Enhancing Social Studies Vocabulary and Comprehension for 7th Grade ELLS: Findings from Three Experimental Studies

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July 10, 2010
SSSR–17th Annual Conference
Berlin
CREATE is a National Research and Development Center funded through the National Center for Education Research (NCER), Institute of Education Sciences (IES), U.S. Department of Education. It addresses specific challenges in the education of English language learners in the middle grades (Grades 4-8).

CREATE is a partnership of researchers from several institutions:

- **Texas Institute for Measurement, Evaluation, and Statistics, University of Houston**
  - David J. Francis, Coleen D. Carlson

- **California State University at Long Beach**
  - Jana Echevarria, Catherine Richards

- **Center for Applied Linguistics**
  - Diane August, Deborah Short

- **Harvard University**
  - Catherine Snow

- **University of California-Berkeley**
  - Elfrieda Hiebert

- **Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk, University of Texas at Austin**
  - Sharon Vaughn, Sylvia Linan-Thompson
Study Purpose

• Address specific challenges in the education of English language learners in 7th grade social studies classrooms.

• Examine the efficacy of incorporating English-as-a-second language enhancements, such as incorporating visuals and pairing students purposefully, into traditional instruction.
Overview

• Three different non-overlapping samples of classes of 7th grade students (N = 381, N = 507, and N = 740)

• Random assignment at classroom (i.e., section) level to social studies intervention or business as usual comparison

• Treatment sections = 7 for Study 1
• Treatment sections = 9 for Study 2
• Treatment sections = 16 for Study 3
Overview (cont.)

Study Timeline
• 9 weeks of materials delivered over 12–16 weeks
• 2–3 days of pre- and post-testing

Activities
• Intervention implemented 50 minutes, 5 days a week during regularly scheduled 7th grade social studies classes
• Coach, professional development, and ongoing support provided to treatment teachers
• Fidelity checks in all classrooms
Participants and Setting: Study 1

Schools
- 2 middle schools in central Texas
- At least 65% Latino
- Substantial number of ELLS designated as “Limited English Proficient” (LEP)
- 70-82% qualified for free or reduced lunch

Teachers
- 4 (2 female and 2 male)
- Teaching experience = >1 to 8 years
Participants and Setting: Study 2

Schools
- 2 middle schools in central Texas
- At least 51% Latino
- Substantial number of ELLS designated as “Limited English Proficient” (LEP)
- 68-85% qualified for free or reduced lunch

Teachers
- 4 (male)
- Teaching experience = >1 to 3 years
Participants and Setting: Study 3

Schools
- 3 middle schools in central Texas
- At least 42% Latino
- Substantial number of ELLS designated as “Limited English Proficient” (LEP)
- 49-85% qualified for free or reduced lunch

Teachers
- 7 (4 female and 3 male)
- Teaching experience = >1 to 25 years
Measures

• GRADE pre and post (GMRT in Study 3)
  – Vocabulary
  – Comprehension
• Curriculum based content measures
  – Pre
  – Post
• Weekly CBM
The Social Studies Intervention

• Overarching activities:
  – focus on big idea and concept learning
  – use of peer mediated learning
  – provide opportunities for student discourse

• Four intervention components:
  – explicit vocabulary/concept instruction
  – strategic use of video and purposeful
discussion to build concepts
  – use of graphic organizers and writing to build
big ideas
  – use of peer pairing
Social Studies Lesson Framework

Daily-
1. Start the lesson with an overview that incorporates the big idea.
2. Prioritize and explicitly teach concepts/vocabulary.
3. Use brief video clips to build concepts.
4. Read-aloud by teacher or with student partners.
5. Generate and answer questions.
6. Wrap-up with discussion, graphic organizer or activity.

Weekly-
1. Review and progress monitor.
2. Whole class review of quiz items and clarification/re-teaching/re-enforcement of concepts, if necessary.
# The Texas Revolution, Part 1

**Big Idea:** What were the people involved in the Texas Revolution fighting for? Was their cause just?

| Standards | 7.2E Trace the development of events that led to the Texas Revolution  
| 7.3B Explain the issues surrounding significant events in the Texas Revolution |
| --- | --- |
| **Lesson Topic** | Causes of the Revolution |

## Objectives

**CONTENT—Students will:**
- Review the events that led to the Texas Revolution.

**LANGUAGE—Students will:**
- Use key vocabulary in reading, writing, listening and speaking throughout the lesson.
- Listen to and/or read the lesson passage, and write question responses in their notebooks.
- In the review/assessment activity, discuss and write the people’s perspectives on going to war in the graphic organizer.

## Key Vocabulary
- custom duties
- empresario
- land title
- revolt

## Materials
- Student notebooks
- Overhead projector and transparency markers
- Outside Passage: “Road to Revolution” (in teacher’s binder)
- Transparency: Questions

## Preparation
- Post the objectives
- Links to background

## Motivation (Engagement/Linkages)  
5 min.
- Provide overview/background information of today’s lesson.
1. Talk about the big idea of the lesson

The Texas Revolution, Part 1

Big Idea: What were the people involved in the Texas Revolution fighting for? Was their cause just?

• The Texas Revolution was looming as Texans, both Anglo and Mexican, refused to accept the governmental changes made by Santa Anna and the Mexican national government.
• We will review some of the governmental changes and how they contributed to the beginning of the Texas Revolution. As the week proceeds, we will talk about specific battles of the Revolution and the people who were involved.
• Keep in mind who the people fighting in this war are and what they are fighting for.
2. Teach pre-selected concepts/vocabulary

revolt
(revuelta, rebelión)
A protest against or intentional disobeying of authority

In the 1600s, a revolt occurred when the Spanish missions refused to allow the Pueblo Indians to follow their traditional religious beliefs.

A revolt occurred when the principal informed the students they would no longer serve pizza in the cafeteria.

Turn and Talk
- Discuss one thing that the government could do that would get you to revolt. (Prompt: Why are people revolting in the picture?)
- Are revolts always violent?

1. Show students concept/vocabulary transparency.
2. Pronounce the word, give Spanish cognate or translation, and define it.
3. Ask or tell students how the illustration is representative of the word.
4. Use word in two sentences.
5. Use Turn & Talk prompts to help students make connections between the unit of study and what they know.
6. Give students opportunities to encounter the word repeatedly throughout instruction.
3. Watch video clip to provide access to text

1. Introduce the video clip before or after students have read the assigned text passage.
2. Preview what students will watch in the video and set the purpose.
3. Play video clip.
4. Conduct a brief discussion about the video.
4. Paired/teacher-led read aloud

1. Partners sit together, each with their own text and notebook.
2. Partner A reads aloud first while Partner B follows along and provides corrective feedback.
3. Partner B reads the same passage while Partner A follows along and provides corrective feedback.
4. Pairs work together to answer 1 to 4 questions.
5. On alternate days teacher does a read aloud and students follow along.
Questions

- Who are the people living in Texas in 1835, right before the Texas Revolution begins? How did they get here?
- Why did Mexican government officials issue stricter laws on Texas settlers?
- Do you think the Texas settlers were right to go to war against the Mexican government? Why or why not?

Procedures

1. Preview questions before reading to set the purpose.
2. Ask partners to work together to answer questions once they have completed the reading task.
3. Have pairs generate their own questions as they become more skilled.
6. Review/Assessment

1. Introduce the activity.
2. Explain how students will use the activity.
3. Direct students to work on this activity in their notebook (if the activity involves a graphic organizer, display it and clarify how to complete it).
4. Remind students that graphic organizers and other activities are used to organize the most important information (main ideas) from their lessons.
5. Make time to review students’ responses and provide feedback.
Quiz 2: The Texas Revolution, Part 2

Match each definition on the left with the sentence that uses the corresponding vocabulary word on the right. Not all sentences will be used.

1. to leave a place with no intention of returning
   a. The Texan army was unprepared for the advance by the Mexican troops.

2. to prepare for something difficult or unpleasant
   b. The Texans suffered more casualties in the battle of the Alamo than the Mexicans.

3. to all agree on something
   c. The controversial issue of whether to make Texas an independent state was resolved at the Constitution of 1836.

4. mass killing (execution) of people within a short time
   d. In the Convention of 1833, the delegates made the same decisions they had made in an earlier convention.

5. to attract something or someone
   e. The delegates pledged to be loyal to Mexico, only if Mexico restored the Constitution of 1824.

6. people killed, wounded, captured, or missing
   f. All night, the Mexican troops braced for an attack from the Texas army.

7. a movement in which Texas settlers deserted their farms, homes, and towns to avoid the advancing Mexican forces led by Santa Anna
   g. The Runaway Scrape happened after word spread in Texas about the fall of the Alamo.

8. to attack continuously with missiles, weapons, etc.
   h. Mexican cannons bombarded the Alamo.

9. a formal meeting to discuss and decide on issues of common concern
   i. After the Alamo, the delegates were unanimous in their decision to make Texas independent.

10. to make a solemn promise to do something
    j. Mexican soldiers shot more than 400 Texans during the Goliad massacre.

k. The Texas settlers deserted their property during the Runaway Scrape.

l. The possibilities of a better life lured the empresarios to Texas.
Provide brief answers for each of the following.

1. Think about the causes and battles of the Texas Revolution (Goliad, the Alamo, and San Jacinto). Why did many Texas settlers want independence from Mexico?

2. In what ways did the siege help Santa Anna defeat the Texans at the Battle of the Alamo?

3. When Texas settlers declared independence from Mexico during the Texas Revolution, what did their constitution say about slavery?

4. Think about the Runaway Scrape during the Texas Revolution. How were regular families in Texas affected by the war?

5. What was the result of the Battle of San Jacinto?
### CBM Measures from Study 1

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<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Number of Sections</th>
<th>Number of Students (Pre / Post)</th>
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Tests of Fixed Effects for Study 1

### Fixed Effects

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Table Note: Tests of differences between treatment and control conditions on pretest measures of Vocabulary and Comprehension were not statistically significant.
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### Fixed Effects

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Table Note: Tests of differences between treatment and control conditions on pretest measures of Vocabulary and Comprehension were not statistically significant.
Tests of treatment effects in multi-level ANCOVA were significant for Comprehension ($p < .0022$) and for Vocabulary ($p < .0016$).

Variance components for both outcomes were not statistically significant except for students within sections.
## Effect Size Estimates – Hedges’ $g$

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Effect sizes are computed based on the pooled within group post-test standard deviation (pooling within treatment and ELL status). Effect sizes are larger if based on pre-test standard deviation.

Effect sizes are based on unadjusted means. Effect sizes were larger based on adjusted means.
Conclusions and Limitations

- We found that students in treatment sections improved more from pre-test to post-test than students in control sections.
- Positive effects were observed for both comprehension and vocabulary.
- Effects did not differ for ELL and non-ELL students, i.e., both benefitted from the treatment.
- It is worth noting that EL students in the Treatment outperformed non-EL students in the control group in both vocabulary and comprehension at the post-test. This effect has not yet been examined in Study 3.
Conclusions and Limitations

• Teachers were able to implement the treatment in the specified sections and use their typical instruction in their control sections.
• In Study 3, teachers accomplished this objective with minimal support from the research team.
• Gains in comprehension and vocabulary did not generalize to the standardized outcome measure in any study.
• The comprehension measure required a written response and may have under-represented student knowledge.
• Both teachers and students need time to learn how to use paired group work effectively.