Creating Vocabulary Awareness and Promoting its Use through Prewriting Graphic Organizers in Writers Workshop

By

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the effects that vocabulary focused lessons and the use of vocabulary specific graphic organizers have on third grade student writing. This study was motivated by the recently adopted English Language Arts Common Core State Standards. A few of the standards I am referencing are CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.3.3 Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.4 With guidance and support from adults, produce writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task and purpose. Data included ongoing student writing data analysis and observations. Additional data was gathered from six case studies in a regular education third grade classroom noting how the students scored on a CCSS writing rubric. Results demonstrated by scores on the rubric, observations and surveys indicated that the vocabulary focused mini lessons and use of the prewriting graphic organizers did enhance student vocabulary use in their writing.

Keywords: vocabulary instruction, vocabulary awareness, prewriting activities, written vocabulary, elementary literacy
As a third grade teacher I am continually searching for the best ways in which to implement vocabulary instruction. Often I find myself disappointed by the lack of focus given to it within our curricula, especially in the area of writing. Vocabulary instruction has been and continues to be a challenge for me to incorporate meaningfully. The specific area of vocabulary that intrigues me the most is in the area of writing. I am constantly asking myself, “Why don’t students use more topic relevant vocabulary words in their writing?” Research has shown that a learner’s writing vocabulary is the highest level of cognitive development, indicating that students would greatly benefit from learning to use new vocabulary with an elaboration in writing (Laufer & Nation, 1995). I see this need for vocabulary instruction in our writer’s workshop; however, I have not had the know-how nor curricula to support it.

When conferring with my students about what they are going to write about or when we discuss their prewriting graphic organizers, they can orally share these wonderfully rich stories with topic related vocabulary. However, when they get into the writing process of their story, those words seldom appear. For example, a student will bring up a prewriting graphic organizer for his personal narrative about a day with his family at the beach. He will tell me in detail about the characters in his story, what they did, about the wet sand in his toes, how it was cold, about the smelly slimy algae in the water or that he built a sand castle using sticks, rocks, shells, and garbage pieces. Then, he’ll go off to write his drafts and when we conference again, many of the words he used when orally telling me his wonderful story do not show up in his draft. The revision processes we use allows for revising words used, fixing grammar and spelling errors, but I continued to wonder what would help my students use more of their known topic related vocabulary words in their initial drafts.
It was not until I began reading more about the vital importance of quality vocabulary instruction in relation to a child’s listening, reading, writing and speaking vocabulary that I began to understand the complexity of vocabulary instruction and how to meaningfully teach it to children. Vocabulary instruction needs to occur across all curricular areas, but how to promote the use of a child’s current and new vocabulary in their writing seems to be a recurring question being asked and explored by many well-known researchers. It is worth helping and encouraging learners to bring their vocabulary knowledge into active use in writing (Laufer & Nation, 1995). Learning what I have thus far about the role a child’s vocabulary knowledge plays in their academic success has further inspired me to make it the focus of my action research project and literature review because I want to learn more about how I can best incorporate it into daily instruction, specifically in the area of writing. My action research question is: What Effects Will the Implementation of Vocabulary Awareness Lessons and the Use of Vocabulary Specific Prewriting Graphic Organizers have on Student Writing? The literature review will include sections pertaining to the importance of vocabulary size, the vocabulary connection between listening, reading, writing and speaking, vocabulary use in children’s writing and current best practices in vocabulary instruction.

Literature Review

Vocabulary Connections between Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking

I find that children who struggle in reading generally struggle in the areas of writing and spelling too. This concerns me because writing is a critical skill in school and life (Hawkins, Kopeke, Mo, Olinghouse, & Troia, 2014). The vocabulary connections that exist between
reading, writing and speaking are evident; however, in my experience, there are few curricula available that effectively intertwine new vocabulary learning between subject areas. There are four levels of vocabulary. Coomber, Pete & Smith (1998, p. 10) state that the 4 levels of vocabulary are;

1. Listening Vocabulary - words known when heard
2. Reading Vocabulary - words known when read
3. Writing Vocabulary - words known well enough to be used in writing
4. Speaking Vocabulary - words known well enough to use properly when speaking

If these levels of vocabulary are scaffolded together and directly correlate to one another, then why are some teachers and districts not focusing more on vocabulary instruction? The new Common Core State Standards (CCSS) emphasize the importance of teaching vocabulary, but do not give educators direction as to what words should be taught (Graves, 2013). If reading curricula are focusing on decoding, fluency and retelling, but are not providing adequate instruction in vocabulary, research indicates that it is going to have a negative effect on students’ comprehension level. The lack of consistent and quality vocabulary instruction is causing great concern among some of the top researchers as well as many teachers including myself (Berne & Blachowicz, 2008). For me, teaching children how to decode well is the easier part of reading instruction; teaching children to make meaning, understand the words they are reading and make connections with them so that they remember them long term is the greater challenge. Teaching students how to decode a word is useless unless it is a part of their listening vocabulary (Berne & Blachowicz, 2008). More time needs to be spent making connections between a student’s
listening, reading, writing and speaking vocabularies. Writing research and achievement scores are revealing that we must do a better job of preparing writers (Hawkins, Kopeke, Mo, Olinghouse, & Troia, 2014). The limited use of a student’s known vocabulary in their writing is perplexing to me. Yet, after reading more about the cognitive processes involved in carrying over known vocabulary into writing, I understand why I am not seeing it more often. According to Smith (2003), one of the final steps in vocabulary mastery is being able to use known and new vocabulary in writing. When it is used in writing it is a slower and more metacognitive process and it allows for the vocabulary being learned and used to become part of a child’s long term memory (Smith, 2003). The vocabulary connections between listening, reading, writing and speaking are evident for all students and even more so for struggling readers and English Language Learning students (Laufer & Nation, 1995). More emphasis should be placed on vocabulary instruction across curriculum areas for true growth in a child’s vocabulary development to occur.

There is a relationship between an author and reader, students need to be able to taught strategies to understand the vocabulary found in texts. Students need to become aware of what is being written by the author and to note the intention of words between the author and the reader. Reading and writing are co-existing constructive processes that involve similar skills (Graves & Duin, 1987). Reading well and writing well are complementary skills and if effective instruction is taking place in both areas, than I infer that both academic areas for students will simultaneously improve. Analyzing how a writer writes and how a reader reads, knowing the structure of texts and understanding them will improve learning (Nagy, & Scott, 2000).
The Importance of Vocabulary Size

A key factor in a child’s academic success is his or her vocabulary knowledge base. Differences found in children in regard to their socioeconomic status is alarming and well documented (Berne & Blachowicz, 2008). There are learning and academic achievement gaps between some children due to their socioeconomic status, the education of their parents and the vocabulary knowledge they acquire. A strong link has been determined to exist between early reading achievement and vocabulary knowledge (Berne & Blachowicz, 2008). An eye-opening study found that there is direct correlation between the frequency and quality of words a child hears during her first three years of life and their language development. Hart and Risley estimate that children in professional families hear approximately 11 million words per year; children in working class families hear approximately six million words; and children in welfare families hear approximately three million words annually (Hart & Risley, 1995). Those are alarming statistics, especially knowing the lack of explicit vocabulary instruction that is taking place in some classrooms. The National Reading Panel (NRP) and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD, 2000) did not make vocabulary a separate area of instruction; rather, they grouped it with comprehension. Berne & Blachowicz (2008) note that in The National Reading Panel report it is determined that vocabulary is a foundational “pillar” that must be taught and assessed. There is an overwhelming amount of curricula available and best practices about vocabulary instruction that are being shared and continually researched. Still, there is great variation in how vocabulary instruction is implemented. Being a classroom teacher, I feel that it is difficult for teachers to navigate what curricula to use and what specifically are best practices in regard to vocabulary instruction. In my opinion, there are
reading programs that do a fantastic job incorporating vocabulary instruction, but there are also more open-ended reading programs that are vague when it comes to knowing what vocabulary words to teach, when to teach them and how to ensure they are being taught properly to our students so that they will be growing their vocabulary knowledge.

Students need to understand the importance of learning new words and creating a larger vocabulary to use within the areas of listening, reading, writing and speaking. Could it be as simple as; the more words you know the smarter you are? Building word power and developing an awareness of new words they encounter is a learned skill, one that needs to be taught to children (Neuman & Roskos, 2012). A child’s vocabulary knowledge coming in to school is a large factor in their future academic success. The teaching of vocabulary is not a luxury, it is an equity issue (Berner & Blachowicz, 2008). As educators we have to build within our students a rich vocabulary knowledge base in order for them to achieve the academic expectations we are setting for them. No matter what socioeconomic status or ethnic origin our students come from they all need to be exposed to strong oral, reading, speaking and writing vocabularies in order for theirs to grow. If external factors have impacted the breadth and vocabulary knowledge of our students prior to their education years, then it is our job as educators to do all we can to promote their vocabulary growth to meet that of their peers. One of the major determinants of vocabulary use in written production is the vocabulary size of the writer (Laufer & Nation, 1995). How then can student writing expectations include the vocabulary we are hoping to see with respect to the CCSS, when vocabulary instruction is not being given adequate attention?
Building a child’s vocabulary knowledge base is a continual process from the early childhood years to college years. Children need to be taught and made aware of the importance of learning new words. Students needs to know approximately 80,000 words to be college ready and that developing word knowledge is essential (Neuman & Roskos, 2012). One of the key findings that plays a significant role in children becoming engaged in learning new words and developing an eagerness for learning them is the excitement and attitude a teacher shares about it with their students (Kindle, 2009). If children see that you love hearing, finding, using new words, and will take the time to look up the meanings of words they will too. Reading aloud to children is also a powerful and simple way to build a child’s vocabulary knowledge (Kindle, 2009).

The beginnings of a person’s vocabulary knowledge does occur naturally with his/her development of speaking and listening skills, but socioeconomic status, being read to, taught about the meaning of words and life experiences all impact vocabulary learning. Vocabulary knowledge is critical to the long-term development of all students and high quality vocabulary instruction should be a priority for all teachers across all grades (Graves, et. al., 2013).

**Best Practices in Vocabulary Instruction**

Educators and researchers know that there are vocabulary connections that exist between listening, reading, writing and speaking and within those connections the vocabulary knowledge of a child is also going to have an impact on the academic successes in those areas. Telling children new words flippantly or assuming that if they encounter them in their readings they will understand and remember them is not effective vocabulary instruction. Vocabulary instruction
potentially has a systematic methodology that when done properly can be considered best practices and will give teachers the confidence and decision making abilities to incorporate more vocabulary instruction into their classrooms. If these practices become consistent across classrooms, districts and are aligned with the CCSS then student vocabulary achievements in the areas of listening, reading, writing and speaking will show growth.

It would be nice if there were agreed upon and concrete best practices in vocabulary instruction that could be handed to teachers on a silver platter (and I believe that is what I had previously hoped for), but it doesn’t seem to exist; yet. What is evident, is that there are in fact effective methods that keep coming up in research based findings. The National Reading Panel Report (NICHD, 2000) noted that vocabulary instruction should combine both incidental, explicit, and systematic instructional approaches. The NRP report confirms that there are four types of vocabulary; listening, speaking, reading and writing. Vocabulary instruction must be an element in all of those four areas to promote the greatest student growth. That statement encompasses some of the best practices set forth for vocabulary instruction by well known researchers. Some main principles of vocabulary instruction are: (Blachowicz & Fisher, 2000, p. 504).

1. That students should be active in developing their understanding of words and ways to learn them.

2. That students should personalize word learning.

3. That students should be immersed in words.

4. That students should build on multiple sources of information to learn words through repeated exposures.
These principles include other research findings about what is considered best practice in vocabulary instruction. Some other methods that keep resurfacing in my readings are teaching vocabulary through the use of read alouds (Kindle, 2009), studying word parts and structures (Newton, E., Newton, J., Padak & Rasinski, 2011), creating a word rich environment and giving students the tools to record, find and discover new words on their own (Artz, Beck, Crosson & McKeown, 2013).

Determining which vocabulary words to teach can be a daunting task. The SWIT method (Selecting Words for Instruction from Texts) focuses in on the importance of choosing what words to teach from the texts you are using in your classrooms, guided reading groups, or intervention situations (Graves et. al., 2013). Graves and his colleagues looked at various approaches that are used to determine what words to teach such as a word list approach, a genre approach, a tier approach and from those developed their SWIT method that essentially deals with four types of words: essential words (crucial for comprehension), valuable words (have multiple benefits and uses for students in reading and writing), accessible words (more common and higher frequency words that may not be understood by children with limited vocabulary knowledge) and imported words (words that will help comprehension, but may not be directly found within the text). While this method involves teacher planning, preparation, thoughtfulness and continued reflection for effectiveness, it is a vocabulary instructional method that could be used by teachers quite easily. The SWIT method is one component of vocabulary instruction that is directly related to searching out which words to explicitly teach. This method aligns with the beliefs and findings of other researchers that share that vocabulary instruction needs to be explicit (Berne & Blachowicz, 2008; Neuman & Roskos, 2012). Struggling readers and ELL
students benefit from meaning based explicit instruction of vocabulary words that will be most beneficial to them socially and academically (Blachowicz & Fisher 2000).

Students need to experience repetitive exposure to newly learned vocabulary words in their listening, reading, writing, speaking for it to be learned long term (Allen & Lane, 2010). Teachers need to teach vocabulary not just for the sake of it, but because is an crucial element in a student’s academic achievement. Teachers need to become mindful of what research based best practices are, know which words to teach, how to engage their students in their vocabulary development, and continually refer to the new vocabulary being learned.

**Vocabulary Use in Children’s Writing**

When children are allowed to immerse themselves in words, build their vocabularies and make the connections necessary to become academically successful, those words will begin to appear in their writing (Berne & Blachowicz, 2008). A learner’s writing vocabulary is the highest level of cognitive development; therefore, we should not expect her writing to develop parallel to her listening, reading and speaking vocabularies (Smith, 2003). Knowing this, I can better understand why I am seeing the discrepancies between the stories my students can tell me orally versus the stories I am seeing produced in their writing. Knowing how to choose words in one’s writing to convey ideas is more difficult than reading and understanding words (Johnson, 2000). The previous section on vocabulary instruction discussed the importance of having students repeatedly use their new vocabulary words. Use of them in writing is the best way to place them into long term memory (Smith, 2003). Not only do students need to learn and have continued practice with their newly learned vocabulary words, but students also need to learn
how to retrieve the words that they already know when writing. Students need to be taught how to be seekers of just the right words to use during their prewriting, drafting and revising processes; they need to access their inner storehouse of words (Johnson, 2000). This reinforces importance of vocabulary size, students will use the words they already know in their writing before they begin to use new vocabulary words they’ve learned. I don’t find that students are using their “inner storehouse” of vocabulary when they begin to write and need to develop more awareness of using it before they can begin to incorporate all of the new vocabulary they are learning. It will be then that they can use their tools to find new vocabulary words to revise the ones they have in fact used from memory. If students are taught how to better access the vocabulary knowledge they already possess in their writing and begin to understand the role vocabulary plays in their writing, it is then that they will begin to use their new vocabulary words, tools and feel safe to experiment with them in their writing. Teaching a set of related words to students before they write an essay in which the words may be used can directly improve the quality of their essays (Graves, & Duin, 1998). This is precisely what is driving my action research, I want to determine if students generate their known words on a prewriting graphic organizer will it promote student’s use of those words and improve their writing.

Graphic organizers are used to represent children’s conceptual understanding (Novak, 1991). If students can conceptualize, organize and create a framework for a story that they are envisioning, then when it comes to the actual writing of their stories, their graphic organizer will support and enhance the writing process. Developing a graphic organizer that has a component that allows for students to generate known and content specific vocabulary words they wish to use in their stories will also enhance their written work. Graphic organizers help students who are struggling
with the organization of information; they help students arrange their information in a concrete representation and will allow for them to have greater success in writing and other subject areas as well (Baxendell, 2003). Writing skills for students can be enhanced through improved vocabulary instruction and by teachers creating a writing centered classroom that allows for individualized instruction (Coomber, Pete, & Smith, 1998).

**Methodology**

Through the literature I reviewed and the data I collected from my students’ writings, I determined that I needed to teach my students how to better utilize their pre-existing vocabulary knowledge in their writing. This has to occur before they can begin to incorporate any new vocabulary words and use revising tools available to further enhance their writing. I hypothesized that students would benefit greatly from learning to use known vocabulary within their writing. My goal was to carefully research methods to create and introduce scaffolded mini lessons that would promote vocabulary awareness across all curricular areas. However, the focus of this action research project was focused upon writers workshop. I implemented mini lessons that promoted vocabulary awareness, read from mentor texts, utilized vocabulary specific prewriting graphic organizers and allowed for guided practice and eventually independent practice experiences. My goal was for my students to become more conscious about the wealth of their existing vocabulary and take the time to think about including more of it in their prewriting graphic organizer, drafting and even during revising stages of the the writing process. I created graphic organizers that allowed students to have word bank places to generate and record their “inner storehouse” of words (Johnson, 2000). Ultimately, I theorized that students
would improve and enhance their writing by incorporating their existing vocabulary knowledge into their written work.

**Setting and Participants**

My action research took place in my third grade classroom in a small city in the midwest. My classroom consists of 25 third graders. The gender makeup of my classroom is 14 boys and 11 girls, one boy receives his writing instruction through the LD (Learning Disabilities) program and one boy is serviced for his writing instruction by the EBD (Emotionally and Behaviorally Disturbed) teacher. Our midwestern city is an affluent community and our school is often referred to as a neighborhood school. Our writer’s workshop instruction takes place every school day from 9:00 - 9:45 a.m. and sometimes longer depending on the task at hand or the make-up of our day. This research study was carried out over an eight-week period. While all students received the same instruction during the course of this study, my research data focused on six of my 23 third graders. I chose six students to focus on based on their scores from the first prompt given and the rubric results from it. I determined based on scores two students that were performing near grade level, a little below grade level and significantly below grade level expectations. My purpose for focusing on six students in a range of levels was to determine if the use of vocabulary awareness lessons and graphic organizers resulted in improved writing scores for all ranges of writing abilities.

**Materials and Data Collection**

The procedures for data collection were as follows:
1. I had students write a three paragraph personal narrative on prompt #1 (Appendix A) using the prewriting graphic organizer we are currently expected to use and they are familiar with. They took this personal narrative prompt through the entire writing process. This served as my pre-observation data to collect and analyze.

2. I had the students fill out a survey in regard to their perception of vocabulary use in their writing.

3. I taught a mini lesson on the new word bank prewrite graphic organizer that we used for prompt #2 (Appendix B). I modeled how this prewrite would look and we discussed how its purpose is to help generate more genre/topic specific vocabulary as we prepare to write our narratives. We discussed the importance of using our existing vocabulary knowledge to improve their stories.

4. Students were taught another mini lesson and observed my modeling of using another new prewrite graphic organizer that included character, event and action specific word web areas. This organizer for prompt #3 (Appendix C) again promoted student use of their known vocabulary words and they were expected to write them down in the provided word bank areas.

5. I again gave students the survey I had initially used in regard to their perceived vocabulary use in writing when all of the above steps were completed.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data I had collected in order to answer my research questions. First, I looked at the student’s initial writing prompt #1 and assessed their use of topic/genre related
vocabulary specific words using the district’s rubric. From that data analysis I determined that I would focus on six students’ written work. I chose two students that were scoring above grade level, two at grade level and two below grade level. My reasoning for choosing the students that I did were based upon the fact that I do not only want to see my below grade level students benefit from greater vocabulary awareness in their writing through the use of prewriting graphic organizers, but I want to see growth in all students of all writing abilities.

Next, I analyzed and summarized the student vocabulary survey answers to see what summative and formative data it revealed. I also observed student conversations, questions and actions as they were working on these new prewrites and prompts. I recorded my observations using field note forms that recorded observations in one column and my observation comments in another. I collected all student’s prewriting, drafting and published work (if published) on prompts #1, #2, and #3. These student writing artifacts were all assessed using the rubric to determine the use of genre/topic specific vocabulary words within in them. For the purpose of my action research however, I specifically collected and documents the works of my six selected students.

Lastly, I again gave students the vocabulary survey and analyzed its data to see if the perceptions of students have changed in regard to the use of more vocabulary and their awareness of it in their writing.

The survey resulted in the slight majority of students feeling as though they sometimes think about the words they want to or will use in their upcoming story before they start writing their draft (red). The informative part for me from the survey given was pertaining to question number 4 (blue) and how half of the students felt they were using the tools they have to correct
spelling and revise for better vocabulary words and half don’t (Figure 1). This is how I perceive their use of their tools as well. This was a bit disappointing, but after I read more research articles it does not surprise me. How are they to know how to use new vocabulary words and tools when they are not activating and using their current vocabulary knowledge in their writing? When looking specifically at who answered “not at all” versus “sometimes,” the average or above average writers are using their tools, the below average writers are not.

Survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>not at all (1)</th>
<th>sometimes (2)</th>
<th>always (3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 6</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Vocabulary Awareness Survey. This figure illustrates the results from the initial survey given to students.
The second survey given revealed that students felt they were thinking more about the vocabulary they were using in their writing and it also showed that they were making use of their writing tools more often (Figure 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>not at all (1)</th>
<th>sometimes (2)</th>
<th>always (3)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
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<td>Question 3</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tr>
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<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 6</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>NO 0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Vocabulary Awareness Survey. This figure illustrates the results from the post survey given to students.

The results from the three writing prompts given to the six specific students and assessed by me using the district provided writing rubric that aligns with the CCSS showed some fluctuation in the given prompts, but from prompt #1 to prompt #3 all but one student showed growth in their writing as the vocabulary specific graphic organizers were implemented (Figure 3). The student JM, that did not show growth on prompt #3, had shown significant growth on his prompt writing for #2.

**Writing Prompt and Rubric Assessment Results**
Figure 3. Student Writing Rubric Results. This figure illustrates the rubric scores received by each student after the three given prompts.

The rubric that I used to score their writing prompts assesses the six ELA CCSS writing standards and 3 of the ELA CCSS writing conventions (appendi. The six students except for one (AB) showed improvement in meeting expectations in the areas of the standards and conventions; he stayed the same throughout all prompts, but was already performing at about grade level. In analyzing the rubric in regard to vocabulary use and scoring them according to standards and conventions, I was able to detect that the two students (JW and JF) who had been identified as performing the furthest below grade level improved the most significantly after prompt #1 was given (Figure 4).
Figure 4. Individual Student Results. This figure illustrates each student’s writing rubric scores after each prompt individually.

As shown in (Figure 5) JW and JF showed the most growth in not only their writing by using the prewriting graphic organizers, but also in their growth of other grade level writing standards and conventions assessed. Providing them with scaffolded instruction through writers workshop mini lessons and a prewriting graphic organizer gave JW and JF a more concrete place to organize their thoughts, words and take the time to think about their story before writing it. Their knowing my expectations of them and providing them with the support they needed played a significant role in their writing progress of which is evident in their rubric scores.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Prompt #1 Standards</th>
<th>Prompt #1 Conventions</th>
<th>Prompt #2 Standards</th>
<th>Prompt #2 Conventions</th>
<th>Prompt #3 Standards</th>
<th>Prompt #3 Conventions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AB</td>
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<td>3/3</td>
<td>3/6</td>
<td>3/3</td>
<td>3/6</td>
<td>3/3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The results of this study showed that students did become more vocabulary aware in their writing, they utilized their graphic organizers to generate known vocabulary as able, and they began to implement it into their writing to improve it. Much of the students’ growth in writing can be attributed to the use of the prewriting graphic organizers that were more vocabulary specific and to the scaffolded modeling and mini lessons I provided during writers workshop.

Discussion

The implications resulting from this action research project’s findings are that there was an improved effect on student’s writing when creating greater vocabulary awareness in writers workshop and utilizing vocabulary specific prewriting graphic organizers. Students were able to share that they became more metacognitively aware of their use of vocabulary in their writing by their answers to the pre and post surveys given. For example, survey question one asked the students if they think about the words they are going to use in their story before they begin to write it. On the initial survey the student results were eleven responses for “not at all” and twelve responses for sometimes. On the post survey student votes showed significant change, their votes were five for “not at all” and 18 for “sometimes. The improvement in vocabulary use in
their writing was also seen through observations of their prewriting organizer use and in the carry over of their topic related vocabulary from the organizers into their writing. I find students are enjoying the writing process more and are taking pride in sharing their writing with their classmates and will ask me if I like the word they just used in their draft or in the revision process. My action research interventions did have an impact on the students’ writing. The most rewarding part of this action research was not in the increase of the scores that I observed in my students, rather it was in the confidence they are finding in their writing abilities. At the culmination of this research project it is only the end of November and my students, especially these six, have already shown significant growth in their writing and vocabulary use. I can’t wait to see the continued growth they will make as the academic year progresses. I will be certain to continue the use of the new pre-writing vocabulary-specific graphic organizers in our writers workshop. Their effectiveness and the research I have conducted also leads me to believe that graphic organizers, vocabulary instruction and creating vocabulary awareness in all areas of the curriculum will be beneficial.

Applications

I will be sharing my findings with my team of third grade teachers, with our building’s staff in a future professional development opportunity and with my fellow members of the Elementary Literacy Committee I serve on in hopes that they too will begin to instill a greater vocabulary awareness in their classrooms, specifically in their writers workshop times. I can see the benefits of creating greater vocabulary awareness also becoming a stronger instructional component of our readers workshop, guided reading groups, interventions, content area and math
times. I am excited about the potential effects that my vocabulary action research project will have in my classroom in the area of writing, in assessment scores and other academic areas.

Limitations

As with anything newly implemented, there were limiting issues that arose during the study that I had not taken into consideration. I did not anticipate that the writing prompts given would become such a roadblock for few of my students as they did. I did not explicitly remind my students to continually refer to their prewriting graphic organizer as they were drafting. One of my students made me realize this as I saw him looking back at it and even crossing off his vocabulary words as he used them to ensure they were a part of his story. The timing of this research project was also not ideal; it came in the beginning of the school year when our writing routines, methods and tools are still being established, so trying something new was a challenge and for some brought quite intense writing expectations early on and was overwhelming for a few of my students.

Reflection

I am encouraged by the awareness and energy that my students are showing in respect to their vocabulary generation and use of it in their writing at the end of this action research project. Their vocabulary efforts have continued to be observed in other writing tasks I have recently assigned. Students are coming to ask me how to spell words like chaotic, monstrous, fulfilling and revenge in their personal dictionaries. I can’t help but smile and compliment them on their
thinking of such wonderful words to use. This makes me motivated to continue and build upon creating this vocabulary awareness all year long.

I know that I will be implementing more vocabulary-driven mini lessons, modeling and continuing to use the prewriting graphic organizers created or adapt them as the year goes on depending on the genre we are writing about. Vocabulary instruction will be taking place in my classroom as it never has before due to what I have learned through this project, from the literature I have read and the results I was able to observe and assess. I will have a vested interest in vocabulary in the area of writing, but know that creating vocabulary awareness in my students will lead to their academic growth in all areas. Potential action research studies that could result from my findings could be done in relation to the use of graphic organizers that promote vocabulary awareness in other content areas. The use of graphic organizers as evidence of reading comprehension could also be a worthwhile and effective action research study.
References


Appendix

A. Writing Prompt #1 Prewrite Graphic Organizer
B. Writing Prompt #2 Prewrite Graphic Organizer
C. Writing Prompt #3 Prewrite Graphic Organizer
### D. Writing Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing Standards/Tasks</th>
<th>Does not meet expectations (1 pt.)</th>
<th>Almost meets expectations (2 pts.)</th>
<th>Meets expectations (3 pts.)</th>
<th>Exceeds expectations (4 pts.)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Student introduces a narrator/and or character.</td>
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<td>2. Organizes an event sequence that unfolds naturally.</td>
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<td>3. Uses dialogue to develop experiences or show the response of characters to situations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Uses description of actions, thoughts and feelings to develop experiences and events or show the response of characters to situations.</td>
<td>Are there 4 or more vocabulary words being used?</td>
<td>Are there 5 or more vocabulary words being used?</td>
<td>Are there 8 or more vocabulary words being used?</td>
<td>Are there 10 or more vocabulary words being used?</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Uses temporal words and phrases to signal event order.</td>
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<td>6. Provides a sense of closure.</td>
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**CONVENTIONS**

1. Capitalizes the beginning of sentences, proper nouns, and titles.                      
2. Uses correct end punctuation.                                                          
3. Spells grade level high frequency words and other studied words correctly.          

Pre-writing graphic organizer is filled out prior to drafting.

Score Totals:

Student: __________  Date: ______  Score Total: ______/40

Writing Standards: ______/6  Conventions: ______/3  Pre-write: ______