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Dimino, Joseph, & Taylor, Mary Jo. (2009). *Learning How To Improve Vocabulary Instruction Through Teacher Study Groups*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.

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Reviewed by Shannon S. Moon
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Truly effective vocabulary instruction is vexing. Nagy and Herman (1985) have estimated that high school graduates draw on a vocabulary of 40,000 words. Attempting to explicitly teach 40,000 words between kindergarten and twelfth grade would leave little time for any other instruction and, as Dimino and Taylor note, “research indicates that students learn the bulk of those 40,000 words through extensive reading,” (p. 133). Even the most effective reader, however, will become frustrated and lose interest without the appropriate tools for tackling unknown words. Dimino and Taylor’s book stands square in the middle of this intersection between explicit vocabulary instruction and organic vocabulary acquisition. While their approach is focused on explicit instruction, this explicit instruction ideally enhances students’ abilities

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to acquire new vocabulary when they are reading on their own.

Dimino and Taylor outline a very specific sequence of professional development for K-8 teachers, via Teacher Study Groups (TSGs), which allows teachers to, “study and learn together as you apply research-based concepts to classroom practice,” (p. 8). In following their model, teachers meet nine times over the course of a semester and essentially follow the step-by-step instructions for each session. Ideally, the TSG is run by a veteran teacher or reading specialist, but Dimino and Taylor scaffold each session so clearly that not having a veteran teacher or reading specialist should not present a problem as long as one teacher in the TSG takes on the leadership role. From the outset in the orientation session, Dimino and Taylor are clear that, “this program features two of the four aspects of a comprehensive approach to vocabulary instruction: teaching individual words and word consciousness,” (p. 8); this program is designed to support teachers in explicitly teaching vocabulary effectively. One of the drawbacks of this book is that Dimino and Taylor do not provide any suggestions regarding resources for supporting, “wide reading and word learning strategies...(even though they) are important aspects of vocabulary instruction,” (p. 8). Even though they are clear upfront regarding their focus and the limitations of the TSGs, providing a list of resources would be a simple, and necessary, addition to their text.

The TSGs begin by considering how teachers should teach individual vocabulary words. Sessions 1 through 5 focus on teaching individual words. Each session follows a set format in which teachers review the agenda, debrief the previous session, discuss the focus research concept, compare research with practice, and plan a lesson collaboratively. Most sessions require teachers to immediately apply what they have learned in their classrooms via the collaboratively planned lesson. As the sessions progress, teachers review and apply what they have learned in previous sessions. For example, Session 1 addresses the four categories of natural context: mis-directive, non-directive, directive, and general. In Session 5, teachers are required to identify words to explicitly teach based on these categories before they proceed with their planning. Session 6 is cumulative and allots time for

teachers to put it all together and create a lesson which explicitly teaches individual words using the strategies they have learned in the first five sessions.

Sessions 7 and 8 focus on helping teachers teach word consciousness to their students. Session 7 deepens students' understanding of contextualized vocabulary building; Session 8 allows for a review of previously taught words with the intent of furthering student understanding and ability to apply the words. Both sessions offer several suggestions and sample lesson sequences for teachers to consider. As in the first part of the book, these two sessions are reviewed in Session 9, wherein teachers plan an explicit vocabulary instruction lesson which integrates all of the information from the previous sessions. Essentially, this session prompts teachers to create the "graduation lesson" as they complete the TSG experience.

Dimino and Taylor provide a teacher-friendly format for the TSGs that is not only easy to follow but holds participants accountable for immediately "trying-on" the strategies about which they are learning in their classrooms. Each session is grounded in pertinent research, which is reviewed for teachers in concise, compelling prose. Further, teachers are given time and space to immediately apply this new knowledge within the TSG. For example, in Session 4, teachers learn about, "Examples, Nonexamples, and Concrete Representations," (p. 70). They are then prompted to reflect on their reading via a Double Entry Journal format before they begin identifying potential vocabulary words and evaluating the definitions, revising them as necessary. This sequence is theory translated immediately into practice. When participating in professional development, teachers want an immediate "take-back-to-the- classroom" strategy; they should appreciate the format of these TSG sessions.

These vocabulary TSG sessions are flexible enough to help teachers effectively address and enhance both pre-packaged curriculum demands and teacher-created curriculum. In fact, teachers may find that the analysis they are required to do in evaluating the most appropriate and effective vocabulary words to explicitly teach will improve the vocabulary instruction outlined in their pre-packaged curriculum by winnowing out low-impact words.

In regards to their own teacher created curriculum, teachers will find that this approach to explicit vocabulary instruction will provide clearly supported reasoning regarding their choice of vocabulary words to explicitly teach. The main obstacles teachers will face in implementing this professional development program are a lack of time or a lack of administrative support.

Reference

Nagy, W. E.; Herman, P.A. & Anderson, R.C. (1985). Learning words from context. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 20(2), 233-253.

About the Reviewer

Shannon S. Moon is a doctoral candidate at Mills College as well as a high school English and AVID teacher. Shannon's research interests include curriculum, lesson planning, pedagogy, and English education.

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