

Pre-Teaching Unknown Words

An Intervention to Increase Reading Fluency and Comprehension

Description: A “pre-teaching” activity is defined as “any method with which the student is provided an opportunity to read or listen to a passage before receiving instruction.” The idea of pre-teaching in this intervention has children seeing and hearing unknown words before formal instruction.

This intervention involves a method called Incremental Rehearsal (IR). IR is used to teach new, “unknown” words by integrating them with known words at a ratio of 10% unknown to 90% known words. Individual words are written on index cards. The words are presented to the student by the teacher. The teacher shows the word, pronounces the word, uses the word in a sentence and the word is rehearsed by the student.

This intervention can be implemented with students having trouble in reading fluency and/or comprehension as well those identified as reading disabled.

Materials:

- A list of known words. These are words that the student is able to identify within 2 seconds of being shown the word (approximately 15 words).
- A list of unknown words. These are words that are central to understanding the meaning of the passage. These will be chosen by the teacher and can come from the text the student’s are responsible for reading. (approximately 10 words)
- 3x5 note cards

Preparations:

- Make 10 cards of words that students do not know (unknown words).
- Make 15 cards of words that students do know (known words)

Steps in Implementing this Intervention:

- Step 1: The teacher will identify unknown and known words. These words will be written on note cards, with one word on each card. The unknown words are presented in the same order as they appeared in the passage.
- Step 2: At this point, there will be a total of 10 cards (9 known word cards and 1 unknown word card). The teacher will begin showing the student the known word cards. The first nine cards shown will be known words. The words will be presented on the note card, pronounced and used in a sentence. After the ninth card, the teacher will show the student the first unknown word.
- Step 3: The unknown word will be presented on the note card, pronounced, and used in a sentence.
- Step 4: The student will rehearse these 10 words until he/she knows them. The teacher will then take out one of the known words and include another unknown word. Again, there will be a total of 10 words. 8 of these words will be the initial known words, 1 will be the newly learned word and the final will be a new unknown word.
- Step 5: New unknown words will be introduced until the student makes three errors. A student being unable to read a known or unknown word is considered an error.

- Step 6: Rehearse the list of words. Finally, allow the student to read the text that includes the new words.

Rationale: A child must recognize a word before being able to be fluent in their reading pattern. Similarly, fluency is essential for comprehension. Thus this intervention is an effort to improve word recognition, which should positively influence both reading fluency and comprehension.

Tips:

- Implement the intervention daily. The pace of the intervention and how quickly new words are shown depends on the child. Some children may require more time than others to fully incorporate the new words.
- This intervention could be used by pairing children in the classroom. If there are certain children who master vocabulary words more quickly than others, they could act as the “teacher” in the intervention.
- This intervention can be adapted for whole-class instruction. The words could be written on the board or overhead projector for all students.
- If there is a desire to evaluate how successful this intervention can be for a student, it is necessary to first determine a baseline. This can be accomplished by allowing the student to read through the text without any pre-teaching. Make note of the number of incorrect words. Questions concerning comprehension can be administered. Implement the intervention. After the pre-teaching intervention, have the student read back through the text. Determine how many words were incorrect on the second read through. The number should decrease. Administer the comprehension questions and hopefully the student is able to answer more questions correctly.

References:

Burns, M.K., Dean, V.J., Foley, S. (2004). Preteaching unknown key words with incremental rehearsal to improve reading fluency and comprehension with children identified as reading disabled. *Journal of School Psychology, 42*(4), 303-314.