

Virtual Vocabulary

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Introduction

A huge challenge that is seen in education across grade levels and across disciplines is finding a way to effectively teach academic vocabulary for student understanding and remembrance. Academic vocabulary is prevalent in more than just English classes, and continues beyond schooling. With the rise of Common Core, academic vocabulary has increased in priority for the College and Career Ready Standards. Some of the Common Core State Standards referring to academic vocabulary include “Interpret technical, connotative, and figurative meanings of words and phrases” (Reading Anchor Standard 4) and “Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases” (Language Anchor Standard 6).

Students need to understand directions to complete tasks in the classroom. For example, it is difficult for students to do a close read if they do not understand the difference between comparing and contrasting. Jim Burke, author of *The English Teacher's Companion* reiterates the importance of the CCSS first reading standard dealing with close reading by explaining the list of academic verbs needed for students to be able to complete a close read effectively. In addition to the understanding of a given set of directions, students will need proficiency with academic vocabulary in order to display their mastery of the content.

Although academic vocabulary can be taught and focused on in all disciplines, it is heavily prevalent in English Language Arts classes. Depending on the levels of the students, there may need to be more structure and priority on teaching academic vocabulary. In this study, researchers look at a Reading Intervention class of grades 6, 7, and 8. The need for scaffolding and extra accommodations for this group of students creates an environment where more time and emphasis needs to be put on teaching academic vocabulary in order for it to be mastered.



Statement of the Problem

What strategies or accommodations can be used to effectively teach lower level students academic vocabulary and catalyze reading comprehension? The students in this study have a combined 64% vocabulary comprehension in the Read 180 intervention program, measured by daily computer software use. This affects reading fluency and the ability to answer comprehension questions, therefore, many of their other test scores are low as well. This issue with low vocabulary scores from lower level students needs to be addressed in order to find new ways to adjust teaching these students to maximize time, opportunities, and increase vocabulary comprehension.

Background and Need

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress Reading Assessments for 8th grade, average vocabulary scores directly correlate to reading comprehension levels (Figure 1). Nationwide, students with higher vocabulary scores also tended to have higher reading comprehension levels. Furthermore, for 8th grade, the state of California had lower test scores in vocabulary and comprehension than the nation's average.

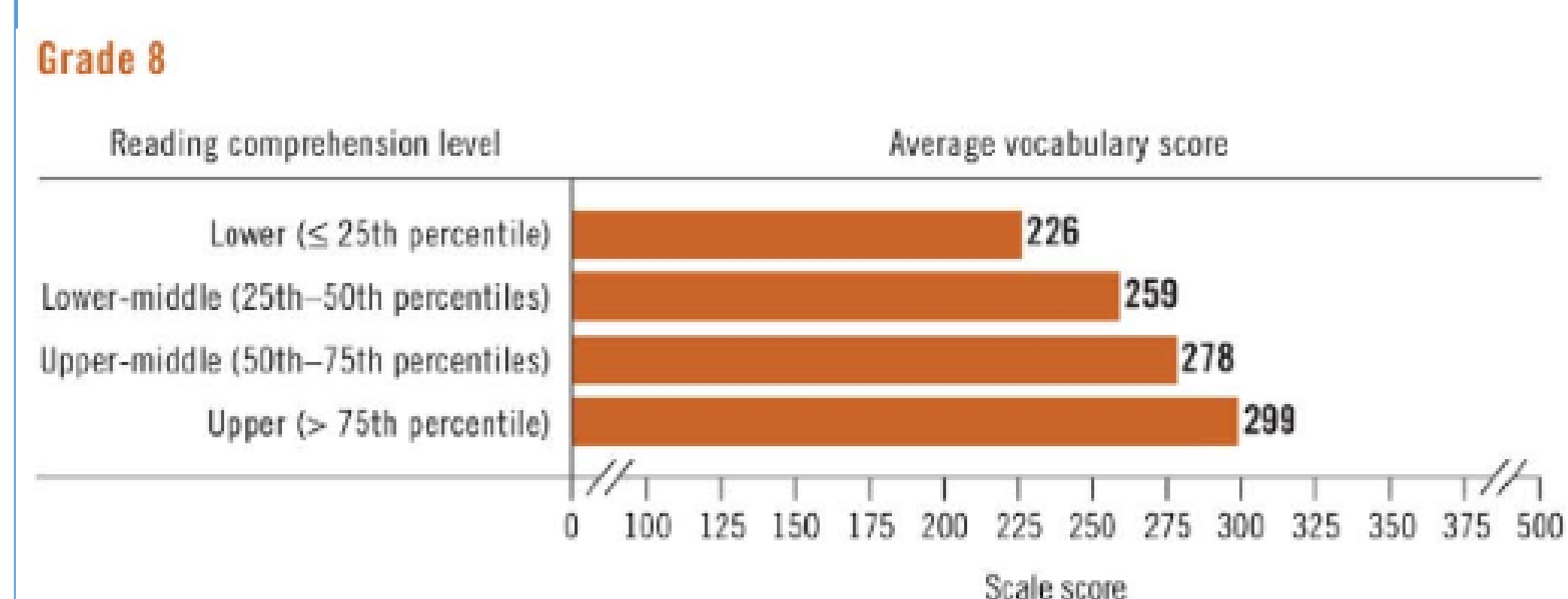


Figure 2 shows data from the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) for Napa Valley Unified School District, the participating students' district. According to this assessment, the district's middle school grades have very low percentages of students that are above state standard for reading comprehension. The majority, roughly 80%, of each grade level is only at, near, or below standard.

Reading: Demonstrating understanding of literary and non-fictional texts

	6th Grade	7th Grade	8th Grade
Above Standard	12 %	14 %	21 %
At or Near Standard	43 %	45 %	45 %
Below Standard	45 %	40 %	34 %

Figure 3 shows the data from the CAASPP for the participating students' school, American Canyon Middle School. This data shows the percentage of students meeting or exceeding the standards for the school, compared to the district, and compared to the state. Less than half of the students from the school and the district meet the standards for literacy.

California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Results for All Students (School Year 2014-15)

Subject	Percent of Students Meeting or Exceeding the State Standards		
	School	District	State
English Language Arts/Literacy	41	41	44

The participating students at American Canyon Middle School have vocabulary and comprehension test scores from the computer software used daily in their classroom. The students get tested during every segment they complete. The class has a combined 64% vocabulary score, and a 62% comprehension score. This data could imply a greater need for vocabulary interventions for the state of California and its districts.

Action Research

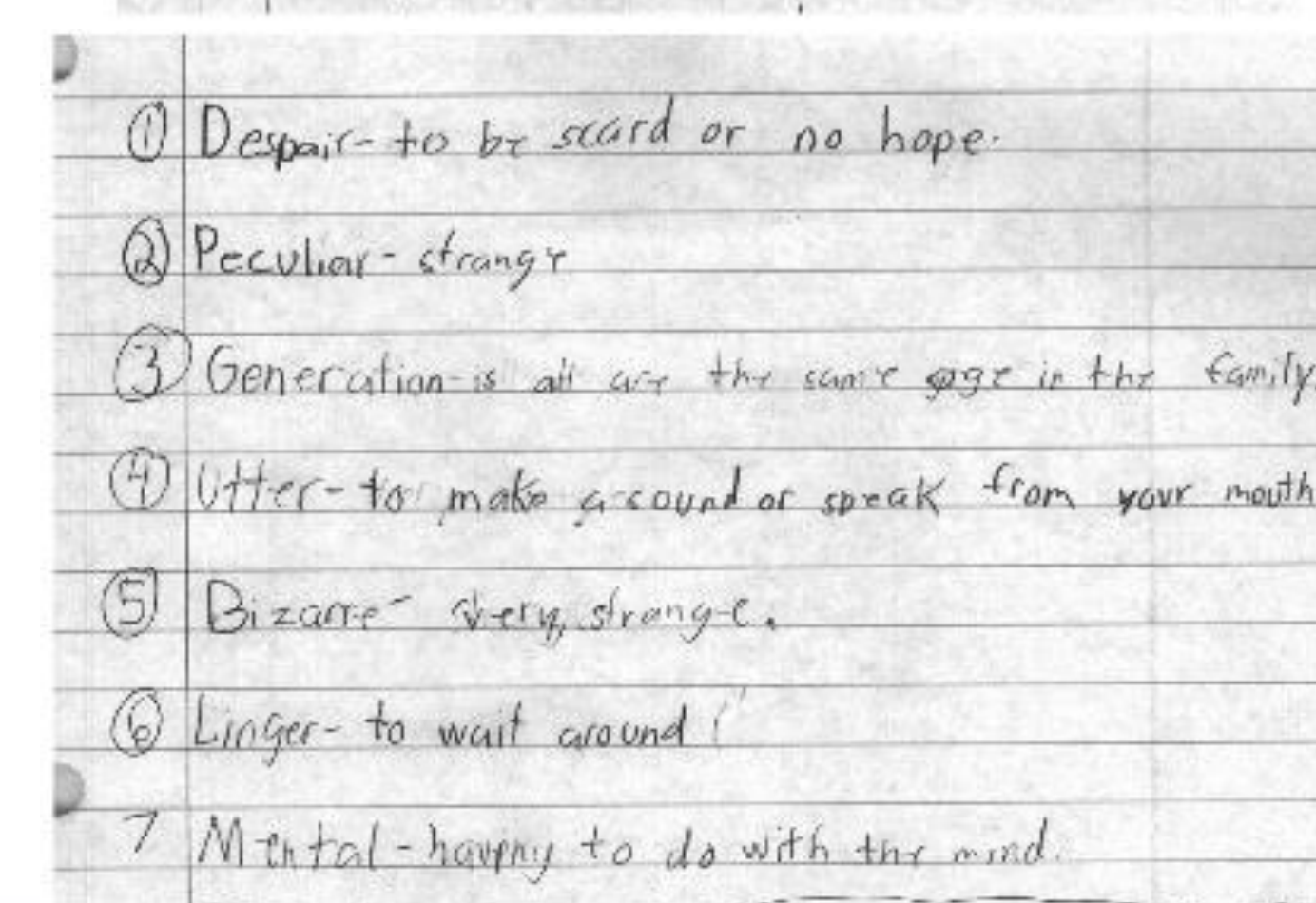
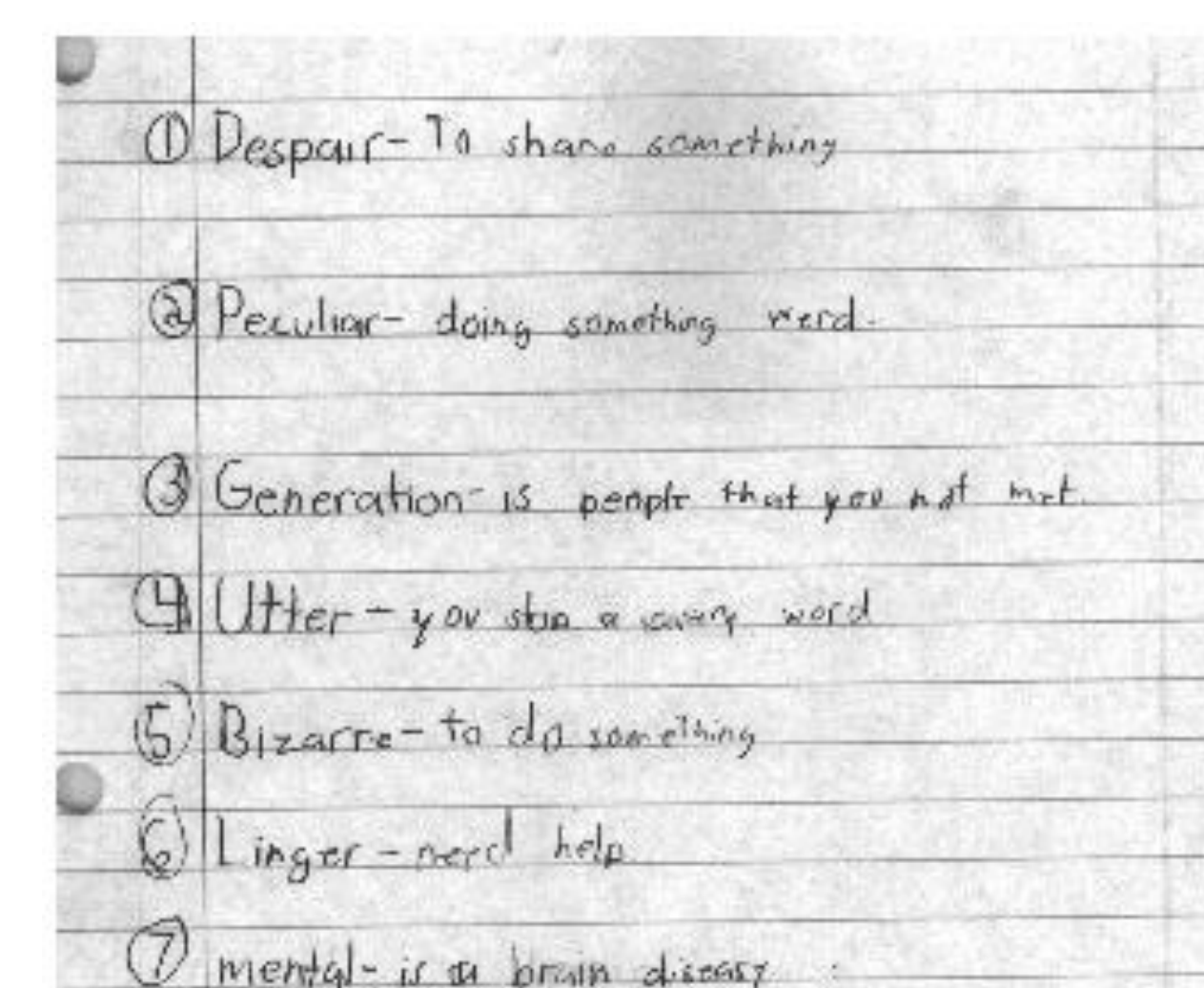
The students taking part in this project are in a reading intervention class from Scholastic called Read 180. This class is designed to take the place of a core English class, and provides students with two focused class sections: a reading section and a writing tutorial. The reading section is very structured, broken into small group rotations including independent reading, computer software, and group work while the writing tutorial focuses on the fundamental skills of writing like grammar and punctuation use. Students are selected for this class based on low reading lexiles and test scores. The participating students in particular have low vocabulary test scores as measured by the Read 180 software, and struggle with the new vocabulary introduced in each unit.

The participating students were given a pre-task test and post-task test on a set of vocabulary words from their current unit. They had already been introduced to the words, and completed the vocabulary assignments that came with the unit. After the unit work, the students still had not shown mastery of the vocabulary words, as discovered in the pre-task test. Between the pre- and post-task tests, students engaged in a variety of activities designed to implement technology and multiple modalities of learning focused on deeper understanding of the targeted vocabulary.

The overall task was to develop a digital presentation of their vocabulary words. They built a Google Slideshow where each slide was dedicated to a word. The task created exposure to different forms of the given vocabulary words such as including the definition of the word, part of speech, usage in a sentence, changing or adding prefixes and suffixes to change the word, a visual to go with the word, and in some cases, a physical action of the word.

Student Work Samples

These are some examples of a student's Pre and Post-Task Test.



Data Analysis and Conclusion

The measureable objectives for this project center around improving vocabulary recall and comprehension proven by at least 80% of the participating students having an increase in scores on lesson vocabulary tests. The goal criteria to meet was 11/15 vocabulary words.

Before engaging the participating students in the designed task, 100% did not meet the original criteria of 11/15 vocabulary words. After students completed the designed task, 80% of students met or exceeded the criteria, and 95% of students showed measurable improvement. The remaining 5%, 1 student, who did not show improvement had to have their post-test data removed because they were unable to complete the test.

Baseline Data

30% (6/20)	70% (14/20)	0%	0%
% Did not meet the Criteria	% Partially Met the Criteria	% Met the Criteria	% Exceeded the Criteria

Summative Data

5% (1/20)	15% (3/20)	35% (7/10)	45% (9/10)
% Did not meet the Criteria	% Partially Met the Criteria	% Met the Criteria	% Exceeded the Criteria

In this study, adding multiple modalities of learning proved to be beneficial to improving students' vocabulary recollection. The work the students did with the targeted vocabulary words before the task was very simple in the workbooks and on the computers. This was not enough for them to have mastery of the words. When visual aides and physical actions were incorporated into the task, multiple learning style needs were met, therefore, vocabulary recollection increased.

References

California Department of Education. 2015. California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress. Data Report. Retrieved from <http://caaspp.cde.ca.gov/SB2015/ViewReport?ps=true&1stTestYear=2015&1stTestType=B&1stCounty=28&1stDistrict=66266&1stSchool=&1stGroup=1&1stSubGroup=1>

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Acknowledgements

Touro University, and its dedicated and knowledgeable teachers. Thank you for having faith in me, guiding me in the right direction, and answering all of my questions along the journey.

None of this would have been possible without the tremendous support from Napa Learns. I am thankful to work in a District that cares about their teachers. Napa Learns not only wants us to be great teachers, but will help us to get there. Thank you Napa Learns!