed to the red on the top and said lava. Following a week of lion themed words students were heard using the words twice. One time during a read aloud a picture was shown of lions and gazelles. The students enthusiastically pointed out that the gazelles were the lion’s
“prey.” They also said that the group of lions was a “pride” and pointed out that the place where they live is their “territory.” One student showed ownership of the word “prey” during a writing assignment when students were to write, “If you give a _____ a _____,” inserting words that start with the same sound. This student used, “If you give a cheetah a Cheeto,” and excitedly pointed out, “Oh! The Cheeto is the cheetahs’ prey!!” This showed that he knew the meaning of the word and its context and could extend it to apply to a similar situation. The ability to extend a word correctly to a similar context was also done with the word “camouflage” weeks after students had learned it. While reading a story about dinosaurs a student excitedly pointed out, “That dinosaur blends in!” pointing at a dinosaur that did, in fact, blend into the bush it was in front of. I asked all the students, “What do we call that?” All the students enthusiastically responded, “camouflage!” One student did not know “fossil” on the “dinosaur” pre-test then did know it on the post-test. On a card she made for me she drew a picture which she told me was a fossil. When I asked her what a fossil is she said, “When the dinosaur gets saved.” On the test, students were asked to circle the appropriate picture for the word fossil. This student was able circle the correct picture and also able to orally tell me the correct definition of the word. This shows that she had internalized the knowledge of that word, both in picture form and in definition. Students’ enthusiasm in using their vocabulary words reflects the theory of “greatest discovery” by Stern (as cited in Vygotsky, 1962). This refers to the discovery that everything has a name of its own. This gives children a natural curiosity to learn new words and labels. Student’s desire to learn new words is then reflected in their excitement to use them.
Through this study, I found that including cooperative group work and oral presentation in instruction provided rich, contextualized opportunities to interact with the words and their meanings. Repeated and powerful experiences with the words lead to students owning their vocabulary words. According to Stahl and Kapinus (2001), “this ready availability or ownership comes only when the word has been actively used or processed several times in many different ways. Students will then understand the conceptual information behind the word” (p. 14).
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Vygotsky (1962) expressed the importance of word meaning by saying, “A word without meaning is an empty sound, no longer a part of human speech” (p. 5). The purpose of this action research was to study the effects of including small group cooperation and oral presentation in kindergarten vocabulary development. This study was initiated with the intent to find a way to make vocabulary development meaningful and engaging for kindergarteners. To develop a deep and true understanding of the words so students would not just know a word meaning for a test but take ownership of a word and use it. This lead to the central question of this research: “What are the effects of using small group cooperation and oral presentation in kindergarten vocabulary development?” In addition to this central question, the question: “Can Kindergarteners effectively work in cooperative groups and gain content knowledge?” was also examined.

This study is significant because it looks at how to effectively develop vocabulary using methods that focus on using oral language. This is important for the academic and overall development of students. Vocabulary is important to develop because children with more vocabulary knowledge are better readers (Tompkins, 2010). Vocabulary is essential to reading comprehension because it is impossible to understand what you are reading when you do not know what enough of the words mean. For similar reasons, vocabulary knowledge is also important for fluency; if students automatically
recognize a sufficient amount of the words then they can read more easily (Tompkins, 2010). Developing students’ vocabulary through meaningful instruction is also essential, considering the influence that socioeconomic status has on vocabulary. Studies show that financial poverty can often lead to what Stahl and Nagy (2006) call “linguistic poverty” (p. 5). Students from more affluent homes have more than twice the vocabulary as their less-fortunate peers (Tompkins, 2010). The study was also implemented with consideration of how vocabulary is acquired. Word meanings are not stored separately in the brain, instead they are “stored as a semantic network” (Stahl & Nagy, 2006, p. 11). “Each word is connected to other words, and to other concepts, facts, and specific memories. When a word is recognized, the connections to other words in the network are also evoked” (Stahl & Nagy, 2006, p. 11).

To study the effects of small group cooperation and oral presentation in vocabulary development, lessons were carefully designed to provide rich opportunities for group work as well as productive and receptive oral language. Data was collected during instruction to show the level of vocabulary knowledge gains as well as the correlation between vocabulary gains and cooperative group work and oral presentations. Forms of data collected and analyzed include pre-tests and post-tests, observations and anecdotal notes, as well as student work. Tests were administered to directly measure the number of vocabulary words students could define before and after the vocabulary words were taught. Observations and anecdotal notes were kept as data to study students’ use of language and cooperation during vocabulary development. Student work was also kept and studied to find the correlation between what students are including in their work and
speaking about in their groups as well as the impact of their work on their vocabulary knowledge.

During the course of this action research, cooperative group work and oral presentation were used to deliver intellectually engaging vocabulary development lessons. The study sought to research the effectiveness of using cooperative group work and oral presentation in developing a deep understanding of vocabulary word. Other questions, worthy of future study, arose as byproducts of using these methods.

At one point in this research, a usually shy student gave a confident presentation of her work. She was followed by a student who was usually more outgoing, but she gave a quiet and mumbled presentation of her project. The first student had more experience giving presentations than the second. This observation leads to the recommendation to research the effects of oral presentation on students’ presentation skill as well as oral fluency. How to effectively support students toward speaking more confidently and improving oral fluency should also be researched. At the initial stages of this research, when students first started working in groups, they argued over space on paper, materials, and who would draw and color. Their group illustrations ended up distorted and confusing, including, for example, several chunks of sky around the paper or multiple suns. As time progressed groups argued less and cooperated more. Their illustrations also became more cohesive, including one sky correctly oriented to the ground. A recent group project where students were sorting was done silently. Students just pushed the objects into their places. I heard one student ask who wanted the last one. Then another student told two people in his group to row-sham-bow for the last one. These observation leads to the recommendation to research the implementation and
lasting effects of cooperative group work on intergroup cooperation skills. A finally recommendation for further research is to study how vocabulary knowledge learned in context generalizes across context, from the context it was learned in to other applicable contexts.

Overall, significant gains were made in acquired vocabulary knowledge. There were also positive effects shown in students’ ability to cooperate in groups. A structured opportunity for sharing of oral language also appeared to be beneficial for students. Students were actively engaged in learning, and they used their newly acquired words outside of vocabulary development. By producing the words in a correct context outside of instructional time and when unprompted showed that students had taken ownership of their words and that they had become part of their vocabulary. This study found that the effect of using small group cooperation and oral presentation was that instruction provided a rich context for students to learn the words and take ownership of them. According to Vygotsky (1962), “The meaning of a word represents such a close amalgam of thought and language that it is hard to tell whether it is a phenomenon of speech or a phenomenon of thought” (p. 120).
REFERENCES


Name: __________________________

1. Which picture shows an orchard?

2. Which picture shows a field?

3. Which of these pictures shows crops?

(Images from Microsoft clipart.)
4. What does plant mean?

★ Run

△ Dig

✉ Put a seed or plant in the ground to start growing

★ I don’t know

5. What does harvest mean?

★★ Dig

△ Pick the crops

✉ Trees

★ I don’t know
APPENDIX B
SAMPLE OF LESSONS

Lion Vocabulary (“Callie Cat” for the letter of the week “Cc”)

Pride: A community of lions.
Territory: Where the lions lives.
Prey: The lion’s food.
Defend: Protect

Monday: Pre-test: During table tops, I walked around the groups and ask a question like, “What do we call the community a lion lives in?”
Introduced the vocabulary words: pride, territory, defend and prey with a PowerPoint.

Tuesday: Split into 3 groups. Each group colored its “territory.”
“Territory” was made out of butcher paper and colored on with crayons. “Prey” could also be colored on. Students were given pictures of lion’s habitats to use to color.

Wednesday: Made paper plate lion masks.

Thursday: Group presentation day. Student sat on the red part of the rug. One at a time, each group put their territory on the rug and I put animal cracker “prey” on it. Each group held their masks up and said: “We are a pride of lions. We defend, roar, our territory and hunt our prey.” Then they each ate an animal cracker off their territory.

Penguin Vocabulary (letter of the week “Pp”)

Waddle: Used the movement.
Down feather: Soft, warm feathers.
Habitat: Penguins home.
Colony: A community of penguins.

Monday: Took a pre-test by asking each student what each word means while they colored a picture of a penguin. Introduce the vocabulary words: waddle, down feather, and colonies (was connected to a lion’s pride). Habitat was connected to a lion’s territory. Waddle was connected to other animals that waddle and the movement waddling. Down feathers were connected to ways that we use down feathers to keep us warm too. A PowerPoint was used for this.

Tuesday: Students got into penguin colonies where they made construction paper penguins to use during presentations. Each colony was a different type of penguin (Rockhopper, Emperor, Little Blue and Chinstrap).

Wednesday: Each penguin colony used pictures to color the habitat where they live on a large sheet of butcher paper.

Thursday: Oral Presentations: Each group stood behind their habitat on the carpet. As a group they said, “We are a colony of __________ penguins. Our down feathers keep us warm. We waddle around our habitat.”
Frog Vocabulary (letter of the week “Ff”)
Hibernate: Sleep through the winter.
Camouflage: Blend in.
Moist: A little wet.
Croak: Used the sound.

Monday: Read a book about frogs to introduce tadpoles and hibernate. Played “Frog Tag.” In this game most students are frogs, one is “summer” and one is “winter.” The frogs hop around, croaking, until “winter” tags them and says hibernate. When tagged, the frog crouches down and hibernates until “summer” tags them. Then we talked about other animals that hibernate.

Tuesday: Used a direct draw to draw frogs. Felt sponges with different amounts of water for moist.

Wednesday: Each student colored a frog’s habitat. Then they colored the frog to camouflage into the habitat. Stapled frogs on habitats.

Thursday: In small groups students will present their frogs. “My frog is camouflage in _______.”

Environment Vocabulary (Travel Theme)
Environment: All the animals and plants in a place of land or water
Desert: Used pictures for environments.
Grassland
Forest
Rainforest

Monday: Pre-test.Introduced each environment using a PowerPoint and short videos.

Tuesday: Review environments. In small groups, students used pictures to illustrate one of the 4 environments.

Wednesday: Each student colored a picture of an animal that lives in their environment.

Thursday: Environment presentations: groups presented their environment by sharing their animal and something else about their environment. Post-test.

Travel Vocabulary (Travel Theme)
Travel: Go somewhere.
Trip: Go somewhere.
Pack: What we do with a suitcase. Students acted it out.
Luggage: Used a picture.
Suitcase: Used a picture.

Monday: Pre-test
Environment art stations: After demonstrating each station, students chose one.
  Desert: chalk
  Jungle: crayon with jungle stickers
  Prairie: crayon with flower and footprint stamps
  Forest: leaf rubbings, add brown trunks.

Tuesday: Explain and discuss vocabulary words. Students got into groups according to where they were traveling. Each student packed a construction paper suitcase that
folded closed by coloring clothes and what they would take with them.

Wednesday: Students chose what they would be traveling in (truck, helicopter, train, car, etc.) from foam stickers. Then they colored the setting for their transportation (road, sky, train tracks, city, country, etc.). Then they colored a suitcase on their transportation.

Thursday: Some students present their trip. Took post-test.

Cattle Vocabulary (Farm Theme)
Ranch: a cow farm with cowboys who sell the cows
Dairy: a cow farm for milk
Herd: a community of cows
Pasture: the land where cows eat and sleep
Range: the land where cows eat and sleep
Cattle: cows

Monday: Pre-test. Some students presented their trips. Used a farm book with pictures to introduce and discuss vocabulary words.

Tuesday: Review words. Colored ranches and dairies in groups using pictures. 2 group colored a ranch and 2 group colored a dairy

Wednesday: Each student made a paper bag cow.

Thursday: Presented ranches and dairies. “We are a herd of cattle. We live on of a dairy. We sleep in the pasture.” Or “We are a herd of cattle. We live on a ranch. We sleep on the range.”

Farm Words (Farm Theme)

Orchard: a tree farm
Field: where plants grow
Crops: plants that grow in a field
Plant: put seeds or plants in the ground to start growing
Harvest: pick the food from the orchards and fields

Monday: Pre-test. Presented more travel projects.

Tuesday: Introduced and discussed the words using a farm picture book. Did a Think-Pair-Share for types of crops. In a square bucket of sand each group planted rows of crops.

Wednesday: Review words. Think-Pair-Share plants that grow in orchards. In groups, students harvested crops from buckets, then planted an orchard.

Thursday: As a class, sorted crops into field or orchard. Post-test.

Ant Vocabulary
Tunnel: Used a picture.
Gather: Bring things together.
Worker: The one who does the work.
Hill: Used a picture.
Antenna: Used a picture.
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<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>No School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Pre-test. Sang “Ants Go Marching.”</td>
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<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>Discussed and Think-Pair-Share vocabulary words. Read ant story which included vocabulary words.</td>
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<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Made ants out of clay with pipe-cleaner legs and antenna.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>Reviewed vocabulary words. Painted ants black.</td>
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<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Each group “ant colony” built an ant hills. This was done from the side view so the ants could crawl through the tunnels and out of the hill.</td>
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<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>Presented ant colonies: “We are a colony of ants; we crawl through our tunnel, out of our hill, and gather leaves. We feel with our antenna.”</td>
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<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Played in ant colonies. Took post-test.</td>
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Dinosaur Vocabulary
Past: before now
Present: right now
Fossil: dinosaurs and plants saved in the ground
Extinct: not alive anymore

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<th>Day</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>Pre-test. Read a story about dinosaurs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Explained and discussed extinct, past and present. In groups, students categorized pictures of reptiles into those who lived in the past and those who live in the present.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>Reviewed vocabulary words. Looked at pictures of fossils. Made fossils with sand, seashells, and plaster.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Oral presentations: Students shared something about their fossil or their groups poster. Post-test.</td>
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Explorer Vocabulary
Explore
Observe
Discover
Journey

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<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>Pre-test. Read fictional explorer book.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Finished explorer book. Discussed vocabulary words. Students wrote their name on their own explorer books.</td>
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<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>Went over explorer rules and consequences. Walked to the outdoor classroom. Students drew what they observed and discovered in their explorer books.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Post-test.</td>
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