Explicit vocabulary teaching: developing reading confidence and achievement in disadvantaged Y6 pupils

Annabel Brownfoot

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate if the teaching of vocabulary could lead to increased confidence and achievement in reading for disadvantaged Y6 children. The literature highlighted the importance of teaching vocabulary from an early age in order to have the greatest impact and to ensure that children are taught a range of strategies that they can then apply independently to work out unknown words. Following the literature review, I was interested to investigate how far daily teaching of vocabulary closes the vocabulary gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children. In addition, I also wanted to find out if explicitly teaching vocabulary impacted on children's reading comprehension skills and confidence.

In March 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic led to the shut down of schools across the country which meant I was unable to carry out my planned intervention. I had already collected some data from questionnaires, vocabulary and reading tasks along with reading. From this data, I found that some of the more accomplished disadvantaged readers still lacked confidence in their own ability. In addition, the data found that some of the children with poor vocabulary knowledge passed the reading test whereas others who had a wide vocabulary knowledge scored poorly. This suggests that whilst vocabulary knowledge is important; there are also other factors which contribute to being a successful reader.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Background and rationale

As a passionate reader, I have always tried to encourage and develop reading for pleasure in my classroom. In 2019, I investigated reasons for underachievement in reading and found that early parental influences, a lack of confidence and a poor understanding of vocabulary all had a significant impact (Brownfoot, 2019). One child commented that he could not understand what the words in the story meant so he avoided reading altogether (Brownfoot, 2019). Therefore, I have extended this research (Brownfoot, 2019) by looking at possible solutions.

During my teaching career, I have regularly encountered children who are disengaged with reading and often these come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Many of these children also appear to have a limited spoken and written vocabulary, which is often due to poor access and exposure to books (National Literacy Trust, 2012). Therefore, I was keen to research whether there is a 'vocabulary gap' in primary school and if so which children are affected by this. Additionally, I had planned to investigate whether there was a link between using a vocabulary intervention and an increase in reading confidence and achievements of older Key Stage 2 (KS2) children.

1.2 Context of the school

The research was undertaken in a Church of England Primary School in the Midlands, England. The school is located in an ex-coal mining village and has 334 pupils on roll from Foundation Stage 2 (FS2) to Year 6 (Y6). Of these, a large number of pupils are

from a working class background. Currently, 26% of children are eligible for pupil premium (PP) funding, 13% have special educational needs (SEND) and less than 2% have English as an additional language (EAL) (SEF School X 2020).

During the last Ofsted Inspection, (before the school converted to an academy), the school was rated as 'good' (School X Ofsted Report, 2014). Since then, achievement across all year groups has improved, especially in KS2 (SEF School X 2020). Under the English primary school testing system, the Department for Education (2019a) explained that 'to reach the expected standard, (in the end of Y6 SATs test) a pupil must achieve a scaled score of 100 or more and to reach the higher standard (greater depth), a pupil must achieve a scaled score of 110 or more'. The scaled score is calculated from the raw score and the pass mark fluctuates each year depending upon the performance of children nationally (Department for Education, 2019a).

At the school, 2019's Y6 SATs results were very strong in maths (90% of Y6 achieved expected standard or above) but they were much lower in reading (61%) and writing (79%). Generally, the disadvantaged children performed much more poorly than the rest and the significant difference between reading results can be seen in Table 1.1. The table also shows that, with the exception of Y2 and Y4, non-disadvantaged children significantly outperform disadvantaged children across school.

Table 1.1: Reading Progress July 2019

Year Group	All children		PP Children	
	Expected or above	**Greater Depth**	**Expected or above**	**Greater Depth**
Y1	68%	14%	50%	6%
Y2	73%	20%	88%	13%
Y3	64%	18%	27%	7%
Y4	52%	2%	63%	0%
Y5	45%	5%	33%	0%
Y6	61%	29%	33%	19%

It has been recognised that Literacy is a weakness across the school (School X SEF, 2019). In addition to this, Ofsted (2019) have recently highlighted the importance of early reading in order to ensure children have the best chance of succeeding in school and therefore, reading is a key focus and priority (School X SEF, 2019). When analysing reading performance, the children's limited vocabulary has been highlighted as a major issue across school and Senior Leaders believe it is a factor in the lower results in reading. Consequently, the teaching of vocabulary has been a priority area to help to improve reading confidence and achievement across all year groups.

1.3 Disadvantaged Children

In the school, 26% of pupils are in the disadvantaged category, which is broadly in line with national (27%) figures (DfE, 2020). The definition I will be using when describing a disadvantaged child, is: 'those who were registered as eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years, children looked after by a local authority or who have left authority care in England and Wales through adoption, a special guardianship order, a residence order or child arrangements order' (DfE, 2019b).

1.4 Reading in school

In order to become secure, confident readers, it is important that children are given the best opportunities to succeed (Clark, Woodley and Lewis, 2011). However, many children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, begin school below the expected standard compared to their richer socio-economic peers (Hansen and Joshi, 2007). The school has recognised this and therefore interventions have been put in place to help narrow the gap. This is essential to ensure children improve and become good readers as they move through school in order to give them the greatest chance of success in secondary school and beyond (Lawton and Warren, 2015). All children (with the exception of SEND children) should be able to pass the KS2 SATs reading test by the time they leave primary school as without this essential skill, they may struggle to find employment and develop mental health issues in the longer term (Quigley, 2018:23).

1.5 Teaching vocabulary in school

When reading about the teaching of vocabulary, I found reference to the three tiers of vocabulary which is a method of putting words into categories (Beck, McKeown and Omanson, 1987:147). Tier one includes everyday words and tier three focuses on more technical, academic vocabulary (Beck, McKeown and Kucan, 2003:9) but for this research, I focused on using tier two words from this system. In addition, I used the golden triangle of teaching vocabulary which is looking at the process of recognition, pronunciation and definition of individual words. (Beck, McKeown and Kucan, 2013:5). For my intervention, I planned for the children to complete a range of tasks and activities, to implicitly and explicitly teach them tier two vocabulary (Jennings, 2019:7).

Throughout the year, the staff had training from myself and the Deputy Head on using vocabulary in the classroom. As reading is such a significant issue in the school, I was interested to see if the intervention enabled Y6 children to improve their reading confidence and achievement. In the longer term, it will be interesting to see if it improves reading confidence and ability across school.

1.6 Questions and issues to investigate in the literature review

During my reading, I aim to investigate the following areas:

- How great is the vocabulary gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children?
- How far does learning vocabulary help children with reading confidence and achievement?
- What type of vocabulary instruction is effective when teaching vocabulary?

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

2.1 Reading and disadvantaged children

Historically, there has always been an attainment gap when comparing the academic performance of children from poorer and more prosperous backgrounds (Quigley, 2018:3). In all of the schools that I have worked in, this has been a constant problem and staff are always working hard to try to narrow this gap. Before the Fisher Act of 1918 (which brought in compulsory education for all 5-14 years olds), many children from working class backgrounds were sent out to work rather than attending school (Akenson, 1971). These families had to prioritise income rather than education as many were living in poverty. The Education Act of 1944 strengthened the Fisher Act further by insisting young people stayed in education until they were 15 years old (UK Parliament, 1944). Before The Education Act, 80% of students left school at 14 years old because many of these students were from poorer backgrounds so they were required to go out to work to support the rest of the family (Barker, 1947). Consequently, some left school with a lower level of education so they were only able to get low skilled jobs and had poor literacy skills (Akenson, 1971). This meant that when they had children, some parents would have struggled to support their child's education and this allowed the poverty cycle to continue.

Currently, all young people have to stay in education until they are 18 years old (House of Commons Education Committee, 2014). Despite this, along with interventions and pupil premium funding, children from middle and upper class backgrounds still consistently outperform children from less wealthy backgrounds (DfE, 2018). Significantly, in the most deprived areas of the country, 40% of UK adults do not have the expected literacy skills of an 11 year old and nationally 16-24

year olds have the poorest literacy skills of any age group (National Literacy Forum, 2014). This is concerning, as it suggests that the literacy education in the UK has worsened over recent years rather than improved, although, the UK has improved in the international school rankings with the country now in 14th position for reading compared to 22nd in 2015 (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2018). However, the UK is still a long way from the high achieving countries such as China and Canada who have succeeded in ensuring children from all backgrounds are successful academically, despite the OECD (2018) suggesting that the socio-economic background of an individual is the strongest indicator of future performance. This proves that it is possible for children from even the most disadvantaged backgrounds to be successful and I have experienced this myself in schools. Furthermore, when looking at GCSE results 14% of disadvantaged individuals scored in the top quarter for reading performance at GCSE in 2018 (OECD, 2018), suggesting that with the right opportunities and support individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds can go on to succeed academically.

In 2011, the British Government attempted to narrow the gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged 1tudents by introducing Pupil Premium funding (Quigley, 2008:3). This is extra funding, which the Government has allocated, to support children who are considered 'disadvantaged' and therefore schools should use this to provide extra support to help reduce the academic gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children (Hutchinson, Dunford and Treadaway, 2016). For the academic year of 2019-2020, the funding will cost the government £2.41 billion but despite the huge cost, there are still gaps between the two groups of children as shown in Figure 2.1 (DfE, 2019b) casting doubt on how far the Pupil Premium funding has been successful or value for money. In other

respects, without this funding, the gap could be even larger than it currently is and consequently the gap may have increased further without this support rather than slightly decreasing. Notably, recent results from the OECD (2018) confirm that the overall UK literacy skills of disadvantaged children in UK schools are improving so the extra money, which is providing opportunities for interventions and support for disadvantaged children, could be having a positive impact on mitigating the disadvantaged gap. Alongside this, Ofsted are now holding schools to greater account if their disadvantaged children are not performing as expected and they are putting more pressure on schools to ensure disadvantaged children succeed (Ofsted, 2015). In the area where I work, this has led to a number of schools not receiving the inspection outcome they previously would have expected so there is now an increased focus on making sure disadvantaged children are achieving their full potential. Consequently, this will hopefully be beneficial in reducing the 'disadvantaged gap'.

Figure 2.1: Disadvantaged attainment gap index (DfE, 2019a:1)

Despite Ofsted's renewed focus on disadvantaged children's achievement and the OCED recognising that disadvantaged children's literacy skills are improving; the gap between the two groups is not narrowing as it should be (see Figure 2.2). This shows that because the disadvantaged children are improving at almost the same rate as the non-disadvantaged children (DfE, 2019a) the reading gap between the two groups is still substantial (DfE, 2019a) which means that the disadvantaged group are still not on equal terms of attainment and changes are needed in order to narrow this gap without impacting on the progress of the children who are not disadvantaged.

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Figure 2.2: Percentage reaching expected standard in reading, writing and maths over the last four years (DfE, 2019a:10)

The Department for Education (2019a) found that when children leave primary school, one fifth of all children and one third of disadvantaged children do not pass the Y6 reading test. This can create long-term issues into later life as they are already behind their expected year group expectations before they begin secondary school. It then becomes even more difficult to catch up and as they become older the gap only gets wider (Lawton and Warren, 2015). My own previous teaching experience has shown that if children reach secondary school unable to read well, they are not able to access tasks, can often misbehave and miss out on lessons that

they may have otherwise enjoyed such as technology and humanities as they have to have extra English lessons to 'catch up'. Consequently, this can lead to bullying, lack of motivation and self-belief, which only continues the downward spiral. It is therefore important that interventions are put in place from an early age to begin to address the attainment gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children.

2.2 Vocabulary Gap

Many writers (e.g. Hart and Risley, 1995; Nation, 2001; Beck, McKeown and Kucan, 2013; Fernard, Marchman and Weisleder, 2013; Biemiller, 2015) believe that vocabulary is the most significant barrier to progress with Nation (2001:20) claiming that, "To read with minimum disturbance from unknown vocabulary, language users probably need a vocabulary of 15,000-20,000 words". Clearly, this is an issue when it comes to teaching disadvantaged children to read because research has shown that at three years old, a child from a poorer socio-economic background will know only 300 to 600 words compared to a child from a more well off background who will know approximately 1200 words (Hart and Risley, 1995). Significantly, Fernald, Marchman and Weisleder (2013) suggest that the gap in vocabulary between different socio-economic groups can be found in children as young as 18 months old which suggests the gap begins from a much younger age than previously thought meaning that it is essential that early interventions take place to narrow the gap.

In the classroom, I have seen that the vocabulary gap only increases as children become older because they become further and further behind as the reading texts and vocabulary become more difficult. This is supported by Lawton and Warren

(2015) who found that as children become older, if no work is done to address the vocabulary gap then the gap widens ever further so early interventions are essential. Crucially, by the time they reach secondary school, children need to know about 50,000 words in order to be successful in school and later life (Graves, 2009). This is a big challenge for many children who know very little vocabulary by the time they start school. Hansen and Joshi (2007) found that when children start primary school, those from less affluent backgrounds are over a year behind in vocabulary knowledge compared to those from more well off backgrounds and research has shown that these children tend to fall even further behind (Feinstein, 2003). This is not the case for every disadvantaged child as as many children from poorer socio-economic backgrounds actually start at school the expected level.

Writers have found that there are a number of reasons for the lower levels of vocabulary found in homes from poor socio-economic backgrounds. Firstly, Uttal (1999) discovered that many children from poorer backgrounds are kept at home until school age, which limits their opportunities to socialise, increase their vocabulary and experience quality teaching in nursery at a crucial age. Significantly, Uttal's research was based in America, which slightly differs to the UK due to different attitudes, religions, family situations and a lack of funding for childcare in America. Adding to this, many children do not begin preschool or nursery until two years old or older by which time Fernald, Marchman and Weisleder (2013) had already found a difference in their vocabulary. Another limitation, which could cause lower levels of vocabulary, is that there are fewer opportunities for children from poor socio-economic backgrounds to attend high-quality preschools and nurseries as deprived areas often have a lack of quality resources and can have difficultly recruiting good staff (OECD, 2009). Therefore, any vocabulary gap could be difficult

to narrow without the guidance of good quality staff and nurseries whereas children in richer areas have the opportunities to attend high quality nurseries so that any early gaps are identified. However, the quality of a preschool setting can be a 'subjective notion' (Moss and Pence, 1994) as different stakeholders can have different opinions on what quality is (Dickinson, 2006). An example of this are parents who may have different views to the government on what a quality setting looks like (Georgeson, Campbell-Barr, Boag-Munroe, Mathers, and Parker-Rees).

The opportunity to attend high quality early years settings is important for disadvantaged children to narrow the gap as Biemiller (2003) and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (2008) found that the main contributor to a child's early vocabulary is their home environment. Hansen and Joshi (2007) believe that children from richer socio-economic backgrounds have a larger vocabulary because their parents use a greater number and variety of words when speaking to them or in front of them. Biemiller (2003) even found that the home environment was the greatest contribution to vocabulary growth in children up to the age of seven years old. This is a concerning finding as it suggests children from poorer socio-economic backgrounds could therefore struggle to catch up despite interventions and guidance from school. However, Uttal (1999) disagrees and argues that nursery and early schooling actually has the largest impact but does recognise that it is only effective if children are able to experience quality teaching and learning (OECD, 2009). Consequently, this is an issue which needs addressing in struggling early year settings and particularly those in deprived areas.

When looking at reading achievement, like vocabulary growth, parental involvement is one of the main contributors to success (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford and Taggart, 2004; Quigley, 2018; NLT, 2012; and DfE, 2016). Sylva *et*

al. (2004) believe this is because young children spend the majority of their time at home while hearing vocabulary from their parents. Therefore, this can limit children's reading ability if they do not get read to or have good oral language practices modelled to them (NLT, 2012). Despite this, I have often encountered enthusiastic, supportive parents who do not know where to start when teaching or supporting their children with reading. Clark, Osborne and Dudgale (2009) agreed with this and also found that some parents from poor socio-economic backgrounds do not have the skills or confidence to support children in their reading or acquisition of a range of vocabulary at an early age. The Early Learning Partnership Project (ELPP) was a short term family support programme which ran interventions to support parents in early reading (Evangelou, Sylva, Edwards and Smith, 2008). The research found that the interventions provided many benefits for parents such as increased confidence and ideas to educate their children as well as helping to create a better relationship between parent and child (Evangelou *et al.* 2008). However, better relationships and learning opportunities do not always lead to improved learning outcomes (Melhuish, Belsky and Leyland, 2008).

As parental influences appear to have a significant impact on both reading and vocabulary knowledge, it is essential that the cycle of disadvantage is broken. Therefore, it is important parents are taught how to teach vocabulary and reading but this needs to be carefully managed. The National Literacy Forum (2014) found that parents need support in the home environment to develop a child's early language before they begin school. Although, when considering some of the families that I work with, it needs to be recognised that it is not just parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds that struggle to teach early language. Many parents (including those from professional backgrounds) do not have the knowledge or

confidence to do this so it is important that these families are not forgotten. Significantly, Weizman and Snow (2001) recognised that the language used by poorer socio-economic parents may not be as broad as richer families but it still provided benefit for their children along with helping them to grow their vocabulary. In response to this, the Government have allocated funding to local authorities to help support parents in the home and local community by putting in place a trial scheme run by the Education Endowment Fund (EEF) to support parents in building their child's language, reading and vocabulary (EEF, 2018). With the correct support and training, parents (including those from low socio-economic backgrounds) can learn how to use a larger variety of vocabulary with their children and use suitable methods to explain a larger range of words to develop their child's vocabulary (Weizman and Snow, 2001).

When looking at vocabulary in the home environment, the widely regarded Hart and Risley 1990s research study instigated the '30 million word gap', (Hart and Risley, 1995) which led to a number of other research projects and initiatives. They found that parents from more affluent backgrounds said 30 million more words to their children compared to parents from the poorest working backgrounds whose children had smaller vocabularies in comparison. Even though they noticed a difference in vocabulary size, they did not find any differences in the richness (the number of different words used) or quality of the language spoken by parents from different backgrounds (Hart and Risley, 1995). This study was widely discussed and used by other researchers but there were a number of issues with it. Firstly, there were no independent measures for the two variables (the language the children hear and the vocabulary size of the children). In addition, they only wrote down the words the child said during their observed time but this would not be a true measure of their

vocabulary size as they would not be able to share all of their vocabulary depth during this time. Another issue was that adults (with high academic qualifications) observed the families and this could cause some to speak less and others to speak more than was normal (Labov, 1969). Therefore, this may not have been a true reflection of the language and vocabulary spoken in the household during normal times. Consequently, the validity of the vocabulary gap is called into question, as is its significance.

Over twenty years later, Gilkerson, Richards, Warren, Montgomery, Greenwood, Kimbrough, Hansen and Paul (2017) built on the study by Hart and Risley but conducted it on a much larger scale (329 families compared to just 42) and used modern technology so that parents were able to speak freely without being observed by a person in the room. The study found that there was a vocabulary gap as Hart and Risley (1995) suggested but they found that there was a gap of four million words between the richest and poorest families, which was much smaller than the 30 million initially thought by Hart and Risley. The difference could have been due to the recording technology, which meant that parents did not feel the pressure of having someone observing them, or it could have been because the study was of a larger scale. In addition, Sperry, Sperry and Miller (2018) also tried to replicate the study of Hart and Risley with the same number of families and recording technology. They found that there were differences between the amount of language spoken in the home but it was spread fairly equally across all socioeconomic backgrounds rather just focused on those from poorer backgrounds. However, there were some significant issues with this study. Sperry, Sperry and Miller (2018) included bystander talk (the talk between people but not the child) and they only looked at working and middle class families rather than professional families. This limits the validity of study

as they did not look at the full range of socioeconomic backgrounds and other research suggests that children learn best from speech directed at them rather than speech which is overheard (Gilkerson *et al.* 2017).

Some research suggests that vocabulary is not the most significant barrier to reading. O'Connor (2014) found that word recognition is the largest barrier to reading ability in SEND and lower ability children. However, this research only focused on children who were of a lower ability and at this point word recognition is the most important skill as without this they may struggle to develop even basic vocabulary. Along with this, Ofsted (2011) highlight in their Early Barriers to Reading report that phonics is one of the most important aspects when learning to read. Salvin, Lake, Davis and Madden (2011) agreed as they investigated a number of studies and found that the most successful early reading programs were strongly associated with phonics. Indeed, phonics are important during the early reading stage but this becomes less relevant as children become older, as if children do not have the vocabulary depth and knowledge they will struggle to progress as the reading texts become longer and more challenging (Biemiller, 2015).

2.3 Tiered vocabulary

Beck, McKeown and Omanson first introduced the concept of tiered vocabulary in 1987. It is a method of categorising words, which helps teachers to pick out the most useful words to teach children, and provides suggestions for vocabulary instruction (Beck, McKeown and Omanson, 1987). They also created the tiered vocabulary triangle (see Figure 2.3) which explains the different types of vocabulary found in language. The majority of writers believe that the first and third vocabulary tier do not

need to be taught in vocabulary instruction as most people use tier one words daily in their oral language whilst tier three words are only used during specialist or academic work (Beck, McKeown and Kucan, 2003:9). Therefore, only tier two words are commonly found in primary school vocabulary instruction as they are rarely spoken but regularly used in the written language (Quigley, 2018:17).

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Figure 2.3: Tiered Vocabulary (Beck, McKeown and Omanson, 1987:147)

Despite the tiered vocabulary triangle being in existence for over thirty years, my experience has shown that vocabulary is taught incorrectly in many schools in England as many teachers tell children to look up definitions of unknown words in a dictionary. However, the majority of these definitions are not child friendly which means children do not always understand the definitions (Jennings, 2019). Along with this, children do not always retain the definition, as they can be dull and uninspiring (Beck, McKeown and Kucan, 2013:43). In my own practice, I have done

this and I agree with Beck, McKeown and Kucan that the children find this work dull and therefore do not retain the information. McKeown (1991:141) conducted research into vocabulary activities using dictionary definitions and found that only 60% of sentences made sense when children were asked to write sentences using words that they had looked up in the dictionary which emphasises the importance of using more accessible, child friendly language and teaching strategies to improve their vocabulary knowledge (Beck, McKeown and Kucan, 2013:45). Doing this ensures that vocabulary teaching is long lasting and effective.

When it comes to choosing which words to teach, Biemiller and Slonim (2001) believe that you should teach the vocabulary in the same order as children would normally learn it which builds on previous word learning and understanding. However, this does mean that the teaching would be very restrictive and consequently children may miss key learning opportunities along with the opportunity to learn words from stories and texts. In addition to this, vocabulary learning does not necessarily happen in a particular order or sequence (Beck, McKeown and Kucan, 2013:87). Hiebert and Kamil (2005) attempted to teach vocabulary by working through a frequency lists of words, which they had created for Y2-Y5 by looking at studies involving word frequency in writing and they found this was relatively successful. However, this could open up the opportunity for misconceptions if children came across words with multiple meanings because they would have only been taught one meaning at a time. Nevertheless, Stahl and Nagy (2006) agree with Hiebert and Kamil (2005) that teaching using frequency lists is beneficial but they emphasise the importance of including general vocabulary and a child's individual needs in order to be the most effective.

Both Hiebert and Kamil (2005) and Biemiller (2015) agree that teaching common high frequency words, which the children will often come across in oral language, is a potentially time wasting exercise as they are likely to understand these words without teacher input but this could differ for SEND and low attainment children who may not be able to do this independently. Therefore, it is important that teachers consider carefully which words to teach to their own classes in order to have the most impact (Stahl and Nagy, 2006; Nation, 2001; Beck, McKeown and Kucan, 2013:3). Often, this isforgotten in the classroom as some teachers stick to set schemes or lists rather than adapting for the individuals.

When choosing the vocabulary to teach, Stahl (1999) and Quigley (2018:16) emphasise that the words chosen must be words that can be linked to others. Learning each new word opens up the opportunity to understand a larger number of words (Quigley, 2018:16). However, the research differs regarding how to teach words with multiple meanings. Some (Biemiller and Slonim, 2001; Hiebert and Kamil, 2005; Beck, McKeown and Kucan, 2013:49) believe that you should teach one meaning at a time to prevent confusion whereas others believe it is important that children are taught the different meanings of words at the same time as then children have to pay attention to contextual clues (Stahl, 1999; Nelson and Stage, 2007). In addition to this, Stahl (1999) found that by mapping words to other linked words it can help children to build their vocabulary knowledge. Furthermore, it is useful to link the words through a text or book, as it then gives the children a context, which helps with the learning of new words and meanings (Beck, McKeown and Kucan, 2013).

During vocabulary instruction, teachers should use the rules of the golden triangle of words (see Figure 2.4) which focuses on recognition, pronunciation and definition of individual words (Beck, McKeown and Kucan, 2013:5). As well as using these key

terms, it is important that children are being explicitly taught vocabulary through structured tasks such as games, words of the day, modelling, examples and applying words in sentences to allow them to access the vocabulary in a range of contexts (Jennings, 2019:5).

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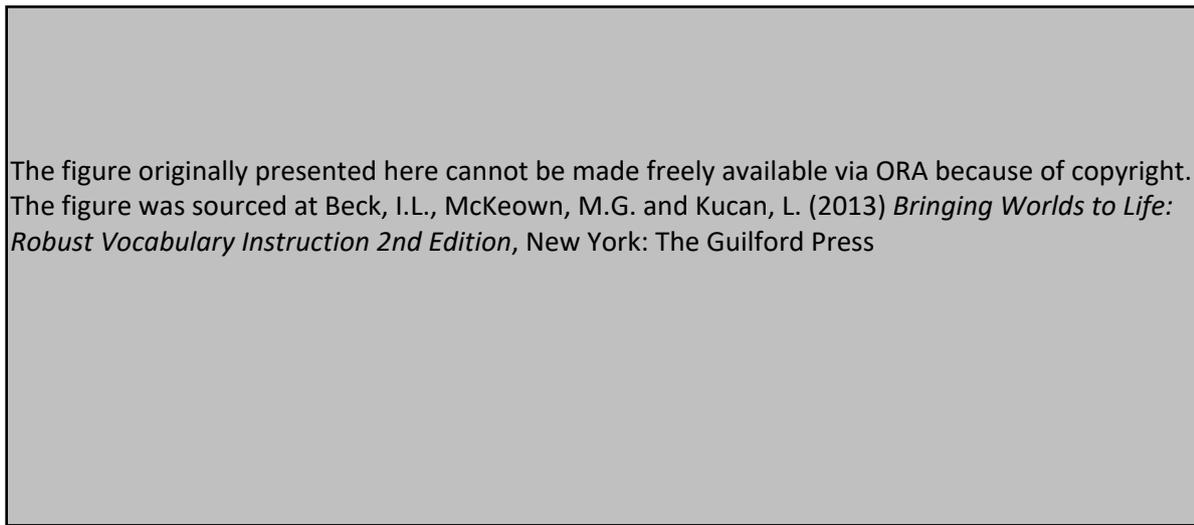
Figure 2.4: Golden triangle of words (Beck, McKeown and Kucan, 2013:5)

When teaching tiered vocabulary, explicit instruction of words is only one aspect and a multi-component approach should be undertaken to have the most impact (Sedita, 2005). Using written vocabulary tasks are useful but it is also important that language is taught orally too. Clark, Woodley and Lewis (2011) and Beck, McKeown and Kucan (2013:86) found that the teaching of oral language led to an improvement in language skills but an even greater improvement in reading comprehension when compared to other strategies. In my teaching, I have noticed that many of the children who struggle with vocabulary and reading are not keen on writing hence oral activities could be more engaging and suitable for these types of children. However,

it is important to remember that children still need to answer questions related to a written text as this is what they have to do in the reading SATs test.

2.4 Teaching vocabulary to help reading

The National Reading Panel (2000) found that for children to be successful in reading they need to have phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, fluency and vocabulary. If a child is missing any of these aspects then they will struggle to be a confident and accomplished reader. The recent Government focus on phonics has meant teachers have improved the decoding skills of their children but the end of key stage one and two tests suggest that they still lack comprehension skills (NLF, 2014).

Salvin *et al.* (2011), Ofsted (2011) and the NLF (2014) recognise that phonics is a key part of the early reading process yet so is the understanding and knowledge of vocabulary (Biemiller, 2015). The research by Sedita (2005) found that this was particularly true when it came to comprehension skills as a lack of vocabulary knowledge makes reading comprehension very difficult because the knowledge and understanding of words is essential to access the texts. Admittedly, Sedita's research was undertaken in a SEND context rather than a mainstream school which could make a difference. Perfetti and Adlof (2012:14) also found that,".. for any encounter with a given test, it is the quality of the reader's word knowledge (form as well as reading) for the words in that text that is crucial to comprehension".

Over the last thirty years, reading researchers have agreed that a child needs to know at least 90% of the words in a text in order to comprehend it (Hirsch, 2003). Nevertheless, Laufer (1989) believes that to have a good understanding you need to know 95% which Quigley (2018:71) agrees with if the work is teacher supported.

However, if working independently on more challenging texts he actually found it could be as much as 98%. This shows the importance of a good understanding of vocabulary in order to be able to progress in reading.

When beginning to teach vocabulary in order to support reading, it is important to have an accurate assessment of a child's understanding of reading and vocabulary as during a multi-choice test, Curtis (1981) found that children with poor vocabulary knowledge could only explain half of the words that they said they knew. Beck, McKeown and Kucan (2013:12) support this and say that teachers need to consider the extent of children's' understanding as many children will say they understand a word but when asked to explain it or put it into a sentence they have difficulties. Many times, I have experienced children saying they recognise a word but are unable to explain it. Curtis (1981) found that when children were tested on words they said they knew, 70% could give a very simple explanation of it; 50% could give an example and only 20% could provide a synonym of the word and a full explanation. Even though Curtis's study is dated, it still reminds teachers about the need for using different types of measures to get an accurate assessment of children's understanding of words (Beck, McKeown and Kucan, 2013:93).

There are two main methods to teach vocabulary. These are indirect (reading, conversations, overheard speech and seeing words) and direct (key words, context, pre-teaching and repeated exposure) vocabulary instruction (Armbruster, Lehr and Osborn, 2003). Despite evidence supporting the importance of vocabulary in improving reading, Quigley (2018:12) found that the explicit teaching of vocabulary rarely takes place in school but much of Quigley's research is based in secondary schools so this could differ in primary schools. Nevertheless, as a teacher, I have rarely witnessed the teaching of vocabulary in the classroom and it appears to be a

missed opportunity to help support all children with their reading skills. In addition, it would be particularly beneficial for disadvantaged children as these children have few examples of indirect vocabulary to build on. If schools do not teach vocabulary, the vocabulary gaps between different socio-economic groups will not change, as the children with poorer vocabulary will generally not be learning it at home (Beck, McKeown and Kucan, 2013:1).

Along with disadvantaged children, the teaching of vocabulary has been found to be particularly successful for low ability children (Salvin *et al.* 2011) and the explicit teaching of vocabulary can be three times more beneficial for these particular children (Elleman, Lindo, Morphy and Compton, 2009). This could suggest that the teaching of vocabulary is not that useful for children who are middle or higher attaining or it could be that the low ability children have such a big vocabulary gap that they make lots of progress very quickly. Alternatively, it could be that the studies of Elleman *et al.* (2009) and Salvin *et al.* (2011) are not challenging the higher ability children enough. Nelson and Stage (2007) also support this and during their research found that children who began with a lower vocabulary range showed the greatest improvements whilst those who already had a wide vocabulary made fewer improvements. Significantly, this was only a short-term intervention so it may have been too early to see the full impact on the higher attaining children. Nelson and Stage (2007) also found that the Y4 children benefitted more than the Y6 children. Again, this was part of a short-term intervention but the difference could have been due to the increased vocabulary gap in Y6 that only becomes more difficult to correct as children become older (Chall and Jacobs, 2003). Despite this, Nelson and Stage (2007) reported that after the intervention, all the children (including the higher ability) showed improvement in their reading comprehension skills which they argue

showed that their intervention was a success and is still beneficial to older children and those working at a higher level.

The research suggests that vocabulary teaching is particularly useful for lower attainment children but writers found that it is beneficial for all children whatever their ability or background (Nelson and Stage, 2007; Salvin *et al.* 2011). Nagy and Anderson (1984) believe that opportunities during story time should be used to discuss language whenever possible. This is something I regularly do as it also affords opportunities to extend the higher ability children. Also, this is particularly useful as it allows the lower ability children to access and be exposed to more difficult vocabulary in a supportive, group environment (EEF, 2017). It is important that lower ability children are exposed to difficult vocabulary as in some classes they are regularly placed into interventions with teaching assistants and miss whole class learning opportunities. However, it is important that children still get time to enjoy the story and it does not become disjointed by interruptions to discuss vocabulary. In addition to this, the middle and higher ability must not be forgotten, as they should continue to be challenged. Beck, McKeown and Kucan (2013:55) emphasise that it is important to extend the high ability children by using a range of tier two words and allowing them the opportunity to investigate their word consciousness, explain why certain words are used by the author and the impact it has on the reader.

When it comes to teaching vocabulary, for children to meet age related expectations, they should be learning 2000-3000 new words each year (Beck, McKeown and Kucan, 2002:43). Therefore, it is important that from a young age, children are exposed to language-rich environments throughout their school years so that they hear and learn about as many words as possible, (NLF, 2014) as the KS2 SATs reading tests are a challenge for many children due to their technical, academic

language, which is unfamiliar to many children (Chall and Jacobs, 2003). Duke and Moses (2003) point out that you cannot teach children all of the vocabulary that they need to know by explicit vocabulary teaching alone and therefore the most effective method of developing vocabulary is by using a range of strategies, as Graves (2009) says, 'one size does not fit all'. The National Reading Panel (2000) agree and believe that there is no ideal method for teaching vocabulary and that both direct and indirect methods can be used successfully. The research highlights the importance of using a range of strategies in order to produce the most effective and enjoyable vocabulary instruction. Beck, McKeown and Kucan (2013:3) found that for vocabulary teaching to be seen as a 'success' it needs to have a positive impact on reading comprehension skills and building children's vocabulary (Beck, McKeown and Kucan (2013:3). This should then lead to improved reading confidence and achievement, which may help narrow the gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children.

Writers (Beck, McKeown and Kucan, 2002:43) have found that direct vocabulary instruction is an effective vocabulary teaching method because it was a way of children learning and remembering new words. Armbruster, Lehr and Osborn (2003) support this as they found that using direct vocabulary instruction led to an improvement in both a child's knowledge of vocabulary and their reading comprehension skills. However, their research recognised the importance of using a range of methods, as it is essential to adapt the teaching to the children you are working with. Alternatively, the research by Beck, McKeown and Kucan (2013:47) found that vocabulary teaching was successful when teachers simply explained the meanings of words and children then completed fun activities about the word and definition though this may not be a suitable method for all children, which is

something the study did not recognise, as those children who are lower ability or SEND could struggle with this activity while other activities may be more beneficial. Nash and Snowling (2006) agreed partly with Beck, McKeown and Kucan that the use of definitions were important but they found that other activities and strategies need to be used to create improvements in vocabulary with this being especially important for children who were far behind where they should be. In contrast, Stahl and Fairbanks (1986) found that vocabulary interventions, which just used definition examples, showed no improvements in a child's reading comprehension skills but this study was run over a very short time frame (three months) so there were limitations regarding its reliability.

Adding to this, many writers (Beck, McKeown and Kucan, 2013:4; Nash and Snowling, 2006; Armbruster, Leher and Osborn, 2003) believe it is important that vocabulary is taught in context as this helps children to create links and remember words. Nash and Snowling (2006) completed two vocabulary interventions, which were both definition based, but only one group was taught with a context. Three months into the intervention, they found that the group which was taught in context showed a greater knowledge and understanding of vocabulary compared to the group who were not. In addition, the context group demonstrated that they had improved their reading comprehension skills and showed that they could apply their newly learnt strategies to unknown vocabulary independently, which the other group struggled to do (Nash and Snowling, 2006). By teaching words in context with examples, the words are more likely to be remembered and this is particularly important with words that have more than one meaning (Beck, McKeown and Kucan, 2002:86). Despite this, McKeown (1985) points out that this can still be a difficult task

for children with a poor understanding of vocabulary as they often struggle to work out the meanings of words even in context.

Teachers need to remember that stories rather than definitions can be used to teach words in context as Biemiller and Boote (2006) completed a story based vocabulary intervention with two groups of children and after one week looked at the understanding of word meanings in the stories. The first group was read the same book three times and had no vocabulary instruction. After the week, they found there was only a 12% average increase in the understanding of word meanings. However with the second group, they read the same book four times but alongside this ran five days of vocabulary instruction lessons, which were related to the vocabulary in the book, and they found a 41% increase in word meaning understanding. This method is time consuming so it limits the number of books and vocabulary children are exposed to but Biemiller and Boote (2006) believed they could teach four hundred words each year using this method. In addition, after five days of lessons and reading the book a number of times, a lot of recap may have taken place so it would have been interesting to know what percentage of word meaning had been retained a month later.

Many of the interventions and activities, which have been discussed, have limitations as there is no perfect method to teach vocabulary and it is important a range of strategies are used. The MCVIP Project (Manyak, Blachowicz, Graves, Arner, Bates, Cieply, Davis, Peterson and Olejnik, 2014) was created following the findings that multiple methods or strategies are needed to effectively teach vocabulary. They created four key principles for effective vocabulary instruction, which included language experience, teaching individual words, strategies to learn new vocabulary and creating word consciousness. This project ran over a three-year period and

showed promising results with the children making significant progress in vocabulary depth and reading comprehension skills (Manyak *et al.* 2014), which suggests they could be useful principles to follow when teaching vocabulary.

The opportunity to have language experience was recognised as an important principle in the MCVIP Project (Manyak *et al.* 2014). When speaking, most people use the same two thousand words in their oral language which are mostly made up of tier one words (O'Keeffe, Carter and McCarthy, 2007). Therefore, teachers need to ensure they use a range of vocabulary when speaking to individuals and groups of children to expand the range of depth of children's language (Quigley, 2008:17), as Clarke, Snowling, Truelove and Hulme (2010) found that a lack of oral language is a major barrier to a child's reading comprehension skills. Consequently, the EEF (2019) carried out a study into oral language interventions, which showed some promising results with improved reading comprehension skills. Along with this, there is some evidence that the oral language interventions involving problem solving lead to some disadvantaged children making up to six months reading progress whereas interventions focusing on meaning were not as successful but still showed some improvement (EEF, 2019). This suggests that the more interactive activities led to an increase in progress and this was particularly the case for disadvantaged children.

As it is not possible to teach children all of the words they need to know by direct vocabulary instruction, it is important that children read widely to improve their vocabulary depth and knowledge (Nagy and Anderson, 1984). Beck, McKeown and Kucan (2013:9) suggest that children should be encouraged to read challenging texts, which include tier two vocabulary, to expose them to a large range of vocabulary. However, Sedita (2005) disagrees and believes that when working with children with a lower level of vocabulary, it is important to slowly introduce them to

difficult texts so that they are challenged and expand their vocabulary without damaging their confidence. Chall and Jacobs (2003) agree and found that challenging texts could be an issue for lower attaining children as if children have limited vocabulary; they avoid reading more tricky texts. This is something that I have experienced in the classroom, where children who are the poorer readers, stick to the easier texts and avoid reading altogether if possible. This is often because they do not want to fail. Furthermore, if they do read enough, these children do not have enough context or background knowledge in order to work out the meanings of a large number of unfamiliar words (McKeown, 1985:140). This could be a particular issue for those children who are dyslexic, as these children need to be taught vocabulary to help their reading confidence (Biemiller, 2015). Without intervention, as the lower ability and dyslexic children become older, the gap widens even further with the so-called 'Matthew effect' where the richer get even richer and the poorer get even poorer (Stanovich, 1986).

When learning vocabulary through reading alone, the word needs to be read a number of times in different contexts in order to become known words (Beck, McKeown and Kucan, 2013:56). A study by Swanborn and De Glopper (1999) found that when reading, if a child met one hundred unknown words only 5-15% of these words would be learnt through reading alone. This is quite a large variation in percentage because the number of words a child would learn from reading depends upon the age, reading ability and previous vocabulary knowledge of the child (Swanborn and De Glopper, 1999). Another issue with learning words through a reading strategy is that the learning of new words only takes place when children actually read enough to come across unknown words multiple times and have enough context from previous reading to apply this to word learning (Beck, McKeown

and Kucan, 2013:56). Biemiller (2015) found that this is another reason why this method normally only works for more accomplished readers as they read more challenging texts and they have the context knowledge that is required to work out word meaning. Despite this, Biemiller still supports the use of this method in the classroom although he found that only children who are competent readers by the end of KS1 would be able to learn new vocabulary from reading books as they progress onto KS2. Consequently, this will not be a suitable strategy for those who have already fallen behind year group expectations.

When working with a whole, mixed ability class, the most successful way of teaching vocabulary is using a range of strategies (Snow, Lawrence and White, 2009; Lesaux, Kieffer, Faller and Kelley, 2010; EEF, 2017). The EEF Project (2017) found that repeated exposure of challenging words for all children (including the lower ability), the use of words in context and pre-teaching activities were all beneficial as a whole class activity. Along with this, the repeated exposure of vocabulary so that the words become part of a child's active vocabulary (Beck, McKeown and Kucan, 2013:86), different activities (reading, writing, hearing and saying a word) as well as focused work on a small number of words a week (Snow, Lawrence and White, 2009) were all found to be useful activities as a class. However, it is important to adapt strategies and personalise interventions when working with smaller groups of children because they need to be specifically targeted at these children to have the most impact (Snow, Lawrence and White, 2009).

2.5 Reading achievement and confidence

The research by Clark, Woodley and Lewis (2011) found that there is a significant relationship between reading frequency, enjoyment and attainment. This is not surprising, as if children do not enjoy reading they are unlikely to read regularly, which in turn means that their reading attainment drops and they can begin to lose interest in reading because they find it difficult, which then becomes a downward spiral.

The PIRLS International Reading Report (2006) by Mullis, Martin, Kennedy and Foy (2006) highlighted that children's attitudes to reading in the UK were very poor (only 42% of students were very confident with reading and only 40% were very engaged in reading lessons). Worryingly, children's confidence and enjoyment in reading had actually declined compared to the results from the earlier PIRLS report in 2001 (Mullis, Martin, Gonzalez and Kennedy, 2001). Following this report, Sainsbury and Clarkson (2008) shared their research into children's attitudes to reading over time. In contrast to the PIRLS survey, they found that attitudes and confidence had actually improved since they began their research in 2003. However, there were differences in the two pieces of research which may explain the variation such as a slight difference in age groups (PIRLS worked with Y5 and Sainsbury and Clarkson Y4 and Y6), different methods of sampling and the research ran over different years (PIRLS ran from 2001-2006) with the latter being more recent (2003-2007). Perhaps, Sainsbury and Clarkson were accurate with their research or it could have been a cohort blip as according to more recent PIRLS research, the attitudes and confidence in reading has improved significantly (53% of students are now very confident readers and 57% are very engaged with reading lessons). This is encouraging data, which shows that both attitudes and confidence can be improved.

Despite the recent improvements in reading attitudes and confidence, Fletcher-Campbell, Soler and Reid (2009) found that if children had early reading difficulties, it had a negative impact on their self-esteem and future reading success. This means that children who find reading difficult, are more likely to give up on reading, not progress, become even further behind and this is something I have experienced in the classroom. It is a difficult balance as for children to become more competent readers they need to read more challenging texts to expose them to more language as they move through school (Quigley, 2018:17). This is particularly important for the higher ability children who need to be challenged but they are normally the more confident individuals as Mercer, Wegerif and Dawes (1999) point out that children who experience success are more likely to be confident readers.

Guthrie and Knowles (2001) and Sainsbury and Schagen (2004) found that children's attitudes to reading have an impact on their future success in tests and reading ability. If children do not enjoy reading, it can be very difficult to get them to engage with a text and without practice; they will not become more accomplished readers (Guthrie and Knowles, 2001). Alongside this, if they do not enjoy reading they are likely to pick easier books, which they can finish more quickly (Sainsbury and Schagen, 2004). Figure 2.5 shows that having access to texts which children enjoy and the confidence to read are two of the most important factors when encouraging children to read (NLT, 2012). It also shows how attitudes have improved over time but boys still appear to have more negative attitudes to reading than girls (NLT, 2012). It is very important teachers ensure children have access to a wide variety of suitable texts and that they can read in both an encouraging and supportive environment. In my current setting, the use of reading corners and action

books such as the Stormbreaker and Percy Jackson series have been very popular
with the older boys in school.

The figure originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The figure was sourced at National Literacy Trust (2012) *Reading Commission.*

Figure 2.5: Attitudes towards reading by gender (NLS, 2012:3)

Quigley (2018:17) claims to have found a link between the understanding and
knowledge of vocabulary, and reading achievement, as he found that weaker
readers often have significant gaps in vocabulary. Consequently, this could have a
negative impact on their confidence because they may struggle to read for pleasure
due to their vocabulary limitations (Fletcher-Campbell, Soler and Reid, 2009). Other
factors such as phonic knowledge can have an impact; the DfE (2016) found that the
Y1 phonics screening test is the strongest predictor of future reading ability at KS2
and beyond. Duff, Mengoni, Bailey and Snowling (2015) agree and found that the
children who demonstrate a confidence in phonics usually go on to be accomplished
readers. It is also supported by the DFE (2018) who found that 88% of children who

passed the phonics test were at the expected standard at KS2 in 2018. However, for those that did not pass only 30% reached the expected standard in the reading test. Significantly some of the children, who do not pass the phonics test, are children that have very specific learning difficulties and despite intervention they will not be able to pass or access the reading test at the end of KS2 (O'Connor, 2014). However, it could be argued that the children who learn phonics easily are the naturally brighter children, with a wider knowledge of the world around them and these are normally the children with larger vocabularies and better reading skills.

In 2019, despite the 2018-2019Y6 cohort having the highest phonic scores when they were in KS1 (compared to previous years), the reading attainment actually declined as shown in Figure 2.6 (DfE, 2019a). Consequently, this brings into question whether phonics is a reliable indicator of future reading ability as initially thought. However, it is important to remember that other factors could have contributed towards this such as the changes in assessment and the phonics test (Fisher Family Trust, 2019).

The figure originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The figure was sourced at Fisher Family Trust (2019) *Primary school SATs 2019: A look at gender gaps, the disadvantage gap and the impact of the phonics test*
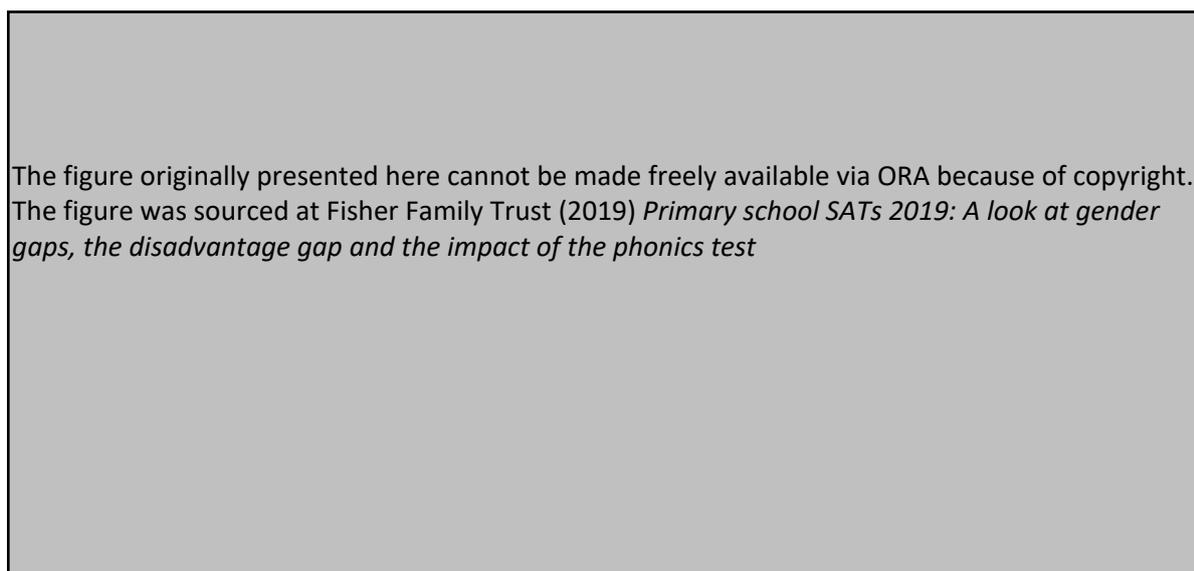
Figure 2.6: Attainment in phonics and KS2 reading (FFT, 2019:1)

2.6 Summary

Most writers agree that the vocabulary gap exists from a very young age between children from different socio-economic backgrounds (HoCEC, 2014). This is thought to be due to the depth, range and quantity of vocabulary taught by a child's parents through talk at home before they begin school. (Gilkerson *et al.* 2017). However, the richness and quality of the talk does not seem to vary according to the child's socio-economic background (Hart and Risley, 1995). Therefore, early intervention strategies need to be put in place to support parents to develop the amount of talk and vocabulary taught at home and this needs to have a particular focus on those children from poorer socio-economic areas (Weizman and Snow, 2001). Otherwise, these children are unlikely to fulfil their reading potential and may never catch up with their economically better off peers (NLF, 2014).

The teaching of tier two vocabulary is an important strategy to support children in their reading development and it has been found to be particularly beneficial for lower ability children (Nelson and Stage, 2007; Elleman *et al.* 2011; Salvin *et al.* 2011). If a child has a good grasp of vocabulary, this can help build confidence, achievement and the all-important, reading for pleasure (Clark, Woodley and Lewis, 2011). In addition to this, if children are successful they are more likely to want to continue reading and this, along with the use of oral language in the classroom will develop a child's vocabulary further (Quigley, 2018:17). However, it is important to recognise that this is just part of a child becoming a more confident and competent reader and a number of other factors are significant e.g. word recognition and an understanding of phonics, in order for a child to be a confident and competent reader (National Reading Panel, 2000).

The NLF (2014) highlight that it is important that the interventions, which are used, are sustainable and long-term, as they need the time to demonstrate any success. Directly teaching vocabulary across the school ages from FS1 to Y6 and even beyond, gives the opportunity for children to build in confidence, achieve and to narrow the vocabulary gap (Beck, McKeown and Kucan, 2013:3). Many writers (National Reading Panel, 2000; Sedita, 2005; Snow, Lawrence and White, 2009; Lesaux *et al.* 2010; EEF, 2017) have found that a range of strategies are required as 'one size does not fit all'. (Graves, 2009). Another important factor is to ensure that when teaching vocabulary, children will then be able to apply these strategies to use independently when they come across words which they do not know (Nelson and Stage, 2007). Teachers cannot teach children the meanings of every word which they may encounter and the independent skills enables children to have strategies to work out unknown vocabulary when there is no adult to help such as during tests or when completing tasks at home (Nelson and Stage, 2007). Alongside this, it is important that children have the opportunities for multiple exposure to vocabulary through a range of methods (both direct and indirect) including independent work and group reading as this will help children to develop their vocabulary knowledge (Beck, McKeown and Kucan, 2003:45).

Following this review, I framed these research questions:

To what extent does the explicit teaching of vocabulary help reading comprehension skills?

How far does the daily teaching of vocabulary close the vocabulary gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children?

To what extent does the teaching of vocabulary help the reading confidence of disadvantaged children?

Chapter 3 - Methodology

3.1 Rationale and approach

In order to investigate my research questions I planned to use activities to explicitly teach vocabulary in my classroom. Throughout this, I wanted to investigate how far the intervention would improve the confidence and achievement of Y6 reading with a particular focus on disadvantaged children. The literature review suggested that using a range of different types of vocabulary instruction (both implicit and explicit) along with activities led to the most significant increases in vocabulary knowledge and understanding in KS2 aged children (Graves, 2009). Consequently, when designing my intervention, I aimed to use a range of activities and different types of vocabulary instruction to help improve the vocabulary in my classroom.

To conduct this research, I used a number of research methods and the process of triangulation (Denzin, Lincoln and Giardina, 2006), to see how far the intervention was a success. By following this process, I could ensure that my results were as valid and reliable as possible. Along with this, if I had any problems with an aspect of data collection I could use other sources of data to inform my results. After the intervention, I planned to collect another set of data to see what changes (if any) had occurred.

When choosing the participants for my data collection, I decided to pick twelve children out of my Y6 class as I thought this was a manageable number and choosing children from my class, ensured that I had complete control over what they were being taught. For my participants, I choose a mixture of boys, girls and abilities. In addition to this, half of the children were disadvantaged. When choosing the children for the task, I used the Y6 reading data – which was taken from mock SATs

results- to ensure I had a mixture of abilities in my group. For the research, I attempted to put them into pairs by matching a disadvantaged child to another child of similar ability who was not disadvantaged. By doing this, I hoped to test if the intervention was more beneficial for disadvantaged or non-disadvantaged children as the pairs were beginning from similar starting points. In addition, I also choose two dyslexic children (one disadvantaged and one who was not) who were of similar ability as I thought it would be interesting to see if the vocabulary instruction was beneficial for them. Before the participants completed any of the tasks, I gained permission from both the child and a parent.

3.2 Action research

For my study, I choose to undertake qualitative research in the form of action research. This research is 'a disciplined process of inquiry conducted by and for those taking the action. The primary reason for engaging in action research is to assist the "actor" in improving and/or refining his or her actions' (Sagor, 2010).

The process of action research has four phrases as shown in Figure 3.1. This includes identifying any initial idea or plan, the literature review, planning the intervention, carrying it out, evaluate its successes and failures, amending it as required and then carrying out the updated intervention (Lewin, 1946:202).

Figure 3.1: The basic cycle of action research (Lewin 1946: 202).

I chose action research as it enabled me to adapt interventions to suit my children and it allowed me to change the intervention if there were issues with it or if it was not working as effectively as it could (Sagor, 2010). Along with this, it ensured that I continually evaluated the intervention throughout the process and checked that the data was reliable and valid for the research I was carrying out. However, there can be problems with this method, as if the project involves control groups it would not be possible to adapt the intervention to make sure the results were fair and reliable (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011) but this was not an issue for this study. Another factor is that the process cannot be repeated with the same conditions and hence it is important that the data taken from action research is discussed in context (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). In that respect, the use of triangulation by using a

range of research methods helped to ensure the validity of the data (Denzin, Lincoln and Giardina, 2006).

At the start of my research, a pilot study was carried out in my classroom for two weeks. At this point, staff members across school were also trying out a similar intervention so that they could feed back their findings and see how far it had an impact on their children. The pilot study enabled me to try out my vocabulary teaching methods and then following the action research methods I could adapt the intervention as required for the main six week intervention cycle with my whole class.

3.3 Intervention

The intervention, which was planned to run for six weeks, was to be taught to all of the thirty two children in my classroom. During the pilot process, the children were taught words from the Vocabulary Ninja list (Jennings, 2019), which was useful as it provided the words on cards (see Appendix 1.1). These cards included the word, class, definition, synonyms, antonyms, examples of the word being used and ideas for activities. The children had a vocabulary book especially for this intervention which they used when completing any vocabulary tasks which allowed the children to recap on words learnt previously and use this new, learnt vocabulary in their writing.

Following the pilot process, both I and the other members of staff, with whom I was collaborating, realised that the word lists had some limitations. It is a useful reference list and using these words encourages talk around school but the list is aimed at the whole of KS2 rather than specifically Y5/6. Despite this, some of the children in this phase still found these words challenging yet the higher attaining children could often

quickly explain the words or already had knowledge of them. Therefore, following the initial trial, I planned to use the same resource card but adapted it with an extension activity which included more difficult words suitable for challenging the higher ability children because I was concerned they were finding the tasks and words too simple. Previously, the cards had tasks on them, which could be useful, but were also limiting because they were often repetitive so I planned to remove these and use my own activities. In addition to this, as a phase group, we all found that time was an issue during the pilot study so we often struggled to fit the intervention in along with everything else that we needed to teach. We needed to prioritise this in our classroom hence we timetabled the intervention to take place at 11.55am so that we could ensure it was taught every single day for fifteen minutes.

During the pilot study, we found that the discussion period (when children spoke with a partner about their knowledge of the word before the word was explained by an adult) was very useful and the conversations in the classroom were language rich, building on previous learning. After conversations with the other teachers I was collaborating with, we decided to allow more time for the discussion phase to ensure this was not missed off due to time constraints.

I had hoped that the intervention would lead to an improvement in children's vocabulary knowledge and reading confidence and achievement through their increased vocabulary knowledge and understanding.

3.4 Research Methods

For this research, I used a mixed-methods approach, which included using data taken from a mock SATs test, a reading speed and recognition task, an independent

vocabulary task and interviews. Using the mixed-methods approach allowed me to ensure the validity and reliability of my data through triangulation (Denzin, Lincoln and Giardina, 2006).

3.4.1 Reading data

Each of the SATs reading tests include three different types of texts, which are normally either a fiction, non fiction and poem or two fiction texts and a non-fiction. The children read each text and then answer questions about that particular text before moving onto the next one. The whole question paper lasts for an hour and normally consists of twenty five to thirty questions which total fifty marks.

As part of normal practice, in February, the children were tested on the 2017 SATs reading test paper in order to assess progress as well as to identify gaps. In addition, it assisted me in choosing the participants for this study by looking at their scaled scores. Each year, the pass score fluctuates depending on how children perform nationally. Therefore, the raw score (marks out of 50) is used to get the scaled score, which shows whether the children are below, at or above the expected standard.

One reason I chose to use this method as part of my data collection was because it enabled me to pick a range of children to focus on. Furthermore, as the raw score is matched to the scaled score, I planned to use the 2018 reading paper after the intervention to accurately compare results which will then tell me whether their reading ability had improved. Following the intervention, I decided that I would use the 2018 paper rather than redoing the 2017 as it was a truer reflection of their reading ability because it would be the first time they had seen it. In addition, the use of this data was useful as it allowed me to group children into similar ability pairs to

enable me to compare them as the intervention went on. Additionally, as I matched a disadvantaged child with a non-disadvantaged of similar ability, I would be able to compare the results between the two and to see how far the intervention was beneficial for each particular group.

In addition to the SATs reading test, I used a short text to test the children on the numbers of words which they could read accurately in a minute (see Appendix 1.2). In Y6, children should have a reading speed of ninety words per minute (Standards and Testing Agency, 2019). I decided to carry out this test because it gave me an indication of each child's confidence, particularly when reading aloud, and it highlighted any word recognition errors. This is important as this could impact on a child's understanding of a text because in order to understand as well as comprehend a text, a child needs to be able to read and understand at least 95% of a text (Laufer, 1989 and Quigley, 2018:71).

3.4.2 Vocabulary Tasks

After I had selected the focus children, I wanted to see what the children's vocabulary knowledge and understanding was before the intervention began. I decided to do this because it meant I could see how many words they did not know or understand in the text. This meant I could compare their vocabulary knowledge in the vocabulary task to see whether there was a link between reading achievement and vocabulary knowledge.

When completing the first task, I read the texts aloud as I wanted to know how far they understood or had knowledge of the word and not whether or not they could read it. Some children were surprised when I read words out, as they had misread

them during the test. Apart from this, they completed the task independently and they were sat away from each other so they were not tempted to copy another's work or have outside influences about the number of words which they were highlighting. Additionally, the two dyslexic children were given the task on suitably coloured paper to enable them to access the work.

Following this task, I was concerned that the children may not be totally honest or actually have a clear understanding of all of the vocabulary which they had not highlighted. Research has shown that this is not a totally reliable method of assessing vocabulary knowledge because children can say they know a word even if they do not as they often do not want to admit it (Curtis, 1981). Consequently, when asked to define a word or put it in to a sentence they are unable to do it. Therefore, after they had completed this task, I later decided to use an additional task to test this theory. I chose to assess children on some of the more difficult vocabulary across the three reading papers from the 2017 reading paper (see Appendix 1.3). The children were asked whether they knew the word, could give a definition, use it in a sentence and write a synonym and antonym for the word (see Appendix 1.4) which gave me a more realistic understanding of each child's actual vocabulary knowledge and understanding. After the intervention, I had planned to repeat both vocabulary tasks but with the 2018 paper as this would enable me to see how far their understanding and knowledge of vocabulary had improved.

Despite the valuable data collected, there were a number of limitations with this type of research method. Significantly, the task relied upon the children to be honest with themselves and me about their understanding (or lack of) vocabulary (Beck, McKeown and Kucan, 2013). Many children – particularly those with low self-esteem- are reluctant to be honest about their difficulties and may try to hide them

(Fletcher-Campbell, Soler and Reid, 2009). To attempt to allay these concerns, I spoke to the children before completing the task and reassured them that this was not a test and it did not matter how many words they highlighted. In addition to this, I seated them so that they could not be influenced by other children.

3.4.3 Interviews

After I had selected my focus group, I interviewed each child on a 1:1 basis. The question script (see Appendix 1.5) included all open questions as I wanted to encourage longer, detailed answers which allowed the interviewee more scope to expand if they wished to (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). It also gave the flexibility to ask more questions to gain further clarification, information or for them to explain further on a point (Bryman, 2004). I used a semi-structured interview style so that I could ask children additional questions to gain extra information, which meant that I could use coding to look for relationships and anomalies in the data (Gorden, 1998). Nevertheless, it was important that I did not lead them to the answers which I would like and that I was supportive of all the answers they gave me.

Additionally, I chose to collect pupil viewpoints in the form of interviews because I wanted to get more in depth views and to hear individual points from children (Bryman, 2004). As well as this, I was able to repeat the question or rephrase in another way if they did not understand which would not have been possible with questionnaires. In addition, I felt questionnaires may not provide enough in depth information as questionnaires can be superficial (Edwards and Talbot, 1999) and Bryman (2004) found that interviews give the researcher more information. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) found that participants play a more active role in

interviews compared to questionnaires as they feel more involved in the research. When interviewing, I did it on a 1:1 basis so that the children felt they could be honest with me and not influenced by others in a group (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). Additionally, it stopped the louder children taking over which can mean the ones who are less confident are not able to put their points across (Edwards and Talbot, 1999). Following the intervention, I planned to redo the interviews with the same questions to see how far the intervention had an impact on their confidence as well as their ideas about vocabulary and reading.

Although interviews have plenty of benefits, they also have some limitations including children being reluctant to be honest or confident enough to speak 1:1 with an adult (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). However, I believe that this was less of an issue for me because I know the children very well having taught all of them since September 2019 and some of them since 2018. Therefore, I feel they trust me and know me well enough to be honest with their answers. In addition, at the beginning of the interview, I reassured them and explained the process so that the interview did not feel threatening. This is essential to ensure you get accurate, reliable data (Bryman, 2004). Another issue could be that the children knew that the interview was related to my research and this may mean that they actually gave me the answers that they think that I would like hear rather than what they actually believe themselves. To address this, I asked them to be completely honest and reassured them that there were no right or wrong answers.

All of the interviews were recorded using a voice recorder and then transcribed. When writing up the voice recordings, as much as possible I used the exact wording of the participant (including where their language was not Standard English). For longer pauses, I used … to show this, for shorter pauses I used commas and I used

other punctuation (such as question marks and exclamation marks) to show when the participant asked a question whether it was rhetorical or not and to emphasise their tone of voice when required. To address the power imbalance in the relationship I ensured the children understood what my research involved and why I was carrying out the interview.

3.5 Collaboration

Before the pilot study was carried out, the Deputy Headteacher (who is also a phase Y5/6 teacher) led a staff meeting in which I reported on the vocabulary work that we were planning to teach in our phase. During this meeting, we shared our ideas for the staff to attempt to try in their own classrooms. In addition, the school had a list of 'Words of the Week' for both KS1 and KS2, which were taken from the Vocabulary Ninja resource (Jennings, 2019). It was decided that these words would be displayed around school and the staff were asked to begin to encourage the children to use these words in conversations around school and in their writing.

During my pilot study, all of the staff across the school also tried out vocabulary teaching in their classrooms. The methods and resources used to teach vocabulary lessons looked quite different depending on whose classroom you visited as they were adapted to suit each group. I worked closely with the other teachers in the Y5/6 team at my school to teach specific words and activities to help improve the reading confidence and attainment of the children in this phase. When I was carrying out my initial research during the pilot study, the rest of the phase teachers also conducted similar vocabulary interventions, but they did not collect their data. Instead, they used teacher observation and marking, which they then discussed with me. The

process of action research led to adaptations to the task and the list of words taught. As a result, it enabled us to share good practice across the team and the rest of the school.

3.6 Ethics

For this study, I followed the British Education Research Association (2018) ethical guidelines. After confirming my research title, I obtained approval from the CUREC committee at the University of Oxford. Before I began my data collection, I gained permission from the Head Teacher to carry out this research (see Appendix 1.6) and to interview children on a one to one basis. The children, who took part in my research, were informed about my studies along with the reasons for the vocabulary tasks and interviews. They were reminded that all of their contributions were voluntary and that they could withdraw from the process at any time. If any of the children had asked to do this, I would have respected their decision and removed any data from them immediately. However, all of the children were happy to take part in the research and none of them asked to be removed which reassured me that I had created a safe, educational environment with a high level of trust between both teacher and student (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011).

Before beginning the interview process with any of the children, I requested parent's permission (see Appendix 1.7) to interview their children and use voice recording to record their answers. After typing up the transcripts, I deleted the original recordings from the voice recording device and kept the transcripts in a password protected file. Before any interviews took place, I also told the children and parents that all of their

information would be anonymised, any data would be securely stored and their identities would not be revealed in my research.

When choosing the children for my focus group, I ensured that it was children that could cope with the interview process and tasks. During the interview process, if a child told me about anything, which raised a safeguarding issue or concern, I would have immediately referred this to the safeguarding team.

3.7 Changes to study

In March 2020, the pandemic, Covid-19, meant that the Government ordered schools to close which meant that my research was immediately halted. At this point, I had completed my pilot study and was about to begin my full intervention following the adaptations through action research from the pilot study. As a result, I was unable to carry out the main intervention or collect any post intervention data to compare to the pre-intervention data. I was able to continue my study with very limited data collected before the intervention but the study was severely constrained by a lack of rich data.

3.8 Methods of data analysis

Using the pre-intervention data, I compared individual children to look for trends and relationships in the data which I had gathered and coded in the interview process. In addition, I compared data between children of similar and different ability as well as those that were disadvantaged and those who were not.

When analysing the talk and text from interviews, I used a mixture of deductive and inductive coding. Initially, I began with deductive coding because this allowed me to look for patterns that I had identified during my literature review and an example of this included children talking about reading easier books which are aimed at younger readers (Gorden, 1998). I then moved onto the inductive method because this built on my deductive coding which allowed me to use other viewpoints or perspectives such as the child believing they were a 'bad' reader because they thought they were slow at reading as everyone else finished faster.

Chapter 4 – Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

In March 2020, Covid-19 resulted in the closure of schools which meant that the only data included in this study was collected before any interventions were able to take place. Despite this, the children had completed all of the pre-intervention tasks, so the data could be analysed to look for trends and relationships between reading ability, confidence, attitudes and vocabulary knowledge in disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). The data collected included transcripts from interviews, results from a reading task and two vocabulary activities. The focus of my study had to change as it was not possible to answer my research questions with the data which I had collected at lockdown. Therefore, there was more of a focus on attitudes to reading and vocabulary from the original questionnaire transcripts along with reading and vocabulary task data.

4.2 Attitudes to reading

Children were asked to score themselves as good or confident readers on a scale of one to ten (the scales given to the children were one = terrible and ten = brilliant). During the interview process, the children were questioned on their attitudes and engagement in reading, the results showed that those who enjoyed reading were either of middle or higher ability with the exception of one child who was of a lower ability but still enjoyed reading. However, this child was potentially more capable than their work suggested as the most significant barrier to their academic achievement was actually very poor attendance. Significantly, these findings support the work of Clark, Woodley and Lewis (2011) as they found that children who enjoy

reading are generally good at it. On the other hand, two of the three children, who did not like reading, were lower ability children and they strongly emphasised their dislike of the subject. This finding agrees with the research which suggests that if children have had early reading difficulties then it can impact on their future reading enjoyment (Fletcher-Campbell, Soler and Reid, 2009). Furthermore, the NLT (2012) found that many children prefer a particular type of text and this matched the data from the interviews as children said that they enjoyed reading if the book was of a particular genre or a certain type of book that they were interested in. An example of this was one child who said they particularly enjoyed reading about animals in non-fiction texts, as they liked learning new facts.

Overall, 58% of the children said that they enjoyed reading (seven out of twelve) which is encouraging as it very closely matches the PIRLS (2016) data which found that of the children they interviewed, 57% of the children were engaged with their reading lessons. Interestingly, when comparing the enjoyment of reading between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children, there was no difference between the two groups for those who enjoyed reading and those that did not. Despite research claiming that girls enjoy reading more than boys (NLT, 2012), my results showed no difference between the two genders but I did have a fairly small sample of only twelve children so further research into different groups and ages of children would be needed to confirm this.

During the interview process, children were asked how good a reader they were and Table 4.1 shows the interview results on whether they thought they were a good reader, a confident reader, and how it linked with their scaled scores and their reading speed. To ensure anonymity and ease of description each child was given a number and the table specified whether each child was disadvantaged. The third and

fourth column represented the number of words a child could read aloud in a minute from the texts, *Rollercosters* and *The Water Cycle* whilst the words in brackets represented the number of words the child read incorrectly or could not read. The scaled score column was their reading test score. The final two columns were taken from the interviews when the children scored themselves out on ten on whether they were a good and confident reader.

The data from Table 4.1 showed that 50% of the children were confident readers, which is also very similar to the PRILS (2016) research which found that 53% of the participants were confident readers. However, this may not be completely reliable as they used different methods and measures to find out whether children were confident readers. In addition, the interview results suggested that children can find it difficult to classify what a good or confident reader is (Fletcher-Campbell, Soler and Reid, 2009). An example of this was shown when a lower ability child thought they were a good reader because they said, 'I can stop at full stops'. Unsurprisingly, the children who achieved the lower reading scores were the least confident and did not regard themselves as a good reader. There was one exception, who did not follow the trend, which was Child 10 who has exceptionally low attendance but they believed they were a fairly good (seven) and confident (six) reader. Therefore, their low ability is more likely to be due to attendance issues rather than actual ability.

Table 4.1 Attitudes to reading compared to reading test scores and speed

Child Number	Dis	Speed Text 1	Speed Text 2	Scaled Score	Good Reader?	Confident Reader?
1	No	74 (2)	56 (7)	98	3	2
2	Yes	83 (1)	62 (5)	96	4	5
3	No	90+ (2)	90+ (2)	108	7	9
4	Yes	90+	90+	109	9	9
5	No	90+	90+	98	8	10
6	Yes	90+ (1)	90+	101	7	7
7	Yes	90+ (1)	90+ (2)	103	7	5
8	No	90+	90+	107	8	9
9	Yes	77 (9)	65 (12)	92	3	3
10	Yes	90+ (1)	90+ (4)	93	7	6
11	No	74 (4)	66	90	3	5
12	No	90+ (4)	90+ (1)	96	6	7

The numbers in brackets are the number of reading errors in the reading speed test.

In contrast, many of the higher ability children were quite confident in their own ability and believed that they were good readers. This is not surprising as Guthrie and Knowles (2001) and Sainsbury and Schagen (2004) found that children's attitudes have an impact on their reading success. There was only one exception to this, who despite being an accomplished reader and scoring one hundred and three on their recent reading test, believed that they were not a confident reader (five) or a particularly good one (seven). Interestingly, this child was also from a disadvantaged

background and had quite low confidence in class which could have an impact on their self-esteem and confidence (Mercer, Wegerif and Dawes, 1999). Also, when this child was asked whether they were a good reader, they compared their performance to another, 'Well.. C would be a ten so I would be about a seven as C.. got one hundred and twenty so full marks and I got one hundred and three so I am in the middle'. That child was not alone in comparing themselves to other children and their scores as, during the interview process a number of children decided whether if they were a 'good' reader by comparing their mock SATs score with others. Perhaps, this is due to them not having anything else to compare themselves to and because of the big emphasis on SATs in Y6. This brings into question whether it is the reading children find difficult or the SATs test. In addition to this, many children mentioned their knowledge of vocabulary being a factor in whether they were a good reader, which supports Perfetti and Adlof (2012:14) and Biemiller (2015) who found that to comprehend a text you had to have a good knowledge of the vocabulary. A good knowledge of vocabulary is defined as understanding at least 90% of the text (Hirsch, 2003).

The results showed that those children who had a reading speed below ninety words per minute and a number of errors in their reading (Child 1, 2, 9 and 11) had a scaled score of less than the expected one hundred. This was to be expected, as those readers - who are slower - and generally less accurate, are unlikely to finish the test or fully understand the text when completing it. In addition, in order to be reading at the expected standard, children should be reading at least ninety words a minute (Standards and Testing Agency, 2019). Nevertheless, other children (Child 5, 10 and 12) had a reading speed of above ninety but still did not reach the expected standard of one hundred: in addition, Child 5 had no reading errors. This suggests

that there is a weak correlation between word recognition and fluency skills. This raises the question: does a child's reading confidence and view of their ability come from their ability to read a text rather than comprehend it, their ability to answer questions about a text, or is it their lack of understanding of vocabulary which means they are unable to actually understand the text (Laufer, 1989 and Quigley, 2018:17).

The data suggests that children who can read a text believe they are a good and confident reader even if they are unable to comprehend it. It is important to remember that even though a child can read a word, it does not mean they understand it (Curtis, 1981). During the reading test, some of the children showed that though they had a reading speed of above 90 words per minute they were unable to answer enough questions correctly to reach the expected standard. However, further research would be needed to investigate how far this was due to comprehending the questions, comprehending the texts or the fact that they were not working fast enough. In addition, if a child has a poor understanding of vocabulary it could cause the lower reading score as Sedita (2005) and Perfetti and Adlof (2012) found that a lack of vocabulary understanding makes reading comprehension very difficult.

When focusing on reading confidence, some children mentioned that their confidence depended on the difficulty of the book they were reading. Like being a good reader, many children appear to struggle to classify a confident reader. A child with a self-reported confidence level of ten said it was because 'I have a massive book shelf, read constantly and write in my reading record all of the time'. Others felt that they were not confident readers as they did not read aloud very often and one said they were not that confident as they had to move down a book band which is likely to erode confidence. A number of children highlighted the significance of the

book band they were on and regarded 'black' (the top book band) as the ultimate aim. This suggests that the book banding could potentially be having both a positive and negative impact on reading confidence as at this age they are aware of the relevance of the different book banding colours and that is a way of comparing themselves with their peers (NLT, 2012) whereas at a younger age children may not be as aware of this. Furthermore, there were other examples of where children had compared themselves to their peers such as, a child who said they were a slow reader compared to everyone else. This child is EAL and throughout his school life, he had never had supported reading at home as his parents have limited English and so he did find this subject difficult. In addition, this shows that children's confidence and belief in their own ability can be affected by others in the classroom.

In contrast, the lower ability children appeared to be less competitive when comparing book bands as they actually said they preferred to read easier texts such as books by David Walliams and *The Diary of the Wimpy Kid*. Their reasons for this included a preference for looking at the pictures as, they are more enjoyable and easier to read. However, these books are aimed at Y3/4 children and therefore have more basic vocabulary hence they are easier to understand which confirms Sainsbury and Schagen's (2004) finding that children can finish these books more quickly and therefore look as though they are more confident and better readers than they really are. On the other hand, increasing reading confidence could help them with their reading in the long run. Additionally, Child 1 actually said that *The Diary of the Wimpy Kid* was banned in Y4 as it was more like a comic. This appeared to have a negative impact on this child as the child kept coming back to this point which emphasises the importance of encouraging children to challenge themselves to increase their vocabulary knowledge and reading skills but remembering that they

still must have the opportunity to read for pleasure (Clark, Woodley and Lewis, 2011), as otherwise, they can quickly lose confidence and interest in reading.

When asked about the greatest difficultly in reading, nearly all of the children (eleven out of twelve) found vocabulary to be the most significant barrier. Specifically, the majority of children said that 'difficult words' were a barrier whilst others said 'longer words'. I suspect that children were using different words to mean the same thing (difficult vocabulary). The higher ability children said that old words such as those that are no longer commonly used in the English language were the most difficult, a finding which could have been influenced by our recent lessons since we have been completing a reading comprehension of a passage from Charles Dickens.

When children were asked about their favourite texts, a number of children picked out class reads as their favourites and some said being read to was their favourite part of the school day. In my classroom, I ensured that the class read books were high profile and the main purpose was to read these books for pleasure rather than working on comprehension or vocabulary skills. Recently, we have read Room 13 and Holes which have been very popular. During the interviews, both of these books were mentioned by children and appeared to have had a positive impact on their reading for pleasure as children said, 'I liked reading Holes and Room 13' and 'When I am reading a book I don't understand it but I do when someone else reads to me such as Holes is really easy to understand with you reading it and I use my imagination to create pictures in my mind'. This shows the positive impact that reading aloud can have to children and it emphasises the need to continue to read widely to children even as they get older. In addition to encouraging reading for pleasure, reading aloud to a class can also help to promote reading enjoyment and build vocabulary skills (Nagy and Anderson, 1984). To do this effectively the teacher

needs to pre-teach vocabulary and discuss different vocabulary as the text is read aloud. However, it is important to not upset the flow of the story as it can impact on the enjoyment. By increasing enjoyment of reading and children's vocabulary skills, it will build confidence and may encourage children to read more.

4.3 What is vocabulary?

During the interview process, the children were asked what their understanding of 'vocabulary' was. Half of the children said that vocabulary was words but of these, some used the word probably or questioned whether their answer was correct, which suggests that they were guessing and not completely confident in their answer. On the other hand, half of them could not explain what vocabulary was or else gave an incorrect answer. Some said it was finding a better or larger range of words but that was in the context of improving vocabulary rather than of understanding what vocabulary actually is. This could be because I often tell the children to use more powerful vocabulary in their writing which suggests how important it is to explain what the words you are using actually mean and to check that the children understand by using regular questioning (Curtis, 1981). The disadvantaged children were less likely to be able to give a definition of vocabulary and those who could were the children questioning their own answers. When asked what vocabulary is some of the responses included, 'Different types of words', 'Like words', 'I don't know' and 'Not sure'. This may be because the literature suggests that disadvantaged children are still far behind non-disadvantaged children in terms of reading and vocabulary achievement (DFE, 2019a).

4.4 Methods of working out unknown vocabulary

Children were asked what they do when they came across a word they do not know, the lower ability children said they would skip it whereas the other children said that they would try to work it out first. Despite admitting to skipping tricky words, the lower ability children when asked what they should do, could give a reasonable explanation such as asking a friend, teacher or using a dictionary. On the other hand, the higher ability children were fairly confident in their own strategies and methods to work out unknown words which included reading around the word, replacing the word with another and using a dictionary. An example of this was a child who said, 'There are different strategies but I find the above the easiest'. Here, he was referring to his strategy of reading around the word to work out its meaning. In addition, he could also describe other strategies (use a dictionary, replace the word, read around it and ask an adult) and explain which was best for different situations. Another higher ability child, also said they had lots of methods (including the methods mentioned above) to draw upon when they got stuck on a word such as considering the theme and type of text. This is in line with the literature which concluded that when teaching vocabulary, it is essential that children are taught a range of methods so that they have more than one method to draw upon (Snow, Lawrence and White, 2009).

The data suggests that the lower ability and some of the middle ability children only have one, workable method which many admitted did not work well and often involved unsuccessfully using a dictionary. One of the dyslexic children said, 'I try my hardest to look in a dictionary but it never works out'. Therefore, this child needs other strategies which they can use independently in order to access vocabulary which they do not understand (NLF, 2014). In addition, the majority of disadvantaged

children (with the exception of the higher ability child mentioned earlier) admitted that they only had one strategy which was often using a dictionary or skipping the word entirely and if that did not work they were stuck. Again, this is in line with the literature which points out the need for children to be taught a range of methods to enable them to attempt to work out vocabulary so that they can comprehend a text (Sedita, 2005; Snow, Lawrence and White, 2009; Lesaux *et al.* 2010).

When children were asked about the best method for learning vocabulary, nearly all of the children said that reading and discussing a text as a class was the method they found the most useful. In addition, Quigley (2018:17) found that it was important to give children challenging texts and during the interviews many children said that they found it useful looking at a more difficult text together as a class.

4.5 Vocabulary knowledge and disadvantaged children

Laufer (1989) and Quigley (2018:17) found that for children to understand and comprehend a text they need to understand at least 95% of the vocabulary. Table 4.2 shows that all of the children in this study said that they understood at least 95% of the texts. The table also shows who is disadvantaged, what percentage of the reading texts they understood and the percentage of words which they could correctly give a definition for in the vocabulary task. However, the percentage of words children could define in the vocabulary task must be much less for many children, as the table shows that the percentage of vocabulary they actually knew (vocabulary task) was a lot lower than the percentage they said they knew (words understood in the text). The data suggests that many children were not completely clear when asked to pick out the words in the text which they did not understand,

which links with Curtis (1981). He discovered that children often said they understood a word but when asked to use it in a sentence or define it, they were unable to do so.

Table 4.2 Vocabulary task, words recognised, scaled score and disadvantaged

Child Number	Dis	Words Understood In Text	Vocabulary Task
1	No	95%	8%
2	Yes	98%	36%
3	No	99%	56%
4	Yes	98%	64%
5	No	96%	56%
6	Yes	96%	24%
7	Yes	97%	20%
8	No	99%	56%
9	Yes	97%	4%
10	Yes	98%	36%
11	No	99%	20%
12	No	98%	28%

Figure 4.1 shows that some children were very clear in what they did and did not understand. An example of this is Child 12 who picked out the same words in the text as the vocabulary task. However, others highlighted very few words in the reading task but then could correctly define only a small number of words in the

vocabulary task. This finding matches the research literature (Curtis, 1981; Beck, McKeown and Kucan, 2013:12) suggesting it is important to test a child's knowledge and understanding of vocabulary rather than relying on them to know themselves. It has to be remembered that some of the children may have thought that they understood the words but actually only realised they did not when they tried to define them or they may have misunderstood the meanings of the words.

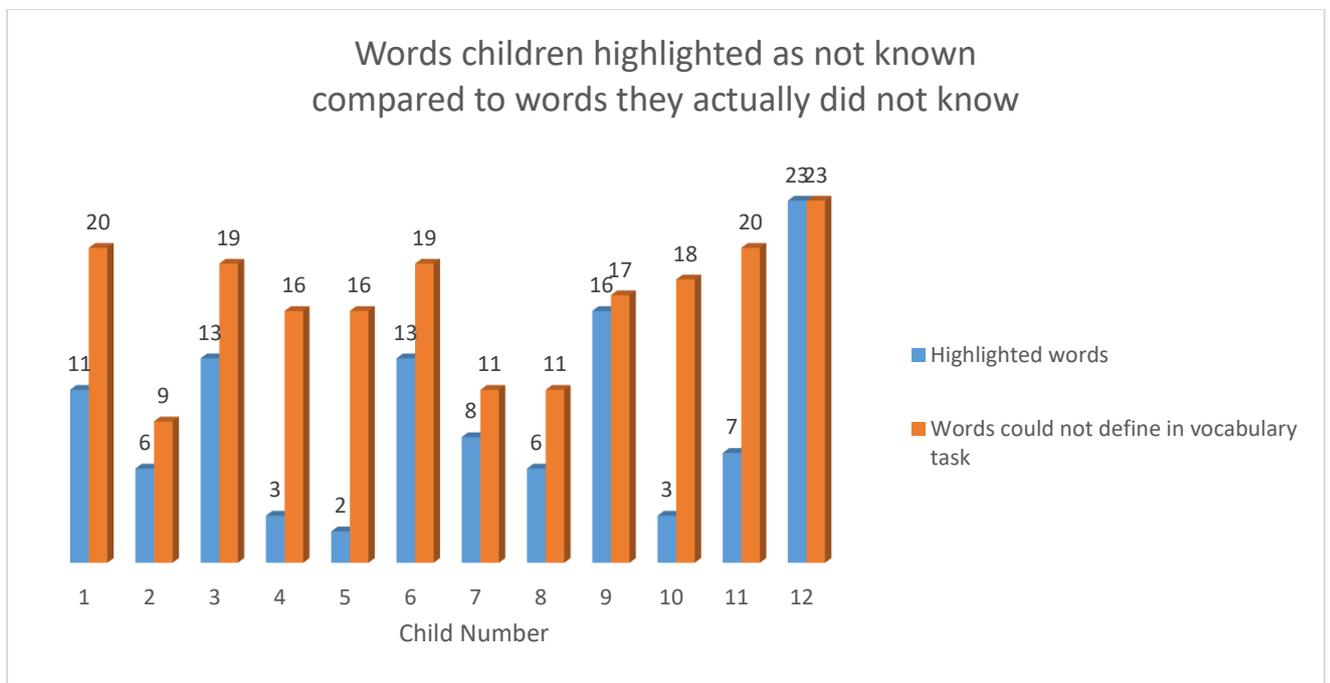**Figure 4.1: Words children highlighted as not known compared to words they actually did not know**

Confidence and self-esteem play a key role when children were asked to highlight the words in a text which they do not understand (Fletcher-Campbell, Soler and Reid, 2009) and therefore children may have been worried about being honest about their lack of vocabulary knowledge which may explain my findings in Figure 4.1.

Children may have been reluctant to say they find things difficult as during the interviews they admitted to comparing themselves to other children and Child 9 said, 'Sometimes I don't know what is going on in reading comprehension'. This could be the case for Child 4 who, despite getting one hundred and nine scaled score on the reading test, which means they were one point off the greater depth standard, they only highlighted three of the sixteen words from the vocabulary task which they did not know. As well as this, there did not appear to be any significant differences between reading speed, ability and knowledge of vocabulary when comparing disadvantaged, non-disadvantaged and different abilities. However, during the vocabulary task, there was some confusion about homophones as Child 9 and Child 11 thought they had understood the vocabulary but in fact they had not. An example of this included the word 'lone' which both confused confused for the word 'loan'.

4.6 Links between vocabulary knowledge and reading success (scaled score vs vocabulary knowledge)

Table 4.3 shows that children with a higher scaled score are more likely to have a higher score on the vocabulary task, which is not surprising as the literature suggests that children with a greater vocabulary knowledge are more confident and accomplished readers (Clark, Woodley and Lewis, 2011).

Table 4.3 Scaled score and vocabulary task

Child Number	Dis	Scaled Score	Vocabulary Task
1	No	98	20%
2	Yes	96	64%
3	No	108	24%
4	Yes	109	36%
5	No	98	36%
6	Yes	101	24%
7	Yes	103	56%
8	No	107	56%
9	Yes	92	32%
10	Yes	93	28%
11	No	90	20%
12	No	96	8%

In addition, Table 4.3 shows that the three children with the highest scaled scores on the reading test were children who had the three highest scores on the vocabulary task as Child 3, 4 and 8 had the highest scaled scores with vocabulary scores of 56%, 64% and 56% respectively. There were some who did not follow this trend, as Child 6 and 7 could only provide definitions and sentences for 24% and 20% of the vocabulary and so would not be expected to reach the expected scaled score, though both of these children achieved scores above one hundred. On the other hand, another child achieved 56% vocabulary (which was the second highest vocabulary score during the study) but only achieved a scaled score of ninety eight.

Both of these examples suggest that answering the reading comprehension tests is not just about vocabulary knowledge (National Reading Panel, 2000) as children with poorer vocabulary skills have gone on to reading success and those with stronger vocabulary skills are not able to pass the Y6 reading test. The reasons for this could be because those children with poorer vocabulary use the most effective strategies when faced with a word they do not know (Graves, 2009). In addition, in my experience some children in Y6 do not perform as well in tests, as they may work too slowly (the test only lasts an hour) or they may not read the questions carefully enough.

The children who had the lower scores on the vocabulary task, were the same children who said that their favourite books were texts such as *Diary of the Wimpy Kid* and books by David Walliams, which could suggest that these children are not reading challenging enough books to increase the depth and breadth of their vocabulary (Quigley, 2018:71). However, it is important that children are still allowed the opportunity to read for pleasure because this helps to improve their confidence and enjoyment (Clark, Woodley and Lewis, 2011). The more reading a child does the more vocabulary they will be exposed to which will help to develop their reading skills (Clark, Woodley and Lewis, 2011).

Chapter 5 – Conclusion

5.1 Findings

My study was significantly impacted by the closure of schools due to Covid-19 and therefore, only pre-intervention data was available for analysis. This was disappointing, as I had hoped that the intervention would lead to children having a better knowledge and understanding of vocabulary. I thought that their reading achievement and confidence would also improve. Despite this, a number of interesting trends and relationships were found from the pre-intervention data. The data was taken from interviews, reading and vocabulary tasks from twelve focus children.

Historically, there has been a gap between the reading achievements of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children (Quigley, 2018:3). However, countries such as China have shown that it is possible for all children (including disadvantaged children) to achieve academically (OECD, 2018). In 2011, the introduction of pupil premium funding to support disadvantaged children (Hutchinson, Dunford and Treadaway, 2016) has proven to be successful and has narrowed the gap (DFE, 2019b) but is very expensive. The data found that many disadvantaged children have positive attitudes towards reading and are successful at it but it also showed that some of the better disadvantaged readers still lacked confidence in their own ability.

The literature agrees that in order to address the 'vocabulary gap' between the richest and poorest children (HOCEC, 2014) early interventions need to be put in place. Ideally, these interventions need to involve supporting parents to develop the richness, quality and depth of their child's vocabulary before they begin school

(Weizman and Snow, 2001). Addressing the vocabulary gap at an early stage should help children to become more confident readers which enables them to build their self-esteem (Mercer, Wegerif and Dawes, 1999). During the study, the data found that the more confident children were more likely to be better readers.

Generally, the data suggested that children who were the better readers were fairly confident in their own ability, whereas the poorer readers were the opposite. This is concerning as if children lose confidence in their own ability, they begin to dislike reading and it is a downwards spiral (Gurthrie and Knowles, 2001). Crucially, children must be encouraged to read for pleasure, as this is a key factor in developing a child's reading confidence and achievement (Clark, Woodley and Lewis, 2011). The data showed that the children who were successful readers also enjoyed reading but those who were not good readers did not enjoy reading supporting the work of Fletcher-Campbell, Soler and Reid (2009) who found that children who experienced early reading difficulties showed that they were less likely to enjoy reading in the long term.

During the interview process, a number of children highlighted the opportunity to listen to books read aloud by an adult as something they particularly enjoyed even if they did not particularly enjoy reading themselves. In addition, the significance of book banding appeared to have a marked impact on a child's reading confidence. This needs to be carefully managed to ensure a child's confidence in not damaged (Mercer, Wegerif and Dawes, 1999). Furthermore, many children named easier books which are aimed at a younger audience as their favourites. They are useful for reading for pleasure and can help to develop confidence as children can finished them quickly (Sainsbury and Schagen, 2004). However, they are not challenging enough for most upper KS2 children (Quigley, 2018:17).

Both the literature review and the data collected highlighted the importance of having a range of strategies in order to be able to tackle difficult vocabulary (Sedita, 2005; Snow, Laurence and White, 2009; Lesaux *et al.* 2010). Some children admitting to becoming stuck when their usual strategy did not work whereas the higher ability children had a range of strategies to draw upon. Therefore, it is essential that children experience both direct and indirect vocabulary instruction as it is not possible to teach children all of the vocabulary that they need to know from direct instruction alone (Duke and Moses, 2003). Additionally, children need to be encouraged to read independently to increase their vocabulary depth (Nagy and Anderson, 1986).

The literature suggests that having a wide range of vocabulary knowledge does help reading achievement (Biemiller, 2015). However, some of the data actually found that children with poor vocabulary knowledge passed the reading test whereas others who had a wide vocabulary knowledge scored poorly. This suggests that that whilst vocabulary knowledge is important; there are also other factors which contribute to being a successful reader (National Reading Panel, 2000). However, a depth of vocabulary will help children with their reading skills and confidence (NLF, 2014).

5.2 Collaboration

During my study, I encouraged other staff members across school to attempt to teach vocabulary in their classroom as an intervention. I worked particularly closely with the Y5/6 team who planned to teach the intervention to their whole class in a similar way to myself. Significantly, the Y5/6 members of staff also took part in the

pilot study, which gave me valuable information and feedback on the intervention, so that I could adapt it using action research for the full, planned intervention. Once schools closed, such collaboration became impractical.

5.3 Limitations

For this study, the most significant limitation was that I was not able to carry out my main intervention and collect post intervention data due to school closures from Covid-19. Furthermore, the focus children were all from one age group and one class. It could have been interesting to look at different age and class groups to get a wider set of data. Additionally for my study, there were only a small number of focus children, which meant I only had limited data to work with, and therefore it could have been useful to have a larger group of children to focus on.

5.4 Implications for future practice in school

Despite school closures having an impact on this study, there are still a number of implications for future practice which can be taken. The data and literature showed that it was essential for children to have a range of strategies to work out tricky vocabulary and therefore I will focus on this in future vocabulary lessons. Also for the school, the literature highlighted the usefulness of ensuring early interventions to close the vocabulary and reading gap (Weizman and Snow, 2001) so these interventions need to be in place in KS1. Additionally, the careful selection of tier two vocabulary is important as it is not possible to teach all of the words so words need to be chosen according to the individual group or class being taught. Finally, the children all said they enjoyed the class read and therefore it is important that time is

put aside for this each day, as alongside being an enjoyable activity, it is also an opportunity to build vocabulary knowledge.

5.5 Implications for future research

For future research, it would be useful to have the opportunity to carry out the intervention as planned in order to answer my original research questions. In addition, I would like to investigate further the links between vocabulary and reading achievement to see how far the two are interlinked.

The literature suggests that the vocabulary gap begins at a very young age, before children even begin school (Fernald, Marchman and Weisleder 2013). Consequently, it would be interesting to complete an intervention and research into vocabulary support in the home environment.

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Appendix 1.1 – Vocab Ninja Cards

Shinobi Word of the Day

Word of the Day: destination   **Word Class** (noun)

Pronunciation / Syllables *(des-tin-na-tion)*

Definition: The destination of someone or something is the place to which they are going or being sent.

They had reached the **destination** after hours of travel.

Phrases: *the final destination*   *the real destination*

reached our destination   *destination unknown*

| Challenge: Use WOD with a simile.	Morphology		
Synonym :	**Antonym :**	**Prefix :**	**Suffix :**
objective			-s

Jennings (2019)

Appendix 1.2 – Reading Speed Test

Rollercoasters

9 The rollercoaster has been a fashionable ride for many
17 years, with one of the first recorded rollercoasters
26 opening in Paris in 1817. Historically, it is believed
35 that the rollercoaster was inspired by sledging on the
43 icy Russian Mountains. The popularity of the coaster
53 did not spread initially. It wasn't until 1884 that the
60 first notable and highly admired rollercoaster was
70 opened in New York, USA, with a runaway train style
80 ride. The coaster ran on wooden tracks and was an
82 instant success.

91 Today, a rollercoaster track can either be a complete
98 circuit or a shuttle-track, allowing the cars —
106 individual or multiple — to run in both directions.
110 Modern rollercoasters are, of
114 course, much faster than
118 the original models and
121 safety standards have
123 notably increased
125 since then.
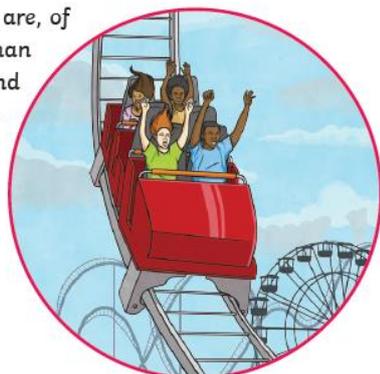
The Water Cycle

10 More than three quarters of the Earth's surface is water.

20 Heat from the Sun causes water to evaporate from seas,
28 lakes, rivers and streams. Water also evaporates from
39 puddles and ponds. It doesn't even need to be hot for
50 this to happen! When the water has evaporated, it is in
61 the form of water vapour, which rises in the air, clumps
70 together and cools down (condenses) to form clouds. As
78 more water vapour condenses, more water droplets are
87 formed in the clouds. Eventually, the water droplets are
99 large and heavy enough to fall back to the surface of the
107 Earth as precipitation (rain, sleet, hail or snow).
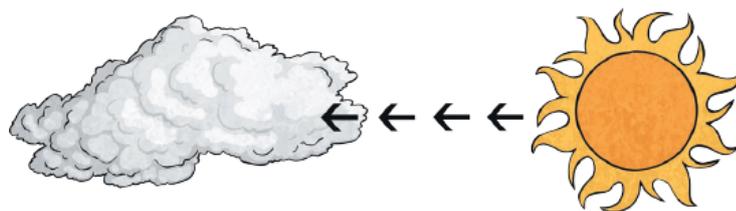
Twinkl (2020)

Appendix 1.3 - 2017 Reading Paper

Gaby to the Rescue

Swimming the English Channel

An Encounter at Sea

Reading Booklet

2017 key stage 2 English reading booklet
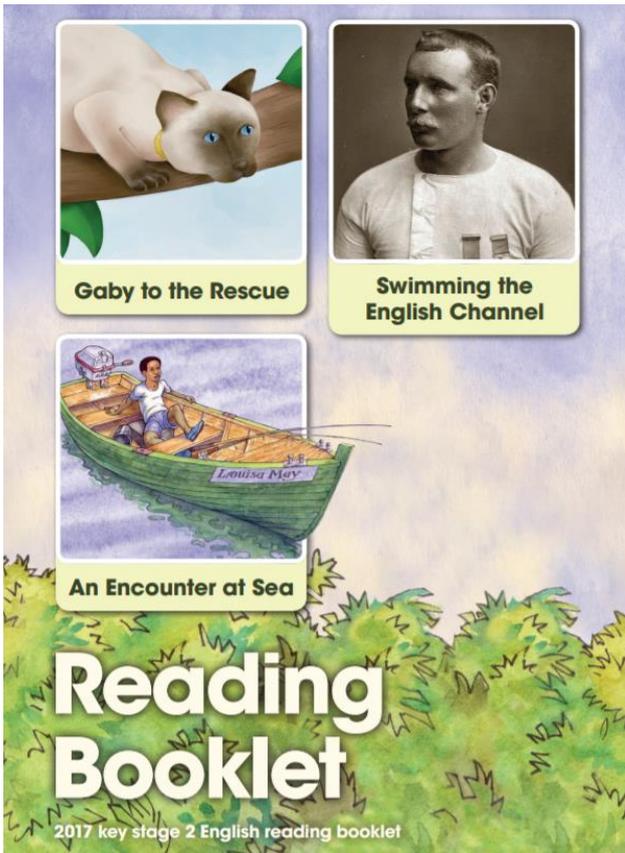
Gaby to the Rescue

A Siamese cat crouched on a tree branch, peering down at Gaby with brilliant blue eyes. It cried out. The cat was stuck in the tree in front of her house and, as luck would have it, she had on the nicest cardigan she owned. Gaby pulled the cardigan tighter around her. This was her last good school cardigan until who-knows-when her father would have enough money to buy her a new one. The poor cat cried again. Gaby looked back at her small yellow house. If her mother were here, that cat would already be out of the tree and purring – safe and sound, in her mother's arms.

Mind made up, Gaby pulled off her cardigan and tossed it onto her porch. 'You're out of luck, *gato!*' she yelled. 'My mom, master tree climber and cat rescuer, isn't back yet.' She rolled up the sleeves of her white shirt. 'But until she is, you've got me.' Gaby grasped the nearest branch and pulled herself up. 'Gaby to the rescue.'

The cat meowed.

'I *am* hurrying.'

The last time Gaby had climbed the tree was when she and her best friend, Alma, had challenged the boys to a water-balloon fight last summer. Up high was the perfect spot for a full-blown assault on the boys below. Those guys never had a chance.

Gaby secured her feet and hands and climbed higher, until the cat was within arm's reach. 'See? You aren't the only one who can climb.' But then she looked down. Mistake number one.

She knew the universal rule of tree climbing said don't ever, *ever* look down, but she couldn't help it. This was the highest she'd ever climbed. If she fell, she'd definitely end up looking like an Egyptian mummy. Gaby imagined herself bandaged from head to toe and sipping dinner through a straw.

Well, she'd just have to not fall. Simple as that. 'Here, kitty, kitty!' she called out, the same way she had heard her mom call for stray cats hundreds of times. But this was no stray. The cat was too shiny. Too chubby. Around its neck, a rhinestone collar with gold charms sparkled. Someone loved that cat. She reached out toward it. 'Almost got you.' Mistake number two.

The cat arched its back and hissed.

Gaby pulled back, startled. 'Nice teeth.' She resettled on the branch, considering her options.

When Gaby was younger, she had seen her mom climb the same tree many times to rescue a cat. All the way up, her mom had giggled and sweet-talked the cat in Spanish. '*Que bonita eres gatita.* You're so pretty, little cat.' Her mom told her that when dealing with cats you should speak softly and pick them up by the loose skin at the back of their neck, because that's how their mothers carried them. Her mom had always made it look so easy. Once she had the cat nestled against her chest, she would manoeuvre down through the branches, comforting the cat with kisses on the ears and soft words with rolling Spanish *r*'s like purrs.

There were never any arched backs, hisses, or sharp teeth.

Gaby took a deep breath and reached out for the cat again. 'It's okay, little kitty,' she said sweetly. This time the cat latched on to her, digging its claws into her arm and shoulder. 'Ooh, ouch!' She couldn't quite get it by the scruff of the neck like her mom had shown her, but at least she had the animal. That was progress. Now she just had to get down.

Without falling.

Swimming the English Channel

from Dover in England to Calais in France

The first Channel swimmer

On a foggy August afternoon in 1875, a lone swimmer dived from Admiralty Pier in Dover into the cold waters of the English Channel. Nearly twenty-two hours later, the exhausted man staggered onto French soil at Calais and became an instant hero. Captain Matthew Webb had become the first person to swim across the English Channel.

Twenty-seven-year-old Webb was a merchant seaman from Shropshire. He had always been a powerful swimmer and, hearing of J.B. Thompson's failed attempt to swim the Channel in 1872, he was inspired to give up his job and train as a long-distance swimmer. Webb's first attempt had to be abandoned due to bad weather, but he returned to the icy Channel waters two weeks later.

Captain Matthew Webb

Many of the hardships that Matthew Webb had to deal with during his pioneering swim are still faced by modern-day Channel swimmers. In fact, some of his methods for dealing with these hardships are still used today. Webb coated himself in oil for protection against the cold and jellyfish stings. He was also accompanied by boats so his friends could protect and feed him. It must be said, however, that the ale, brandy and beef tea they supplied are not standard for today's cross-Channel swimmers!

Frequently asked questions

Q: How cold is the water?

A: The water temperature can range from 12°C to 18°C. Most people would consider water below 20°C too cold for swimming.

Q: How far is it from England to France?

A: The direct distance from Dover to Cape Gris Nez near Calais is approximately 21 miles, but a swimmer always swims further than that due to the movement of tides.

Q: How long does it take to swim across the Channel?

A: How fast do you swim! The faster you are, the more direct your swim will be. A slower swimmer will not only take longer but will have to swim further because of the tides and currents. Swimmers also have to plan stops for feeding. The fastest recorded crossing is 7 hours; the slowest is nearly 29 hours. An average swimmer doing two miles per hour would be in the water for up to 16 hours, but a stronger swimmer may take only 10 hours.

Q: Will you succeed if you train hard?

A: Preparation for a Channel swim involves months of training in very cold ocean water. But even this does not guarantee success. Fewer people have swum the English Channel than have climbed Mount Everest, the world's highest mountain! Some hazards of the swim include hypothermia (dangerous loss of body heat), seasickness and jellyfish. Unforeseen obstacles like rubbish floating in the sea can also cause problems no matter how hard you train.

Q: Why do people swim the English Channel?

A: That isn't a question with a single answer! The motivations for such a venture are as varied as the swimmers. Some people do it for glory, some to raise money for charity, but most do it to challenge themselves and for the satisfaction of being one of a select few to achieve this feat.

Safe to swim?

The French and UK coastguards are responsible for search and rescue operations in the English Channel. The French authorities outlawed swimming from France to England in 1993 for safety reasons. Then in 2010 the deputy director of the French coastguard, Jean-Christophe Burvingt, said he was in favour of a complete ban on swimming in either direction. He pointed out that the swim uses the same stretch of water as 500 vessels each day. Critics compare the swim to crossing a motorway on foot; supporters say the swim is well regulated and comparatively safe.

Celebrity swimmer

The author, comedian and actor, David Walliams, says that he was never sporty at school but he did enjoy swimming.

While preparing for his Channel swim, Walliams didn't miss a single training session in nine months. He knew that more than 90 per cent of people who attempt the swim fail. Walliams took 10 hours and 34 minutes to cross the Channel. His swim raised more than £1 million in donations for the charity Sport Relief.

Pppfffffwwwwraa! The sound came from close behind him, and made him spin round so fast he lost his balance and fell into the bottom of the boat.

Pppffff – shorter and louder, even closer.

Michael picked himself up and looked over the side.

A black shape, much, much bigger than the biggest dolphin, showed about five metres from the boat. It was like a polished rock. On its rounded side was a slit like a flattened S, bigger than a man's two clenched fists, with a raised lip around it. As Michael watched, astonished, not understanding what he was seeing, the lips pinched together, the hole closed, and the black shape sank rapidly beneath the sluicing water.

A whale! Its dark head and blowhole! That's what he had seen.

Pppfffffwwwwraa!

Now it had surfaced on the other side of the boat. This second surfacing was hardly less shocking than the first, although Michael just managed to stay on his feet and cross the boat this time.

Michael is a young fisherman. He often takes out his boat, the 'Louisa May', for a day of fishing.

An Encounter at Sea

It was hot. Really hot. There wasn't the slightest breeze to cool the skin or make even a baby-finger crease on the surface of the sea. The *Louisa May* floated like a toy sitting on a glass table.

For the first time in over a week, Michael hadn't seen a dolphin all day. He was two miles offshore now, motoring along his daily survey course. The *Louisa May* pulled the reflection of the sky and the island into pleats behind her, and the *putt-putt* of her engine was lost in the big, quiet stillness of the afternoon.

Michael shut off the outboard motor and stopped. He leaned over the side to scoop up a bucket of seawater to cool himself, and looked down. Long fingers of sunlight slanted into the clear water, shifting slightly in arcs of radiating lines, and were swallowed up at last into the perfect blueness of the depths.

He poured the water over himself, savouring the delicious coolness.

Carefully, Michael leaned over to look: on one side of the boat lay the whale's tapering tail; on the other side, the head with its scarred lines lay like a piece of huge, dark wreckage. This close, Michael could see that big sections of skin had peeled off in straight lines, giving the whale's head a patchwork look in greys and blacks. Closest of all to the boat, only just submerged, was the whale's eye. Michael looked right into it, and the whale looked back. It was so very, very close. He leaned out further and further, stretching his hand slowly towards it. The whale didn't draw away.

He reached down, until his fingertips touched the crease of skin that gave the whale a kind of eyebrow. It was cool and smooth, like a carved stone covered in a finely stretched coat of rubber.

And as his fingertips touched the whale, he looked into its eye. It was impossible to say what colour it was: dark but with rays of brightness. It was like a window into a whole galaxy, with stars and planets, comets and supernovae moving inside.

Effortlessly, as if movement and thought were the same thing, the whale submerged out of reach of Michael's hand. There was a last shushing sigh as the flipper caressed the boat one more time, and then they were separate again.

The setting sun made a path over the sea, bathing Michael in golden light. He felt as if he were lit up inside too. He had touched a whale and looked into its eye! Like a sleeper waking from a dream, he looked around, dazed.

Appendix 1.4 – Vocabulary Task

Word	Definition	Use In A Sentence	Synonym	Antonym
crouched				
cardigan				
stray				
resettled				
manoeuvre				
lone				
abandoned				
hardships				
pioneering				
succeed				
unforeseen				
motivations				
venture				
feat				
responsible				

outlawed				
critics				
regulated				
comparatively				
reflection				
pleats				
savouring				
submerged				
caressed				
tapering				

Appendix 1.5 – Interview Question Script

1. Do you like reading? Why?
2. What is your favourite and least favourite thing about reading?
3. What do you find difficult about reading?
4. What is your favourite book? Why?
5. What types of books or texts do you like to read? Why?
6. Do you think you are a good reader on a scale of 1 to 10? Why?
7. Would you say you are a confident reader on a scale of 1 to 10? Why?
8. Do you think reading will help you in the future?
9. What do I mean when I talk about vocabulary?
10. If you come across a word you do not understand, what do you do?
11. What do you think you should do?
12. How often do you learn new vocabulary?
13. How do you think you should learn new vocabulary?
14. Do you think it is important to learn new vocabulary? Why?
15. Do you always understand what you read? Why?

Appendix 1.6 – Headteacher Permission Letter

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY
Tel: +44(0)1865 274024   Fax: +44(0)1865 274027
general.enquiries@education.ox.ac.uk   www.education.ox.ac.uk

Director Professor Jo-Anne Baird

Mr M Loader,
St Giles School,
Sheepcote Road,
Killamarsh,
Sheffield,
S21 1DU
28th October 2019

Dear Mr Loader,

I am writing to enquire about conducting research in school this academic year. As you know, I am studying for a Masters in Learning and Teaching at Oxford University, supervised by Gill Boag-Munroe. In my final research project (*Explicit vocabulary teaching: developing reading confidence and achievement in disadvantaged Y6 pupils*) I will explore if the daily teaching of vocabulary helps to improve reading confidence and achievement.

The research will take place with children from Class 12. The whole class will take part in the intervention but twelve children (six disadvantaged and six non-disadvantaged) will be the focus children and be involved in questionnaires and assessment activities. I will be collaborating with other members of school staff on this and I will work with Jo Shackleton to promote the teaching of vocabulary across the school. My research will investigate if the teaching of vocabulary helps to improve reading skills for all children but with a particular focus on disadvantaged children.

By participating in the research, the school would be contributing to a project that will deepen our understanding of the impact of teaching vocabulary to disadvantaged children, to see if it addresses the vocabulary gap and if it helps to improve reading confidence and achievement. Therefore, this could develop ways of improving attainment for similar students in the school in the future. It will also contribute to reading and vocabulary education more widely.

I hope to conduct this research between November 2019 and July 2020. I will be interviewing the focus children for my study and I will take copies of the work they have completed.

Oxford University has strict ethical procedures on conducting ethical research, consistent with current British Educational Research Association guidelines. The University also recognises, however, that my study is a piece of practitioner research, and that schools already operate with the highest ethical standards. Therefore only your formal consent as Headteacher is necessary, and not that of individual parents or staff. However, throughout the research, students and other teachers will be able to refuse to participate in any research activities at any time.

All participants, including students, teacher and the school, would be made anonymous in all research reports. The data collected would be kept strictly confidential, available only to my supervisor Gill Boag-Munroe (gill.boag-munroe@education.ox.ac.uk) and me, and only used for academic purposes. It will be kept for as long as it has academic value.

If you are happy for me to proceed with this study, please confirm that using the attached reply form. If you have any concerns or need more information about what is involved, please contact me or my supervisor. Further, if you have any questions about this ethics process at any time, please contact the chair of the department's research ethics committee, though: research.office@education.ox.ac.uk

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,
Annabel Brownfoot

Explicit vocabulary teaching: developing reading confidence and achievement in disadvantaged Y6 pupils.

Annabel Brownfoot
University of Oxford, Department of Education

St Giles School,
Sheepcote Road,
Killamarsh,
Sheffield,
S21 1DU
Mr Matt Loader

☐   We do not wish to participate in this project.

☐   We would like to find out more about this project.

☑   We would like to take part in this project.

_____

Headteacher's signature

Appendix 1.7 – Parents' Permission Letter

St Giles Church of England Primary School
Sheepcote Road
Killamarsh
Sheffield
S21 1DU

DDAT
Derby Diocesan Academy Trust

Headteacher: Mr M Loader

Tel / Fax: 0114 2482825
Email: info@stgilesprimary.org.uk

Dear Parent/Carer,

I am currently studying for a part time MSc in Teaching and Learning at the University of Oxford. As part of my masters, I am currently carrying out a research project relating to the link between knowledge of vocabulary and reading achievement. As part of my research, I need to interview a number of children about their understanding of and thoughts towards reading and vocabulary.

The interview will be recorded for data collection purposes. No names will be used in my research and the recordings will be deleted after my work has been completed. The children will also be given the option to opt out if they would prefer not to be involved.

Please complete and return the attached slip if you are happy for your child to take part.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards,

Miss Brownfoot

....
Please complete and return to Miss Brownfoot. Research Permission.

I am happy for .... (child's name) to take part in the research project and to be recorded during the interview process.

Signed..   Date.................

Committed to the safety and welfare of children and young people

Healthy Schools   Eco Award   LOT Living the Olympic and Paralympic Values