

Ruddell, M.R., & Shearer, B.A. (2002). "Extraordinary," "tremendous," "exhilarating," "magnificent": Middle school at-risk students become avid word learners with the vocabulary self-collection Strategy (VSS). *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 45, 352-363.

Keywords: vocabulary instruction, elementary education, Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy, motivation, vocabulary choice.

Summary: Three middle-school reading classes were examined in this study for one semester. All 17 participants were Caucasian and 3-4 years below grade level. The study explored vocabulary development using Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy (VSS). VSS allows students to bring in a word of their choice each week, along with a teacher chosen word; these words are combined to create a class vocabulary list. At the end of each week, students were tested on the spelling, meaning, and sentence use of each word from the combined class list. The study revealed higher scores were achieved using the VSS method than the traditional vocabulary lists given in language arts classes.

Assumptions:

- VSS is based on the theoretical learnings espoused by social constructivists, transactional theorists, and activity theorists. Is this a assumption?
- VSS utilizes the link between concept development and word learning first theorized by Lev Vygotsky. Is this a assumption?
- There are tangible gains to be made when students discuss language with teacher and among one another.
- Ongoing transactions with words give words meaning.
- VSS could reduce the limitations of traditional word learning instruction by assisting with student choice and motivation.

Results:

- The use of VSS resulted in a mean score of 94% compared with a 76% for traditional weekly spelling tests.
- There was a statistical significance on the gains made using VSS self-created word lists versus traditional language arts word lists.
- VSS words are retained for a longer period than traditional language arts curriculum words.

Conclusions:

- VSS increases breadth and depth of word knowledge over the traditional language arts word list.
- VSS increases the students' capacity to be strategic and independent word learners.
- Students, on their own accord, will choose difficult and important words to contribute to the class word list.
- The textured and language transactions associated with VSS contribute to its strength and lasting power.

Suggestions for Teachers:

- Teachers can use VSS to assist at-risk students by increasing the students “linguistic-experiential capital.”
- Teachers should create opportunities for students to enter their own Zone of Proximal Development in vocabulary acquisition.
- Teacher-made activities should emphasize the transactional and socially constructed attributes involved in acquiring word knowledge.

Suggestions for Literacy Leaders:

- Train teachers to use VSS to assess students’ strengths and weaknesses.