Explicit Instruction of Vocabulary:

An Integrated Approach

By

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Based on assessment scores including NeSA, MAPs, and STAR, a trend was noted that many 7th grade scores dropped from previous years in all subject areas. The team selected nine 7th grade students in need of additional explicit instruction of vocabulary in order to improve vocabulary and reading comprehension skills and to prevent a drop in language arts scores. The team sought to learn how to best integrate explicit instruction of vocabulary at multiple levels in order to get students the vocabulary they needed to progress academically.

The target group in need were given extra explicit instruction of the Wordly Wise vocabulary program during the 2016-2017 school year. The project team utilized Marzano's six-step process for building academic vocabulary as the most effective strategy because it would allow for a variety of activities to ensure student learning.

Five of the nine students saw an increase in STAR grade equivalency scores from August to March, one remained the same, and three saw a decrease in scores. All nine students saw an increase in scores from pretest to posttest on a minimum of 11 of 13 vocabulary lessons, with many seeing an increase on all 13 lessons. The positive impact on the target population was successful, but additional refinement might be necessary to best serve the population of students working on alternate levels of vocabulary instruction. The project also impacted other students in the classroom as the teacher determined the strategy would be useful for all students. The English department will find this information most useful as the project was implemented alongside the current Wordly Wise program used as part of the Language Arts curriculum.

Acknowledgements

"I can no other answer make but thanks, and thanks, and ever thanks."

-- William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night* III.3.

I express my deep appreciation and gratitude to those who have contributed to my completion of this project.

Thank you to my family. Tom, you have been a model father and husband through all of this, and often you did it alone. On top of that, you believed in me when even I wasn't sure I could do it. Marli and Garyn, Mommy loves you! Thank you for giving up time with me and for loving me anyway!

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To the staff and administration at PHS, thank you for contributing to a caring, open, and supportive school culture.

To my fellow cadre members, and especially to the "Cadre Clan", I appreciate your support and positivity, and I am grateful for our community and our friendships.

And thank you to my mom. You have forever been my inspiration as a teacher, and you continue to be my rock. Thank you.

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Chapter One: Introduction

<u>Description of the School Community</u>

District OR 1 is comprised of two schools that serve the small, rural communities of Palmyra, Bennet, and Douglas in the Nebraska counties of Otoe and Lancaster. OR 1 was given the name Otoe-Rural #1 when several rural school-houses in the county closed to make way for the larger district schools. The elementary school is located in Bennet which lies in Lancaster county, while the high school is located in Palmyra in Otoe county. The Palmyra community, with a population of 551 in 2014, is smaller than the Bennet community at 835 people in 2014. Palmyra's population has remained relatively unchanged in the last 15 years, while the Bennet community has grown significantly, making it the third fastest growing community in Nebraska, according to the 2010 census. The declining population of the smaller community of Douglas is only 173, and many families live in the rural areas in between and surrounding these three communities (City-Data.com).

The larger communities of Bennet and Palmyra are connected to each other by eight miles of NE Highway 2, and this highway also serves as a fast and convenient connection to the metropolitan cities of Lincoln, Omaha, and Nebraska City. The addition of a growing housing development just off of the north side of Highway 2 between Bennet and Palmyra has provided an additional connection between the two communities.

Palmyra, Nebraska was founded in 1882, and has a strong sense of history as an agricultural community. Today, however, only a small percentage of the population actually works in agriculture. Instead, the majority of the population is employed in the areas of managerial, technical, sales, or administrative support. Over 70% of the population is employed outside the Bennet, Palmyra, and Douglas communities (City-Data.com). The village of Palmyra

remains close knit, however, and the community supports several locally owned businesses in town including a restaurant, bank, salon, and grocery store. The community is actively involved in several area churches and maintains an active community building called the Palmyra Senior Center.

Palmyra Jr/Sr High School

Upon founding of the village of Palmyra, a school was opened to serve the local elementary age children and soon expanded to serve high school students as well. In 1965, the community of Bennet joined Palmyra in becoming District OR 1. The community added on to the schools in 1982 and renovated both again in 1998. In November of 2015, after two failed attempts in three years, the communities passed a nearly $12 million school bond that will include additions to the elementary and high school buildings, renovation of existing classrooms, and a new gym and commons area in the high school. The growing community of Bennet added a grant funded preschool in 2007 housed in a modular building near the elementary, and the bond will include a preschool wing addition so the program can join the elementary school (districtor1.org).

District OR 1 schools educated 485 students in the 2014-1015 school year, 184 of those in the 7-12 high school building in Palmyra. The district's enrollment has remained steady over the last 15 years (See Appendix B). However, the district enrollment has increased by 44 students in the last three years, 40 of those in the PreK-6 building in Bennet, demonstrating the growing need for additional services and facilities at Bennet elementary.

In the 2014-2015 school year, 91% of District OR 1's student population was White, 4% identified with two or more races, and 2% each were African American and Hispanic (See Appendix C). In the same year, 21.29% of District OR 1's population received free or reduced

priced meals, and 26.63% of Palmyra High School's students received free or reduce meals (See Appendix D). The percentage of students receiving those meals in the high school building has remained higher than the district as a whole for the last three years. However, the school's percentage has remained below the state average for several years. The percentage receiving free/reduced meals in Palmyra High School (PHS) was 17.54% lower than the Nebraska state average of 44.17% during the 2014-2015 school year. That same year, the district's mobility rate was 6.21% which was 6.04% below the Nebraska state average of 12.25%, and the district has no ELL students (Nebraska Department of Education).

District OR 1 is served by one superintendent, whose office is located in the high school, and two principals, one serving the elementary in Bennet while another serves Palmyra High School. There are 26 teachers serving Bennet Elementary, five of whom (in the areas of art, band, choir, physical education, and media specialist) share their time between the elementary and high school. There are 22 teachers at PHS including three special education teachers, one of whom serves as part-time Activities Director. A guidance counselor, speech pathologist, and technology coordinator serve both buildings, as well. A school psychologist, who was previously contracted through the Educational Service Unit (ESU) will be joining the team full time for the 2016-2017 school year.

During the 2014-2015 school year, the percentage of teachers in PHS with Master's Degrees was 40.91% which was 11.25% lower than the Nebraska state average of 52.16% (See Appendix E). However, the percentage of teachers in the high school was higher than the district percentage of only 28.57%. What the teachers lack in master's degrees, they make up for in years of experience. In Nebraska schools, the average number of years of teaching experience was 14.34 in 2014-2015 (See Appendix F). That same year, while the district average was

similar to the state average at 14.33 years, Palmyra High School teachers averaged 17 years. One hundred percent of the teachers at PHS are White.

Palmyra High School has two teachers in each of the core subject areas and therefore two sections of each grade level in the lower levels contributing to a district-wide student to teacher ratio of nine to one. The core subject teachers serve alternate grade levels every year or two. For example, one English Language Arts teacher teaches English for grades 7, 9, and 10 while the other teaches English 8 and 11 and then one section of senior English and one of a higher level senior British Literature/Research Methods course. One social studies teacher has grades 7, 8, and 11 while the other has 9, 10, and elective senior options. Math, and science work in the same manner until higher grades can choose electives. There are elective career education and technical courses available such as agricultural classes, industrial tech, and family and consumer science as well as fine arts programs like art and music. There is one full time Spanish teacher for foreign language requirements and one full time computer science teacher.

Upon completion of the upcoming renovation, the academic classrooms will be contained within one "wing" of the school building with English, Social Studies, and Spanish classrooms downstairs and Math, Science, Media, and Computer Science directly above them. This has been designed to offer a sense of unity among core subject teachers and classrooms. Special Education will have three adjacent classrooms including a life skills classroom equipped with a kitchen and laundry facilities. The Industrial Technology, Agriculture, Family and Consumer Science, and Health classrooms will have their own wing, and the music department will be located with the theatre near the new gym. This will be a second order change (McREL), or change that requires new skills and understanding, for many members of the staff. Not only will several teachers be moving classrooms, but construction will be happening throughout the next

two school years, which will require adjustment and flexibility in both instruction and extracurricular activities.

An established and published curriculum is still in the process of being developed in District OR 1 schools, and developing and implementing a written PK-12 curriculum has been identified as one of the district's improvement goals. The English and Language Arts department has recently begun to develop a written curriculum aligned with Nebraska's new ELA and College and Career Ready standards. Other core subjects are in the beginning stages, and teachers are working on their own curriculum documents individually. This development will be a focus for the next two school years in accordance with the current school improvement and accreditation process. Curriculum development has been left largely up to the teachers, but is to be developed based on the Nebraska State Standards.

New teachers at Palmyra High School are formally evaluated once per semester and subject to multiple walk through evaluations. The formal evaluations include submission of a lesson plan and pre-observation form. The formal observation itself is followed by a self-reflection, a post-lesson conference with the principal, and then a post conference reflection. The walk-through evaluations are generally followed by a brief email or discussion unless further communication is needed. Once a teacher earns tenure after three years, there is no required number of formal evaluations each year.

Four years ago, District OR 1 implemented a one to one iPad initiative, putting a tablet in the hands of every students grades seven through twelve. Grades nine through twelve adopted a 24/7 model while grades seven and eight check the iPads in and out each day. At the time, this initiative represented second order change. Even today, teachers are still learning new skills in order to make the iPads effective. The technology committee has recently determined a need to

upgrade devices. It is likely that the upgrade will not include newer versions of iPads, but rather an entire switch to Chrome books, which will present yet another second order change to many staff members and students.

In order to ease this potential transition, four staff members attended the 2016 Google Summit to learn advantages and practical applications of the Chrome books for utilizing technology in the classroom. Those teachers will then share their findings with the technology committee, and if the decision is made to move forward with the switch, those teachers will also act as a resource for other staff members as they adjust to the change.

School Culture

Palmyra High School has a rich school culture, steeped in many rituals, traditions, and ceremonies. These help create a unique sense of solidarity among teachers, staff, students, and members of the community.

Rituals are procedures or routines infused with deeper meaning that help make common experiences uncommon events. These rituals begin right away in the morning with gathering in the gym and common area as students eat breakfast and socialize. The seventh and eighth grade students are dismissed to class before the first bell in order to reduce traffic and unnecessary contact with the upper grades. Just after the final bell, a small group of students leads the school in the Pledge of Allegiance and announces the day's activities and birthdays. These announcements also often include an inspirational quote, quiz questions, or similar items depending on the time of year and weekly or monthly celebrations observed. On Wednesdays, morning classes are shortened to add a ninth period to the day just before lunch in which the 8 to Great character education program is implemented. This ritual, though it has changed form in small ways, has been a part of Wednesday's schedule for several years.

Traditions are significant events with a special history occurring year in and year-out. Traditions reinvigorate and symbolize culture to both insiders and outsiders. Many of the traditions occurring at PHS involve camaraderie in the presence of food. The first few teacher work days include an Education Association Pot-Luck lunch in which association members provide a meal for all. Also in the first days, a meal is provided by the area churches, during which the teachers introduce themselves to the pastors and volunteers from each church, which provides a beneficial connection to the community. Other traditions include seventh-grade orientation days before the start of school, a Back-to-School dance for grades seven through twelve, Booster Bash and other athletic banquets, parent nights and celebrations, Spirit Week and Pep Rallies around Homecoming, Prom and Post-Prom activities, and a sixth grade orientation night in the spring. The final days of school include many traditions as well, including a student and teacher "lunch from the grill" provided and prepared by the principal and activities director, a senior breakfast provided by the parents of seniors, and a last day faculty outing which includes staff members of both the high school and elementary school.

Ceremonies are complex, culturally sanctioned ways a school celebrates success, communicates its values, and recognizes special contributions of students and staff. Members of the student council and National Honor Society plan and present an annual Veterans Day Program which involves community members and local veterans. Each year, the administration plans a Nebraska State Assessment (NeSA) Pep Rally in which the principal provides affirmation to the students for the previous year's scores and motivates them to be successful in the coming year with goal sheets based on projected NeSA scores from Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA). Athletes are given a send-off ceremony when anyone qualifies for a state competition as well as a signing ceremony when anyone signs with a college program. An

academic awards night ceremony in the spring provides recognition for individual students who made honor roll, had perfect attendance, or had special accomplishments in academics or non-athletic extracurricular activities. This night also includes a ceremonial induction for new members of National Honor Society. Finally, in connection with the community and places of worship in the area, the band plays and the choir sings for a Baccalaureate ceremony at local churches on an evening just before graduation.

These rituals, traditions, and ceremonies impact student learning in many ways. Most help to motivate students to be successful in the classroom or athletics, but some are designed just to encourage participation in the culture of the school. The administration and members of the Palmyra High School staff feel strongly about creating an inclusive community that provides students with multiple avenues in which they can become involved in the school in their own individual ways.

Palmyra Mission, Vision, and Purpose

In 1993, a group of Palmyra stakeholders met under the leadership of the ESU 4 team to develop District OR 1's Mission Statement, "Together we prepare our students to successfully meet the challenges of the future." At the same time, the team generated the following set of belief statements:

> District OR 1 will:
> - Model and reinforce self-respect and respect for others.
> - Provide equal opportunity for each student to develop his/her
> potential.
> - Seek to develop a sense of individual responsibility and integrity.
> - Seek and integrate educationally sound innovations in to the
> curriculum.
> - Provide a safe learning environment.

The stakeholders also developed the following district vision statement:

> District OR 1 commits to a course of action that provides
> continued academic growth through a curriculum that recognizes
> limitless potential and inspires faith in a positive future for every
> student. With a sense of community ownership and responsibility,
> we will remain fiscally accountable and attentive to current and
> future high-tech facility and staffing needs.

Beginning in 2011, the Board of Education began designing a "Process for Planning a Preferred Future" employing a School Community Essential Planning system. Under this system, the team would take on a long-term planning process that would ultimately do the following:

1. Review the planning process, which would include a re-examination of the district mission and belief statements and a review of the current educational environment/achievement.

2. Review the current curriculum and program offerings, which would include a review of state and program mandates, a comparison to other districts, and an identification of educational priorities.

3. Review the current facilities, which would attempt to identify current and future facility needs and priorities.

4. Review the current financial situation, which would include identifying current and future financial needs and resources.

5. Finalize school and community priorities and needs and finalize community recommendations.

As a result, the Board of Education revisited the mission, beliefs, and vision and determined they were accurately worded and should currently remain unchanged. In addition the Board formally adopted five goals and action plans to 1) continue to implement and expand the character education program, 2) increase the emphasis on technology programs, 3) complete a

facilities study and financial analysis, 4) develop and expand personal finance programs, and 5) increase the community involvement through communication and public relations initiatives.

The mission, beliefs, and vision statement all reinforce the district's overall goals which are to prepare students to be successful after graduation and into the future. These statements, goals, and action plans have been manifested in the school's training of new "8 to Great" coaches, an attempt to improve 21st Century learning skills through the one to one iPad initiative, the expansion of the dual credit program, and the planning and passing of the recent facilities bond. The technology goal will continue to expand and change as the technology committee explores the option of switching to Chrome books.

Description of Current School Improvement Process

District OR 1 is currently endorsed through the AdvancEd accreditation model. The schools will be entering the third year of the Continuous Improvement Cycle. The last school visitation took place in 2013, at which time the team identified three strengths pervasive throughout District OR 1 schools. One of those strengths was the work of the Community Essential Planning Process described above. The second strength was in the character education program, and the third was strong parent communication. The team determined the two priorities for improvement are 1) the development and implementation of a written PreK-12 curriculum, in all core subjects, aligned with the Nebraska State Standards horizontally and vertically, including a timeline for review and revision and 2) the review, revision, and implementation of a Pre-K systemic and systematic continuous improvement process (Nebraska Department of Education).

The stated student learning goal determined by the most recent AdvancED visit is "All students will improve comprehension of informational text through explicit instruction of

vocabulary". District wide staff development during the 2015-2016 school year was directed toward vocabulary instruction including Marzano's six steps for teaching vocabulary. High school teachers spent an additional in-service day working on vocabulary lists and pre and post tests in every subject area. Effort on explicit vocabulary instruction will continue in the 2016-2017 school year.

Description of Interventions

As the school year gets underway, teachers monitor student progress through grades and classroom participation. Every week on Monday morning, teachers are emailed a list of students who are failing classes and in what subject areas. Approximately a month into the school year, students who are determined by a teacher to be in need of assistance or who are on this "F" list in two subjects for two weeks in a row (which is also the determining limits for ineligibility for extracurricular activities) are required to bring their lunch to a support classroom. During that time, their missing or failing assignments are reviewed by a participating teacher (several of whom volunteer to be on a rotational schedule) and they can have time to work on these assignments with the assistance of the teacher. A student who is consistently or severely struggling with academics or behavior can be recommended by a classroom teacher or parent for referral to a Student Assistance Team (SAT) to begin a process of interventions. At that point, the team determines monitoring and intervention strategies. If those interventions are successful, the process ends there. If they fail to help the student be successful, the SAT team recommends the student be evaluated by the district's psychologist to determine a need for an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). If it is determined that the student will benefit from Special Education services, he or she will receive a Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) meeting to determine further needs.

Description of Project Team

The Project Team will include three teachers and the school counselor. Taytum Barbur is in her first year teaching Special Education at Palmyra High School. Taytum is working closely with the seventh graders and the special education students in particular. She will also be covering part of a seventh grade class period for the first semester, and possibly co-teaching during the second semester. Charlene Church has been teaching science at Palmyra for 33 years. Char is passionate about teaching and is interested in helping the seventh graders improve their test scores. Michael Chaffee will be starting his third year at Palmyra as the District OR 1 Guidance Counselor. Michael shares his time between the high school and elementary school and (among a multitude of other responsibilities) works with the sixth graders as they transition into seventh grade, create schedules, and create long term education plans. Cassidy Buescher is in her seventh year teaching English and Language Arts at PHS and works closely with the seventh graders, particularly in the area of language arts and vocabulary development. Taytum Barbur and Cassidy Buescher will carry out most of the implementation of the project in the English and Special Education classrooms.

Each of the team members develops close relationships with seventh grade students, is caring and compassionate, and is interested in helping these students make the most of their transition from elementary to high school. The team will communicate on a daily basis and meet weekly to plan necessary arrangements.

Questions About Student Learning

1. According to assessment data, what were the strengths and challenges in the 2015-2016 school year?

2. What does the data say about the seventh grade assessment progress?

3. What are the most obvious challenges in the seventh grade class?

4. What factors might hinder learning for seventh grade students?

5. How might teachers and administration ease the transition from the elementary to high school?

Chapter Two: Problem Analysis

<u>Data Analysis Process</u>

In April of 2013, District OR-1 hosted an External Review under the AdvancEd

Accreditation Organization. The review team established two required items for development of

action plans in the next improvement cycle.

1. Develop and implement a written PreK-12 curriculum, in all core

subjects, aligned with the Nebraska State Standards horizontally and

vertically, and include a timeline for review and revision.

2. Review, revise, and implement a PreK-12 systemic and systematic

continuous improvement process.

In June of 2014, the data team attended ESU 4's annual data retreat, at which time they

collected and analyzed data from the 2013-2014 school year to determine a student learning goal.

Based on the results of Nebraska State Accountability (NeSA) and Measure of Academic

Progress (MAP) assessment scores, the team developed the following learning goal for the

current improvement cycle:

All students will improve comprehension of informational text through

explicit instruction of vocabulary.

The 2014 team noticed MAPs reading and language usage scores drop in growth in seventh and

eighth grades. The drop not only indicated 7th and 8th grade scores were below average, but it

demonstrated their scores were actually lower in the spring than they were in the fall (Appendix

G). Science scores indicated a similar drop.

The team also studied NeSA Reading scores in the area of vocabulary. The team found

while the scores met or exceeded the state standards, the margin was less than other areas. By

the eleventh grade year, the district vocabulary scores were just meeting the Nebraska state average score (Appendix H). The team determined a goal of improving vocabulary instruction would benefit students in all academic areas. This learning goal was developed as a district-wide target to extend from PreK-12th grade. There were no separate building goals established.

School Improvement Project Focus

For the School Improvement Project, the team will focus on vocabulary instruction for seventh graders. This goal relates to the overall district learning goal of improving comprehension of vocabulary and thereby improving reading comprehension as well as the most recent aim of decreasing the recurrent drop in seventh grade assessment scores in all subject areas. This grade level has consistently seen a drop in scores on all assessments. Explicit instruction of vocabulary will benefit students in all areas, but reading comprehension and vocabulary scores should improve significantly.

Project Data Analysis/Classroom-Based Data

At the 2016 summer data retreat, the team once again identified noticeable drops in assessment scores from sixth grade to seventh grade. The MAP percentile scores dropped in all four subject areas between the sixth and seventh grade year (Appendix I).

Because of the noticeable drop in seventh grade assessment scores across the board, the team identified eight students in the 2016-17 seventh grade class considered "at-risk" in the areas of language and/or reading. These students were identified by below average scores on the MAP and/or NeSA assessment in spring of 2016 and/or below grade equivalency scores on the Standardized Test for the Assessment of Reading (STAR) Assessment (Appendices J and K). Five of those students are currently receiving special education services. One additional student who transferred into PHS this year does not have current NeSA or MAP scores but scored below

grade equivalency on the STAR assessment in August. The STAR assessment scores are also

broken down into three domains. The scores of these nine students on the vocabulary domain

was also analyzed. While one student scored a 72% of mastery of vocabulary skills at a seventh

grade level, the others were lower. The lowest scored a 2% of mastery of vocabulary skills at a

seventh grade level (Appendix L).

Statement of Problem

After analyzing the district and classroom assessments, it is clear nine PHS seventh grade

students need additional explicit instruction of vocabulary. In order to increase their academic

success in all areas, these students need to improve their vocabulary and reading comprehension

skills. Through the analysis of MAPs vocabulary scores, NeSA vocabulary scores, STAR grade

equivalency scores, and STAR vocabulary domain scores, these nine students will be the focus

of this project. The team will work to improve the vocabulary and reading comprehension skills

of nine at-risk seventh grade students.

Description of Current Reality

These students are struggling in all academic areas because of a lack of vocabulary.

When students have a limited vocabulary, they struggle to comprehend all kinds of texts which

can prevent them from learning necessary information in other content areas as well as lead to

frustration with and an aversion to reading in general. This creates a spiral effect in which

students read less, learn fewer new words, and then dislike reading and school even more. The

problem is how these struggling students can learn vocabulary that is suitable for their current

reading level and academic knowledge and background in a classroom full of students who are

learning at or above grade level. While some seventh grade students are reading at a seventh

grade level and should be acquiring vocabulary appropriate for a seventh grader, other students

are reading at a lower level and perhaps cannot process even the definitions to seventh grade

vocabulary. The team has determined the following essential questions that must be answered:

- If explicit and direct instruction of the vocabulary is crucial to their learning, how can a

  teacher give them the instruction they need to gain the vocabulary they need?

- While some of the nine students identified as at-risk might benefit from continuing at

  grade-level with supplemental assistance and additional instruction, still others will need

  explicit instruction at a lower grade level to be successful. How will they have their

  needs met in the same environment?

Best Practice Focus Questions

- What specific strategies are available that will have the greatest impact on student

  learning of new vocabulary?

- What strategies will be most effective with students with special needs, and will these

  same strategies be successful with the rest of the group?

- How can these strategies be implemented in a setting with multiple levels of learning

  among both the "at-risk" group and the group as a whole?

- How can these strategies be implemented with limited teacher intervention and with

  minimal staff?

Chapter Three: Review of Best Practices

<u>Introduction</u>

After analyzing the district and classroom assessments, including MAPs, NeSA, and STAR, it is clear nine PHS seventh grade students need additional explicit instruction of vocabulary. In order for them to improve their reading comprehension and be successful in other core academic areas, these nine students will need an intervention involving vocabulary instruction and assessment to monitor their progress.

The group of students in need of a vocabulary intervention will receive additional explicit instruction of the vocabulary words for each lesson. It was determined this instruction will happen both individually and in a group setting during the time allotted for vocabulary work each class period. In this chapter, an introduction will state the problem and establish the need, a strategy analysis will present three possible approaches to addressing the need, and a summary will review and state the strategy selected and the rationale. The three strategies compared to improve vocabulary were chosen to fit in the time allotted and classroom setting available. The strategies include:

- *Maximizing Word Lists* with a focus on choosing words with efficiency.

- *A Six-Step Process* for teaching new terms with a focus on maximizing student interaction with the words.

- *Word Links* with a focus on making connections between words in a lesson.

Strategy Review 1

Title *Maximizing Word Lists*

Citation

David, J. L. (2010). Closing the vocabulary gap. *Educational Leadership,* 67(6), 85-86.

Marzano, R. J., & Pickering, D. J. (2005). *Building academic vocabulary: Teacher's manual.*
        Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

What is Good Vocabulary Development?. (2012). Retrieved from
        http://saas05.epsbooks.com/academy/adminui/ClassesFrames.htm?startPage=resourcesTe
        acher.htm

Research Summary

       This strategy suggests choice of word lists to teach is as important as how to teach them. Jane David suggests teachers face an enormous challenge in determining which words out of the thousands considered important on which to focus, particularly when there is a gap between students with different language backgrounds.

       According to What is Good Vocabulary Development, this strategy would require choosing a combination of tier two, and tier three words. Tier two words include school or academic vocabulary words, while tier three words are content specific terms which help students comprehend the more difficult concepts in all content areas. The students are using the Wordly Wise 3000 vocabulary program, which integrates tier two and three words in each lesson. However, utilizing this strategy would require instruction, assessment, and monitoring of content specific vocabulary words necessitating additional terms added to weekly lists or creating new lists altogether.

       Marzano and Pickering provide a list of content specific terms divided into levels one through four. Because the students requiring an intervention will be tracked primarily in the English classroom, a list is provided for English and Language arts which allows for choosing words from the lower levels for those requiring more basic vocabulary.

Analysis of Strategy

       It is crucial these students learn academic vocabulary specific to content area in order for them to comprehend content specific texts and understand the concepts associated with those terms. Palmyra High School staff is already working to create content-specific term lists and developing pre and post assessment to track data on their lists. Marzano and Pickering's lists would be an excellent resource for other content area teachers. However, these students are already learning those words in those areas, and will need to focus on a specific list each week of 15 words. This list can already be overwhelming for some students, especially those struggling with reading comprehension and vocabulary building skills, so adding to this list might add to that stress.

 Strategy Review 2

<u>Title</u> *A Six Step Process*

<u>Citation</u>

Fisher, D. & Frey, N. (2010). Meaningful Vocabulary Learning. *Educational Leadership,* 67(6),
      77-78.

Marzano, R. J., & Pickering, D. J. (2005). *Building academic vocabulary: Teacher's manual.*
      Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

What is Good Vocabulary Development?. (2012). Retrieved from
      http://saas05.epsbooks.com/academy/adminui/ClassesFrames.htm?startPage=resourcesTe
      acher.htm

<u>Research Summary</u>

      Marzano and Pickering in *Building Academic Vocabulary*, suggest there are six steps to teaching students new words. Step one is to introduce the word, step two asks students to restate definitions in their own words, step three has students create and image to represent the term, step four engages students in activities to interact with the words, step five involves students discussing terms with each other, and step six involves students in games allowing them to play with the words.

      Fisher and Frey also recommend active involvement with the words through activities, games, and fun experiences interacting with the terms. They also suggest the importance of students having an opportunity to make personal connections with the terms which involves finding or creating images, telling stories, and having multiple interactions with each other.

      Developers of the Wordly Wise program found best practice indicates that effective instruction should include not only definitions but information about the word in context, multiple exposures to the words in a variety of contexts, and active participation in the learning.

<u>Analysis of Strategy</u>

      This strategy fits well with the Wordly Wise program the students are already completing. Because the program already involves multiple exposures in context and developing definitions in their own words, adding some activities to the program they are already using to complete Marzano's six step process would help the students to make connections and increase their interaction with the terms. Because the six steps involve multiple activities, however, an already busy class period might not allow for the time and attention needed to complete this program.

Strategy Review 3

Title *Word Links*

Citation

Marzano, R. J., & Pickering, D. J. (2005). *Building academic vocabulary: Teacher's manual.*
     Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Yopp, R. H., Brigman, J., Wood, K., & Fink, L.S. (2007, September 01). Word links: A
     strategy for developing word knowledge. *Voices From the Middle,* (1), 27, Retrieved
     from http://elibrary.bigchalk.com

Young, E. (2005, July 01). The language of science, the language of students: Bridging the gap
     with engaged learning vocabulary strategies. *Science Activities*, (2), 12, Retrieved from
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Research Summary

        Yopp et. al suggest a strategy for increasing student connection to words called using Word Links. The strategy involves students getting a word on a note card, pairing up with a classmate at random, and then discussing the following: "What do the words mean? What do they have to do with each other? and How do they go together?" The pair then has to share with the class the connection they made before finding a new partner and repeating the process with a new word connection.

        Young also recommends providing activities for learners to establish relationships between the other vocabulary words as well as words they already know. She outlines activities such as clue cards and definition maps that help the students make connections with new words, current words, and words they know by heart.

        Marzano and Pickering provide a review activity graphic organizer and template for double bubble comparisons between terms. In this activity, students must fill in a comparison organizer that requires determining three ways in which the words are similar and three aspects of each words that distinguish it from the other.

Analysis of Strategy

        Because it is a single and focused activity, this would be a manageable activity to add to the classroom setting. Not only does it allow students to interact with the definitions of the words and make connections, but it also provides physical movement and gets the students interacting with one another. This strategy would be easy to teach other teachers to implement and would be a focused activity on which to gather data. However, the team has concerns that this might not be enough to make an impact on the at-risk students, and therefore may not suffice for an intervention strategy.

Summary

      After analyzing the three strategies, the school improvement project team concluded that utilizing Marzano's six-step process for building academic vocabulary would be the most effective strategy and would allow for a variety of activities to ensure student learning. This program will also give the students an opportunity to interact with the words in multiple ways and will provide the greatest opportunity for meeting the needs of each individual student at each individual level.

      The team also determined because of the flexibility of the strategy, some of the activities may be able to take place outside of the English classroom to provide yet another outside connection for the students. The special education teacher may be able to work the words into other aspects of life-skills and reading intervention classes. By allowing for multiple activities with visuals, vigorous activities that include images and movement, and student interaction, the learners may be able to take ownership and develop their own strategies for learning new words to be used in other content areas and into their academic futures.

Chapter 4: Plan of Action

<u>Introduction</u>

After analyzing the district and classroom assessments, the team determined nine PHS seventh grade students in need of additional explicit instruction of vocabulary. In order to increase their academic success in all areas, these students needed to improve their vocabulary and reading comprehension skills. Through the analysis of MAPs vocabulary scores, NeSA vocabulary scores, STAR grade equivalency scores, and STAR vocabulary domain scores, these students were the focus of this project. The team worked to improve the vocabulary and reading comprehension skills of nine at-risk seventh grade students.

The group in need would be given extra explicit instruction of the Wordly Wise vocabulary program during the 2016-2017 school year. Three possible vocabulary instruction strategies were compared, and the project team concluded that utilizing Marzano's six-step process for building academic vocabulary would be the most effective strategy and would allow for a variety of activities to ensure student learning. This intervention fit into the current process for vocabulary instruction being utilized in the English classroom, was a flexible and multi-functional approach to increasing students' connection to vocabulary words, and provided the greatest opportunity for meeting the needs of each individual student at each individual level.

<u>Analysis</u>

The project team was lead by the researcher/English teacher and included two other teachers and the school counselor. The researcher explored potential strategies and together with the team determined that Marzano's six-step process for building vocabulary was the best selection. A majority of the nine students deemed at-risk were receiving special education services, so the team determined that the researcher and the seventh-grade special education

teacher would work together to implement the process beginning on lesson two of Wordly Wise vocabulary. The researcher determined how and when the strategy would be used in the classroom, and the special education teacher assisted with execution of the plan.

The intervention began with adding a "group study session" to lesson two of vocabulary instruction. Students were given a pre-test for each lesson, then the English teacher introduced the terms and students discussed the terms in their own words (Marzano steps 1 and 2). Students then completed the online lesson activities which included root word analysis, finding and applying meanings, differentiation between analogous terms, and various other interactions with the words (Marzano step 4). Then, the teacher involved students in working together to develop a synonym, antonym, image (Marzano steps 3 and 5), and example of each vocabulary term to study for the post-test. Finally, students either discussed the aforementioned in groups or participated in a game employing all or most of the vocabulary terms (Marzano step 6). Intervention would continue from September to March.

There were two significant changes to the original plan (see appendices M and N). The first was that individual students were moved to a level of vocabulary appropriate for their reading comprehension level. Four of the original nine students were moved away from grade-level terms to ones more appropriate for their ability. There were also various adjustments to those levels as the researcher and special education teacher monitored and assessed their progress one lesson at a time. Having several different students working with several different word lists made execution of the strategy a bit more complicated. The two teachers worked together to make time for individual work with individual word lists. The second change was the inclusion of an adaptation of the Frayer model graphic organizer. Following a professional development workshop by the school's Educational Service Unit (ESU 4), the researcher and the

special education teacher, being the two members of the team most closely involved with implementation, met and determined the model could enhance the current strategy. The researcher instructed students on the model using the four square organizer. Students developed a definition in their own words (Marzano step 2), generated an image connected to the term (Marzano step 3), and constructed an example and a non-example of the vocabulary word. The team determined this strategy was a more concrete and visual form of the current practice of developing a synonym, antonym, image, and example. The addition of the this graphic organizer was an enhancement rather than a modification. The team agreed it was a beneficial element to utilize as one of Marzano's six steps and fit well into the current model of the intervention.

Chapter 5: Results

<u>Introduction</u>

   After analyzing district and classroom assessments, it became clear nine PHS seventh grade students needed additional explicit instruction of vocabulary. In order to increase their academic success in all areas, these students needed to improve their vocabulary and reading comprehension skills. Through the analysis of MAPs vocabulary scores, NeSA vocabulary scores, STAR grade equivalency scores, and STAR vocabulary domain scores, these nine students became the focus of this project. The team worked to improve the vocabulary and reading comprehension skills of nine at-risk seventh grade students.

   The group in need were given extra explicit instruction of the Wordly Wise vocabulary program during the 2016-2017 school year. Three possible vocabulary instruction strategies were compared, and the project team concluded that utilizing Marzano's six-step process for building academic vocabulary would be the most effective strategy and would allow for a variety of activities to ensure student learning. This intervention fit into the current process for vocabulary instruction being utilized in the English classroom, was a flexible and multi-functional approach to increasing students' connection to vocabulary words, and provided the greatest opportunity for meeting the needs of each individual student at each individual level.

   This chapter reports the data collected from the Wordly Wise vocabulary program pre and post assessments, vocabulary activity scores, and STAR assessment reading comprehension grade equivalency and vocabulary domain scores. The team collected data, analyzed the results, identified themes, assessed effectiveness, and determined recommendations for future work with explicit vocabulary instruction.

Results

        The researcher decided to examine the broadest data first which was the STAR assessment of reading comprehension grade equivalency (GE). Because one of the original goals was ensuring growth rather than a drop in scores as is common in 7th grade students, the team determined it was important to measure the growth of reading comprehension in general from the beginning of the intervention period to the end.

        The individual growth in reading comprehension, as measured by the STAR assessment GE (Appendix O), showed a majority of the students experiencing an increase in scores from August to March. Five of the nine students saw an increase in scores, one student remained the same, and three of the nine students saw a decrease in scores. The most dramatic increase was Student 9 with a 1.3 point increase, which correlates to a full year and three month improvement. The most dramatic decrease was in Student 3 with a .5 point decrease, which correlates to a five school month regression. Student 3 did see an increase, however, in scores from August to January of .2 points which correlates to a two month improvement.   The same STAR assessment scores when broken down into domains gave a vocabulary score to each student as well (Appendix P). The same students who saw a growth in GE saw a growth in the vocabulary domain. Similarly, the same students who saw a decline in GE scores also saw a decline in vocabulary development scores, and the student whose GE scores were equal also had equal vocabulary scores.

        The researcher also examined the Wordly Wise vocabulary data after collecting pre and post test scores and individual activity scores for each lesson. The pre and post test scores for individual students showed a general increase in scores from pretest to posttest. Student 1 increased from pre to posttest on twelve of thirteen lessons (Appendix Q). Student 1 earned the

same score on one pre and posttest but missed different words. Also evident in Student 1's scores is the switch from third grade level words to second grade level. Lessons three through six posttest scores were under 60% mastery. After moving the student to a vocabulary level matching his reading level, he was more successful.

Student 2 also increased scores from pre to posttests on all but one lesson which was neither an increase or decrease from pre to posttest (Appendix R). Student 3 had a similar experience to Student 1. Though this student's lesson three score was successful, lessons four, five, and six were under 60% mastery (Appendix S). The team met and discussed her situation and considered her STAR GE which indicated a reading level in the mid-third-grade range. The team also believed this student was struggling with self-confidence and would benefit from experiencing some success on her lessons, so the decision was made to move her from a fourth to a third grade level as well. This seemed to help her have some success as all but one of her subsequent lessons reached 70% mastery or above.

Student 4 achieved a 60% mastery or above on 11 of 13 lessons (Appendix T), and Student 5 achieved a 60% mastery or above on 12 of 13 lessons (Appendix U). Both of these students increased from pretest to posttest on all 13 lessons, and both students are continuing work with 7th grade vocabulary words.

There were some inconsistencies in the scores of Student 6 that the researcher found difficult to explain. Her STAR GE score put her reading comprehension level as that of a first grade student in her 8th month of school. The team determined second grade vocabulary words would be most appropriate. However she dropped in scores from pretest to posttest on both of the first two lessons (Appendix V). At that time, the team considered taking action, but decided to push her to continue working with second grade words. Her subsequent seven lessons,

Student 6 achieved over 50% mastery on all posttests and increased from pretest to posttest. Lesson 12, however, she saw a drop in score from pre to posttest, and lesson 13 she saw neither an increase or decrease. Lessons 14 and 15 were more successful with an increase to over 85% mastery on both tests. The researcher considered the possibility of outside factors affecting Student 6's performance, but there have not been any specific issues arise.

The team watched Student 7's vocabulary work very closely. With a STAR GE equal to that of a 4th grader, the team was conflicted as to whether or not this student should be moved in vocabulary level. It was determined that because Student 7 was receiving minimal Special Education accommodations, and the goal was to help her progress to the point of exiting services, she would remain on grade level with 7th grade vocabulary words. Student 7 increased from pre to posttest on all 13 lessons (Appendix W) and achieved 50% mastery or above on ten of 13 lessons.

Student 8 saw an increase in scores from pretest to posttest on all 13 lessons (Appendix X) with the largest increase being from a 53% to a 95%. Student 8 also achieved 60% mastery on all 13 posttests.

With an initial STAR GE of 3.9, the team also knew Student 9 may find 7th grade vocabulary terms challenging. This student moved into the district after school began in August and the SAT process began just weeks after she arrived. However, her Wordly Wise vocabulary scores at a 7th grade level were generally successful (Appendix Y). Her scores increased from pretest to posttest on 11 of 13 lessons, remained the same for one lesson, and decreased on one lesson. She also achieved 60% mastery on eight of 13 lesson posttests.

The average scores on individual activities for students shows that most of the class scores lowest on the Passage activity (Appendix Z). This activity requires students to choose the

correct word in the correct tense to fit into a sentence in the context of a story they read. It was also evident that Student 7 scored lowest on the Applying Meanings section, and Students 4 and 9 scored lowest on the Passage activity. The researcher determined these students may need additional instruction or assistance on these activities.

Themes

Based on the data, students in general showed growth both as individuals and as a group. The Wordly Wise program challenges students with difficult, Tier Two and Tier Three vocabulary words that are relevant for test preparation and academic understanding. By having the students connect with terms individually through the online program, they get multiple exposures to each term. However, without the added interaction with the words alongside their peers, they miss the opportunity to practice using the words aloud and in context. By requiring the students to create synonyms or simple definitions in their own words, images connected to the terms, and their own examples and non-examples, students are not just getting yet another exposure to the words. Instead, they have to discuss the words and definitions aloud. They have to decide as a group on an image that represents the word and then figure out how to draw it. Then, by creating their own examples, they have to put the word into real world context, and finally, by creating a non-example, they have to either determine an antonym or differentiate the word from another term or concept that is similar. Even further, they have to justify those four things to the rest of the class. Finally, the class has a chance to ask questions or disagree, which means they have to either defend or change their original ideas.

It is clear these activities are helping students increase their mastery of the words from pretest to posttest. However, the questions of whether or not explicit instruction of these vocabulary words is increasing their reading comprehension, academic vocabulary skills, and

preventing the current trend of a drop in standardized assessment scores from 6th to 7th grade is still a relevant question. Three of the students actually decreased in reading comprehension scores from August to March. One cannot blame the difficulty of the assessment, as the STAR adjust itself to correct answers. The reasons why the seventh grade assessment scores are dropping is still an important one to examine.

There are multiple factors that might be causing the drop in scores. The three students whose scores dropped are receiving Special Education services. All three are on lower grade level vocabulary lessons. It is possible that the team's decisions about grade-level placement were misguided. Perhaps the decision not to challenge them more, regardless of the resulting effect on their grade, meant they did not have the chance to improve. It is also possible that outside factors affected their progress. One student regressed in other ways over the course of the school year as a result of a difficult family situation, extreme anxiety, and an excessive dependence on a parent which was exasperated by the shift into a high school setting. The other two students had scores that actually increased in January and then fell lower in March, which could indicate that they (and the team) had not been as diligent about taking the necessary time when completing, studying, or practicing the words during the spring semester.

Most other students didn't increase their scores enough to match the months they had spent in school. Only one of the nine students increased in STAR GE score .7 points which would be equivalent to the seven months between the August and March assessments (Appendix O). This was Student 7, who was working on seventh grade vocabulary terms with reading comprehension at a 4th grade level. While she only achieved a passing grade and mastery of 70% on two of the 13 lessons (Appendix W), hers was still the highest increase in reading

comprehension scores. It is possible her being challenged far above her level is what led to increased reading comprehension, even though she struggled with her grade as a result.

Additional Information and Sources of Data

It is important that the team and the school as a whole continue to address the trend of 7th grade scores dropping year after year. The data that led the researcher and team to develop the vocabulary goal was indicative of a larger issue that is being dealt with by the school as a whole by adding a Special Education staff member as a transitional assistant to the students with IEPs in 6th grade as they move into 7th grade. As far as these individual nine students, the team will continue to meet with them, carry out Marzano's 6 Step vocabulary instruction process, and collect data in order to measure growth as the year continues. The MAP and NeSA assessments will be helpful in determining the true progress of these students in the area of vocabulary and reading comprehension.

Chapter 6: Conclusions/Recommendations

Introduction

      After analyzing district and classroom assessments, it became clear nine PHS seventh grade students needed additional explicit instruction of vocabulary. In order to increase their academic success in all areas, these students needed to improve their vocabulary and reading comprehension skills. Through the analysis of MAPs vocabulary scores, NeSA vocabulary scores, STAR grade equivalency scores, and STAR vocabulary domain scores, these nine students became the focus of this project. The team worked to improve the vocabulary and reading comprehension skills of nine at-risk seventh grade students.

      The target group in need were given extra explicit instruction of the Wordly Wise vocabulary program during the 2016-2017 school year. Three possible vocabulary instruction strategies were compared, and the project team concluded that utilizing Marzano's six-step process for building academic vocabulary would be the most effective strategy and would allow for a variety of activities to ensure student learning. This intervention fit into the current process for vocabulary instruction being utilized in the English classroom, was a flexible and multi-functional approach to increasing students' connection to vocabulary words, and provided the greatest opportunity for meeting the needs of each individual student at each individual level.

Conclusions

      The implementation of Marzano's six-step method for teaching vocabulary positively impacted all of the students in the classroom, not just the target group. Even before considering data, the student response was extremely positive overall. The final day of each lesson before the test was the day the students put together what they'd already learned about each term and created their "tricks" to remember the words, which functioned as Marzano's step five,

discussing the terms with each other. (Later on, this became the collaborative creation of the Frayer four-square model with a synonym, image, example, and non-example, also reinforcing Marzano's step two and three.)   This practice came to be known as the group's "study session" and it was completed religiously on the day before the test. Students grew to ask about "study session" day, and often made anxious remarks if they knew they would be absent on that day, hating to miss it, and worried they might not do as well on the test. Eventually, this practice reached a point where the teacher had a very small role. The teacher could assign the words by table group, and then the groups took over, taking hold of each word, step by step, agreeing on a simple definition, drawing their squares on the board, creating an image, sometimes using humor, collaborating on the creation of an example and non-example, sometimes having to overcome disparities and come to a consensus. While the online program itself functioned as most of Marzano's step four by engaging the students in activities with the words, the addition of collaboration and group discussion before and especially after the activities positively complemented the online instruction.

The biggest challenge came with the few students on alternate levels of instruction. While the larger groups were collaborating on the grade-level terms, it was a challenge to separate the two students on one alternate level and the two students on another alternate level. When only two students could collaborate, the results were not as positive. Exacerbating that issue was the fact that the target group contained students who frequently struggled to complete their work on time. As a result, when group "study session" day came along, often one or more of these students were still attempting to finish the lesson activities and were not ready to work with a group. When one of only two on a level was not ready to collaborate, then the other did not get the discussion either. A student missing out on the group cooperation was bad enough,

but forcing another student to miss out as well because of a lack of partnership was unfortunate but unavoidable.

When the project began, the team asked how a teacher could give the students direct and explicit instruction of the vocabulary they really need to progress academically. The team determined that the combination of online and group instruction seemed to work the best. The online work, while individual and silent, at least allowed for autonomy and responsibility. Then the group work, (even though it didn't always happen with those on alternate levels and was frequently contingent upon partner progress), was beneficial, but the loss was not detrimental. The online activities, however, were essential for the students to have both multiple and complex exposures to the words and thoughtful and individual connections with the words.

The team also asked how students at varying levels of vocabulary terms would have their needs met in the same environment. Frankly, this turned out to be the biggest obstacle. Because collaboration was such a big piece of the puzzle, those on alternate levels lost out on the collaborative piece the most often. The team concluded that meeting their needs to the fullest extent would require one-on-one support, something which the situation can simply not always provide. The team determined to continue to work together to meet the needs of these students in the best way possible on a day by day basis.

Addressing and Resolving the Problem

The nine students in the target group were in need of extra explicit instruction of vocabulary in order to improve their vocabulary and reading comprehension skills. This project initially addressed the needs of these students by considering their respective reading comprehension and vocabulary levels and adjusting them accordingly. Two students began on fourth grade levels and moved to second grade levels, and two students began on fourth grade

levels and moved to third grade levels. As the team monitored their progress and made

adjustments based on individual data and individual needs, they made decisions about what

would be most beneficial to each student. The purpose of altering level was twofold. The team

wanted to challenge the student but not overwhelm him or her, to encourage rather than

discourage the student. On the other hand, it was also important to ensure the words would be

adding to their current academic vocabulary but not be so advanced they would never retain the

definitions.

Impact

Overall, the project impacted many more students than originally anticipated. The

positive impact on the target population was successful, but additional refinement might be

necessary to best serve the population of students working on alternate levels of vocabulary

instruction. However, other students were impacted by the project as well. The English teacher

recognized the benefits of group "study session" early on and made the decision to apply it to all

of the 7th grade, 9th grade, and 10th grade English classrooms, making it a part of standard teacher

instruction. The results have been decidedly encouraging in all other grade levels. These

students have shared the consensus that the practice has made a positive impact on their test

grades.

The researcher is planning to share results with the other English teacher as well as with

other content area teachers at the next staff inservice. Because the overall school improvement

goal is explicit instruction of vocabulary, all teachers can benefit from the results of this project.

The flexible nature of Marzano's 6 Steps and the addition of the Frayer model into step five

makes this a process that most teachers may find feasible to include in their own classroom

settings.

<u>Recommendations</u>

The English department will find this information most useful as the project was implemented alongside the current Wordly Wise vocabulary program used as part of the Language Arts curriculum. Other teachers may have to start by creating the activities that help students interact with the words, which the Wordly Wise program does automatically. It's also possible that teachers who are still utilizing vocabulary worksheets may find that adding a few elements to their instructional methods might be a good first step to altering how they teach vocabulary. For example, they may be able to add Marzano's step two and three using the Frayer model at the beginning of the lesson and then review and discuss them at the end of the lesson. This may only add about 20 total minutes to their instructional time per unit, which even reluctant teachers might find reasonable.

The researcher will present this information to the administrator and special education teachers in April, with the target of eventually presenting to all 7-12 teachers in August as they plan and prepare their vocabulary development curriculum for the upcoming year. As the school continues its cycle of school improvement, vocabulary data is being collected and analyzed for the upcoming spring of 2018 visitation. This project may demonstrate how the school is using the goal of vocabulary instruction for continuous improvement.

<u>Learning Reflection</u>

I have learned that leading a team is like balancing on a balance beam. If one can remain steady, bending with every move, adjusting to each step, and noticing even the smallest wiggles, one can remain on her feet. While gymnastics is an individual sport, and one is on the balance beam alone, an educational leader gets to change the rules. Through her routine, she has members of her team helping her in three aspects. One, they are ready with a hand held out if

she falters. The special education teacher was always willing to talk things through with me as I continued through the process, on good days and bad. Second, team members help to create the rhythm of the routine. They helped me to put my thoughts into real, everyday practice, making my vision become a reality. Third and finally, a team is there to judge the landing. As someone who was directly connected to the project for a long period of time, I became too close to the students and to the data to accurately judge the outcome. It took input from the other members of the team as I evaluated data to candidly assess progress, successes, and challenges. While I wanted to say the project was a complete success because I was in charge of the majority of implementation, it took another team member to remind me of the importance of considering data objectively. While I still had to remain steady and use every bit of balance I had, I found I enjoyed collaborating with a team and capitalizing on their strengths as we completed the project.

Lists of best practices for classroom instruction are available in abundance. Experts and leaders talk about best practices all the time, but to a teacher who is struggling day to day in order to manage time, materials, personnel, and sanity, a list of best practices can seem like a very abstract concept, an apple just out of reach. I have learned, however, that by narrowing my focus to one particular practice, one method researched and proven to be successful, and then trying to implement that one practice, the whole project goes from, "I think I can do this," to "I always do this" in no time at all. If the focus on the goal remains at the forefront of lesson planning, then instructional practices follow. Even if they are awkward or unnatural at first, the methods can often, as a teacher learns to fit them to their own style of classroom, become like second nature. It is getting started and setting up the plan that takes courage and determination. As school leader, I hope to be an encouraging source of inspiration for those I lead. If I can

convince them that all it takes is to try one new thing at a time, then teachers will learn that instructional growth isn't a punishment but a norm.

Creating and maintaining field notes presented me with a new and interesting challenge. Because so many of my meetings with team members happened informally and spontaneously, I had a difficult time keeping up with them. I know there were many impromptu meetings, discussions, and then alterations made that were relevant to the project that I did not include in my field notes. I did, however, find that what I did record was extremely useful as I began to analyze data, consider the results and impact of the project, and reflect upon my successes and failures as a leader. I learned that if I had made recording field notes more of a habit, I would have had more to reflect upon later.

As a balanced leader, I've been able to practice monitoring and evaluating current instructional strategies and communicating with peer teachers and members of the leadership team. I've learned to be actively involved in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices, and provide intellectual stimulation to members of the group when it becomes important to bring in outside practices. I've had to maintain situational awareness to address potential problems and be flexible as elements of the project changed along the way. I've had to build and maintain relationships with other teachers and administrators over the course of this venture, and those relationships have been the foundation of any success this project has had. A balanced leader recognizes that relationships involve real people, and when real people are involved, real life comes into play. Teachers have real lives that involve children, family members, friends, hobbies, and talents that are separate, (and should be separate) from their lives at school. A balanced leader must be able to stabilize the team when real life tilts the balance beam. It just so happens, however, that the beam was my favorite event.

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