# Word Up! A Quality Improvement approach to increase vocabulary of pupils in a secondary school

Nicola McDonald, Education Support Officer (Literacy),
Children and Families Service, Dundee City Council

Research evidence has shown that by the time children reach the age of 5 years the expressive vocabulary gap between children from the richest and poorest backgrounds is around 18 months (Bradshaw, 2011). This gap can widen as pupils progress throughout primary school. A recent report by Oxford University Press details the impact of this word-gap for secondary pupils in terms of slower than expected progress in English and other subjects, difficulty following what is going on in class and difficulty working independently. This has a direct impact on pupil attainment. This project uses quality improvement methodology to understand effective approaches to improving vocabulary for S1 pupils in a secondary school.

Aim

By the end of this academic session (June 2019), we aim to increase vocabulary knowledge in range (number of words known) and depth (ability to give definition, examples and use in writing) by 20% for one class of pupils in S1 at secondary school.

Method

QI Tools including Benchmarking, Force field analysis, Cause and Effect helped us understand some of the drivers and restraining forces in the education system and generate ideas for change.

These were then collated into a Driver Diagram; a visual representation of different parts of the project.
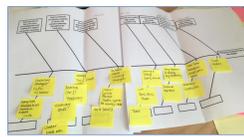
Process Change
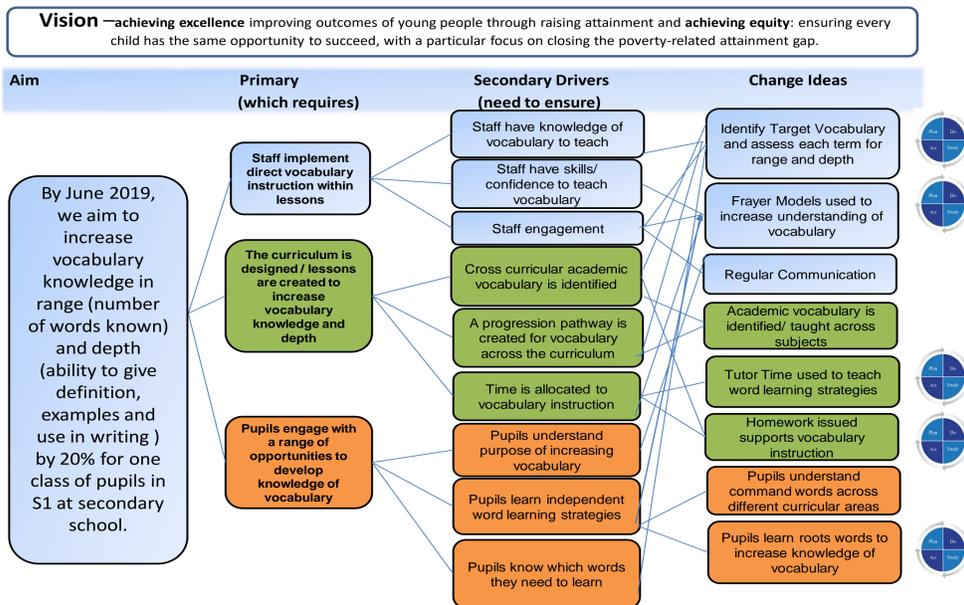
A combination of PDSA cycles were used to develop approaches to improve pupil vocabulary. Three approaches were tested; teaching subject specific vocabulary using the *Frayer Model* approach, teaching Greek/ Latin roots during Tutor Time using *Membean* resource and teaching academic vocabulary using the online resource, *Bedrock Vocabulary* completed as English homework twice a week.

Achievements

Understanding how to create and use a driver diagram

Designing and using control charts to measure outcome and process data

Refining an aim to ensure that all stakeholders know the purpose of the improvement work

Results

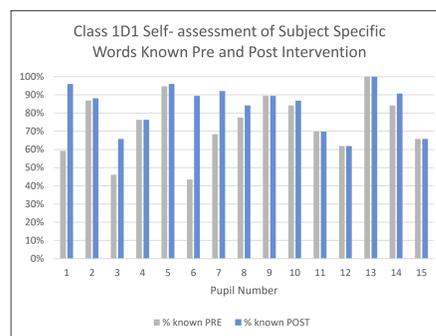All 19 departments each chose 4 words from their subject.

There was an average 18% increase in subject specific vocabulary known over 12 weeks.
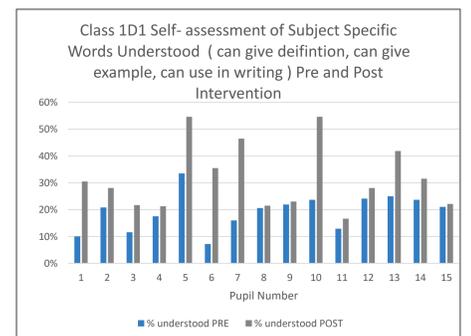
There was an average 10% increase in understanding of subject vocabulary (can give definition, examples, use in writing) over 12 weeks.

However only 5 departments used the Frayer Model approach.
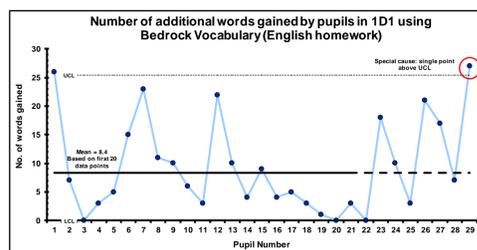
We used a Shewhart chart to track individual pupils' knowledge and understanding of academic words gained using Bedrock Vocabulary. Low results correlated with no. of lessons completed.
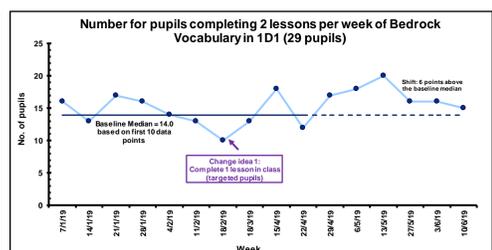
Run charts were used to track how many pupils were completing two lessons of Bedrock Vocabulary per week and adaptations made to improve engagement.

Staff and Pupil Questionnaires helped us understand their experience of each approach

Pupils rated each approach out of 10

- Frayer Model 6/10
- Bedrock Vocabulary 5/10
- Root Word Lessons 4/10

1D1 Pupils' feedback of Frayer Model

Key reference materials

Quigley, A. (2018) *Closing the Vocabulary Gap*, Routledge

https://www.bedrocklearning.org/

https://membean.com/educator/wordroots

Conclusions

Scaling this project down to one or two teachers would have enabled the project to have started quicker. Then data and communication would have been easier to manage and changes more readily adapted.

Next Steps

Share the results of the three approaches and feedback to all staff

Use the learning from this project to spread to another secondary school

Key learning points

Using data to challenge mindsets and assumptions, to search for and be honest about failure and use this to improve rather than blame. Regular communication is key to keep momentum going and celebrate wins, no matter how small.

Contact: Nicola McDonald

nicola.mcdonald@dundeecity.gov.uk

@DundeeLiteracy

ScIL
Scottish Improvement Leader