**Book Club Individual Review and Reflection**

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**Section A: Book Review**

**Book**: *All About Words: Increasing Vocabulary in the Common Core Classroom*, PREK-2 written by Susan B. Neuman and Tanya S. Wright

Neuman, Susan B., & Wright, Tanya S. (2013). All About Words: Increasing Vocabulary in the Common Core Classroom, PreK-2. Teachers College Press.

**Book Choice:**

As I studied the variety of books we, as learners, were able to read throughout this course I was struck by an instant fascination regarding vocabulary acquisition within primary classrooms. As an educator working in a primarily bilingual second grade classroom, vocabulary and word knowledge created a stark contrast in my room and made the language abilities of my ELL’s versus my native English speaking students both evident and harmful. This text was intriguing to me, as it promotes the idea of narrowing the achievement gap prevalent in the American school system, through planned and monitored word knowledge acquisition strategies. I was instantly drawn to the text, clearly seeing the ways this could benefit my personal classroom of students.

**Text Summary:**

All About Words introduces readers to the importance of words in a child’s literacy development. We are taught the corrections to several myths regarding word acquisition, such as children are sponges, and instead correctly using strategies that are researched based to instruct our students in vocabulary. Neuman and Wright then travel through discussions of common core standards impacting vocabulary and allowing for teachers to utilize class time to increase student’s vocabulary. The reader learns of key principals necessary for teaching oral vocabulary development such as implicit, explicit, repeated, intentional instruction of vocabulary. The authors discuss the importance of a vocabulary rich environment, both at school and home, and the ways that students coming from home environments that have rich vocabulary are already ahead of those that don’t. We are introduced to the ways teachers can combat this disparity by organizing their classroom in a vocabulary rich style that promotes growth and makes vocabulary accessible within the room.

Next is the discussion revolving around classroom libraries and the verbal environment within the classroom. Teachers must create engaging and interactive classroom libraries, and do the same with frequent discussions within a classroom. The book goes on to discuss problems revolving around children’s vocabulary growth and the content-rich approaches educators can use to defeat these problems and promote vocabulary. Teachers read about the teaching sequence recommended for teaching vocabulary and analyze the scaffolded approach that Neuman and Wright display.

Numerous instructional strategies benefiting content rich vocabulary instruction are listed, explained and modeled within the text as readers learn about applying vocabulary lessons to text sets, all genres of text, as well as using methods of both small groups and whole group learning. Teachers read on about the need to strategically group students and use the common core standards to organize your learning intentions for each group.

We finally learn about assessment of vocabulary and dive into numerous activities regarding vocabulary assessment and the need to be analyzing student’s vocabulary development and growth authentically and frequently. Numerous assessment options are listed as well as ways students can show evidence they are learning. With this Neuman and Wright wrap back around to the education debt, and the impact of vocabulary on the achievement gap. The authors finalize their text by sharing principals of high quality vocabulary instruction that will allow educators to support and challenge all students in their classroom.

**Learning Reflection:**

Neuman and Wright’s accessible yet knowledgeable book, *All About Words*, introduces educators to the necessity of vocabulary knowledge in early childhood education and provides a strategic open ended approach to vocabulary planning that will promote student literacy comprehension while also narrowing the achievement gap. The achievement gap, or education debt in education, is a term used to describe the historical socioeconomic, racial, sociopolitical inequalities that are present in standardized test scores.

When it comes to literacy and word acquisition, the Matthew Effect is evidently present in student’s vocabulary across these categories. As the rich get richer, the poor get poorer which here represents students stemming from vocabulary rich environments being automatically predisposed to succeed with literacy far more than their peers who lack that privilege in their home lives. Vocabulary knowledge is a huge part of literacy learning and eventual comprehension skills. Students require vocabulary as when they know more words, they will be able to comprehend more texts and in turn comprehend more content. Students will all require explicit and repeated exposure to various content, supporting and challenging vocabulary in order to increase their learning. Students will be able to form a comprehensive vocabulary through a teaching sequence for teaching vocabulary that scaffolds and supports the approach of vocabulary learning.

Through reading this text, I have learned the importance of children understanding that literacy learning and especially vocabulary learning requires a certain amount of vulnerability and an increased growth mindset. Students also will require vocabulary instruction that is not separated from additional subjects, but integrated into diverse content related topics. Students, as I learned in All About Words, will require multiple exposures to words in order to truly be able to remember and use the words. Student ownership of vocabulary is also a tremendously important aspect of comprehension. Student’s personal suggestions for definitions of words and concepts must be celebrated, and used, allowing them to form connections with the words they are learning.

Neuman and Wright share with their readers that “you can learn a lot about children’s knowledge of words and concepts, as well as their misconceptions, simply by talking to them,” (Neuman & Wright, 2019). With this, in order to properly support student’s vocabulary growth, educators must seek out new and unique ways to support children’s oral language development concurrently. We can do this by maximizing our time in the classroom, ensuring we are creating accessible opportunities for students to engage with vocabulary learning through reading, discussions, and activities. Using my learning from this text, I will now make a resolute plan to incorporate vocabulary education within all genres of literacy and across all subjects of the common core. Vocabulary instruction in my classroom next year will be vastly adapted due to my learning with this book.

**Applications to Teaching Practice:**

 I would love to incorporate each and every strategy read about in this text into my 2019-2020 second grade classroom. However, in order to ensure I do not wildly breach the page limitations of this assignment, I will list a handful of strategies and ideas that will stick with me and be immediately implemented into my practice. First and foremost, I want to begin my vocabulary instruction, and all classroom instruction, next year with a focus on a growth mindset and the fact that vulnerability is ok within a classroom setting. Asking questions and being comfortable requiring a bit of clarification is important in the learning process and I want to ensure that my students feel able to do so with vocabulary education. I will also implement the use of a vocabulary list in my teacher clipboard while I am teaching.

Neuman and Wright suggest doing this so that when a student uses a word or provides evidence of ability to use the word, you record their initials on the vocabulary list and monitor the class’s growth. This is similar to adding anecdotal records on vocabulary to daily practice and I believe this would be very beneficial within my student’s word knowledge growth as well as my teacher planning. I will also follow the provided teaching sequence for vocabulary teaching present within *All About Words* and carefully choose the vocabulary words I teach students through a selective and research based approach. I will ensure my classroom library is both comfortable and exciting for student engagement and that the alphabet and word posters in my room are accessible to students by placing them strategically within my classroom. Lastly, I will make sure to incorporate a think aloud, parallel talk or sharing aspect to every single lesson that I teach involving vocabulary so that I can allow my students to interact with words and become aware of the way they use different vocabulary, (Neuman & Wright, 2019).

**Professional Opinion and Recommendation:**

In my professional opinion as an educator, the text *All About Words* is both thought provoking and effective for growing one’s literacy teaching practice. I believe that this book, which is easy to read and engaging, should be read by all teachers working with prek-2 students. This book provides educators with a step by step suggestive framework for vocabulary instruction that not only benefits the student’s word knowledge growth but also will help narrow the achievement gap present in far too many classrooms. I recommend this book for my own personal school, and I recommend reading this book prior to reading the word study curriculum book that may be present within various classrooms. I believe this book should be read before reading a text such as *Words Their Way*, as it is imperative for educators to know why we are focusing on growing our student’s vocabulary and how this will impact their overall literacy comprehension and content knowledge. It is my opinion that all educators should be instructed on the importance of rich vocabulary environments within a classroom and shown the ways to engage their learners in rich content based vocabulary oral discussions and foster a space for learning where vulnerability and word concept discussions are encouraged and promoted.

**Section B: Professional Reflection**

My professional learning in TE 842 will impact my future teaching of reading through many different aspects of my practice. Not only have I revisited plentiful aspects of assessment that have become far too routinized in my practice, but I have learned through research based studies the ways to make assessment effective and equitable for all student’s literacy instruction. As we completed numerous student data analysis’s throughout this course I feel as though I truly have established proficiency when it comes to using data to build instructional goals and support the student accordingly. I walk away from TE 842 with a notebook full of strategies and a new knowledge of the modified cognitive model, which will allow me to better inform my planning and better execute my literacy instruction.

My prior beliefs of reading instructional practices have been both affirmed and challenged throughout this course as we studied various texts, student data, and literacy learning strategies and student data samples. I had studied McKenna and Stahl’s Modified Cognitive Model throughout my undergraduate education courses, but never had I truly seen the applicability of the model within a classroom setting. Being a full time educator of second grade students at this point in my life, revisiting this text was like opening an entirely new book. I was able to see the way my practice was reflecting the researcher’s standards for high quality, comprehensive, literacy instruction. I was also able to see areas where I was falling short and not truly meeting best practice of literacy instruction.

With this, I was able to personally take the areas of growth that I knew I needed to focus on within my practice and study Morrow and Gambrell’s Best Practices for Literacy Instruction, in order to highlight strategies, possible ideas for lessons, and best practices for teaching specific aspects of literacy development. One of my areas of my practice that I recognized a need for growth within was that of vocabulary. Through studying vocabulary and word knowledge within *All About Words*, I have read about numerous strategies and plan on using a majority of them as I teach *Words Their Way* this coming school year. There are so many ways that word knowledge has been showcased to us throughout this course and I have a long list of applicable strategies, shared to me through researcher’s articles and practitioner’s videos, that I will be able to use with my ELL students and native English speaking students alike.

When it comes to assessment of all categories of the modified cognitive model, and literacy development within early readers, I plan on analyzing my student’s knowledge authentically, through various strategies, instead of through solely standardized assessments. While I understand and appreciate the benefits of the phonics assessment, QRI, and informal inventories, I also have been made aware throughout this course that this is simply not enough to truly be able to assess our student’s literacy growth. Discussions must be frequent and plentiful within a classroom in order for a teacher to be able to listen and take note of what children understand or need support within. Students should be interacting in word sorts, games with words, whole class choral reading, and literary discussions that promote growth mindset, encourage a love and engagement for reading, and allow students a space to vulnerably try out the strategies they have been practicing with decoding words, or decoding the meaning of a text.

Now my reading instructional practices will reflect my new learning through the implementation of various strategies, the use of more frequent authentic assessment, and an increase in planning revolving around individual student literacy data. These are but a few of the assessment practices, and instructional practices, that I will amend and change within my own personal teaching for the next group of students that I will teach. In my effort to continuously learn and grow as an instructor of literacy I will continue my education journey through Masters courses at Michigan State University. I will also be engaging in my network of Chicago Public Schools Literacy Development Training programs where I will mentor a teacher who requires support within their literacy practice and in turn, I will be able to be observed and given feedback on my own practice from various researchers that work with our Literacy team.

I am eager to showcase what I have learned throughout TE 842, I was inspired and excited daily by the strategies I read about or the videos that displayed exciting techniques that I may try with my own second graders. I am eager to take my knowledge from this course and use it to better myself as an educator and therefore better the education of my students.

**Work Cited:**

Gambrell, L. B., & Morrow, L. M. (2015). Best practices in literacy instruction (5th ed.). New York: The Guilford Press.

McKenna, Michael C. & Stahl, Katherine A. (2015).  Assessment for Reading Instruction (3rd edition). New York: The Guilford Press.

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