



Session 6

We called him Tortoise because he taught us.

-The Mock Turtle

Lewis Carroll (Alice in Wonderland, 1865)

Teaching Vocabulary with the Generalizing Strategy

Learning Objectives

- ◇ **Define** the terms low-support strategy and generalizing strategy.
- ◇ **Demonstrate** use of the generalizing strategy when teaching vocabulary.
- ◇ **Analyze** children's responses to the generalizing strategy in a vocabulary activity.
- ◇ **Reflect** on how the generalizing strategy can be used in your classroom to improve children's vocabulary.
- ◇ **Describe** how the generalizing strategy can be extended to all four *Read It Again–PreK!* domains.

Overview

In this session, we will revisit the importance of noticing and accommodating differences among children's levels of vocabulary knowledge. However, we will now focus our attention on supporting children who consistently demonstrate a high level of participation and success on vocabulary tasks. For these children, some of the vocabulary objectives addressed in *Read It Again–PreK!* may be familiar as a result of their experiences at home or in day care centers or preschools.

Early childhood educators can intentionally challenge children who learn new vocabulary with relative ease by using particular strategies to accelerate their pace of learning. Returning to our ladder analogy, we can think of these students as having already begun their climb up the learning ladder. By challenging them, we encourage deeper levels of knowledge about vocabulary and they achieve higher rungs on the learning ladder.

In this session, we focus on children who are able to learn the meanings of new words with relative ease. These children need low-support strategies as they are designed to help children think about vocabulary in more complex ways. **Low-support strategies** allow children to participate in lessons that might otherwise have been too easy for them by introducing new knowledge and skills.

The Generalizing Strategy

The low-support strategy we address in this session is **generalizing**.

With the generalizing strategy, the teacher asks children to extend the lesson content beyond the lesson itself – to their own past or future personal experiences.

Utilizing a child’s own experiences and background knowledge is a powerful way to reinforce learning, especially when the child is headed toward mastery of a particular concept. When using the generalizing strategy, the child supplies the answer to an open-ended question without direct support from the adult. Let’s look at an example:

Teacher: We’ve just read about this little boy feeling **drowsy** when he is staying up past his bedtime waiting for his grandparents to arrive. Can you tell me of a time that you felt **drowsy**?

Paige: I have! I was very **drowsy** when we were watching the movie my sister got for her birthday. It was boring, it made me sleepy – you know, **drowsy**.

Teacher: Yes, sometimes when I am watching a movie I get **drowsy** too.

Notice that, in this example, the teacher asks an open-ended question to encourage the child to extend her knowledge of vocabulary to a personal experience. The teacher then repeats and expands on the child’s correct response.

Let’s look at another example:

Teacher: The story told us that the children thought it was a **perfect** day for making a snowman. People often have different ideas of what makes a day **perfect**. Think about what a **perfect** day for you is like. Who wants to share their idea about a **perfect** day?

In the preceding example, the teacher is trying to challenge children by asking them to generalize the meaning of the word *perfect* to their own personal experiences. To guide the children, she asks an open-ended question. This activates the children’s background knowledge and extends their knowledge of the target word.



Terms and Background Knowledge

Vocabulary

Low-support strategy – A strategy that is used for tasks that are relatively easy for a child and that he or she is close to being able to do on his or her own.

Generalizing – A strategy designed to challenge a child by asking him or her to extend the lesson content beyond the lesson itself – to past or future personal experiences.



Activity 1. Teacher Implementation of the Generalizing Strategy

As we think about using the generalizing strategy, let's consider the way teachers ask students to extend their knowledge of a word to personal experiences during a vocabulary activity. Read this transcript of a classroom conversation.

Teacher: On this page, it says the boy has to **dash** away. What do you think **dash** means?

Tyler: To run away from something very fast.

Teacher: You are right, when you **dash** you are moving very quickly. Can you tell me about a time that you have **dashed** before?

Riley: Oh I know, I **dashed** yesterday when the ice cream truck came! I ran really fast so I could get an ice cream sandwich – sometimes they are all gone if you don't get there fast.

Teacher: Well, that sounds like a very important time to **dash**. You told us that you **dashed** to the ice cream truck. Is there a time you might want to **dash** away from something?

Riley: I would really, really **dash** from a big lion. I wouldn't want it to catch me.

Teacher: I agree – I would certainly **dash** away from a lion, and maybe a tiger too!

Activity 1. Teacher Implementation of the Generalizing Strategy

Now, answer these questions about the preceding exchange.

How did the teacher know when it was necessary to challenge the children using the generalizing strategy?

Give an example from this transcript of an instance when the teacher could have used the generalizing strategy, but did not.

Give a specific example of an instance when the teacher did use the generalizing strategy.

Describe a child's responses to the teacher's use of the generalizing strategy. Was the child challenged by the task?

Compare the children's responses when the teacher did and did not use the generalizing strategy. How did they differ?



Activity 2. Learners' Ladders

Review the strategy of generalizing addressed in four *Read It Again–PreK!* Learners' Ladder Vocabulary Lessons. These lessons are:

- Learners' Ladder Lesson 21
- Learners' Ladder Lesson 25
- Learners' Ladder Lesson 33
- Learners' Ladder Lesson 57

Of these examples, which ones do you feel you use often in your daily instruction?

Next, review these two examples taken from Learners' Ladder Lesson 25.

Example 1:

Teacher: We talked about how you may **gape**, or stare, at someone when you are surprised. What if you were going to surprise someone? What would you do? How do you think they would look at you?

Example 2:

Teacher: Tell me about a time in a movie or show where one character was **howling** at another because he or she was mad or upset.

Reflect on these questions:

How should the teacher respond if these questions are too difficult for the child as evidenced by an incorrect or absent answer?

Activity 2. Learners' Ladders

Rewrite each of the preceding examples so the teacher does not use the generalizing strategy. Predict how a child with strong vocabulary knowledge would perform given these revised examples.

Listen and Learn



Activity 3.

Turn on your DVD player and select **Session 6, Activity 3** from the RIA DVD menu. You will see a teacher reading a book to a group of children. Complete the activity as described below.

Watch this teacher use the generalizing strategy to discuss vocabulary with her students while reading *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* by Bill Martin, Jr. and John Archambault. Answer these questions:

Which word was the teacher targeting?

Describe the teacher's use of the generalizing strategy.

Describe how the children responded to this strategy.

Now, listen to what we have to say.

Turn on your DVD player and select **Session 6, Activity 3 Discussion** from the RIA DVD menu.

Activity 3.



Activity 4.

Turn on your DVD player and select **Session 6, Activity 4** from the RIA DVD menu. You will see a teacher reading a book to a group of children. Complete the activity as described below.

Watch this teacher use the generalizing strategy to discuss vocabulary with her students while reading the book *The Way I Feel* by Janan Cain. After watching, choose a book from your classroom library and complete the following activities.

Choose a word from the book that will most likely be relatively new for your students.

Write down the exact words you could use to implement the generalizing strategy when discussing this vocabulary word.

Now, listen to what we have to say, using another example from the book *The Way I Feel* by Janan Cain.

Turn on your DVD player and select **Session 6, Activity 4 Discussion** from the RIA DVD menu.

Activity 4.



Activity 5.

Turn on your DVD player and select **Session 6, Activity 5** from the RIA DVD menu. You will see a teacher reading a book to a group of children. Complete the activity as described below.

Watch this teacher use the strategy of generalizing to discuss a different domain from that of vocabulary, namely print knowledge, with her students while reading the text *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* by Bill Martin, Jr. and John Archambault. Make notes for yourself while considering these questions:

Which print knowledge skill was the teacher targeting?

What words exactly did the teacher use when applying the generalizing strategy?

How did the children respond to this strategy?

Now, listen to what we have to say.

Turn on your DVD player and select **Session 6, Activity 5 Discussion** from the RIA DVD menu.

Activity 5.

Reflect and Apply

Reflect

1. Think about a child in your classroom who has a very strong vocabulary. Write that child's name here:

_____.

How often do you currently use the generalizing strategy with this child when providing vocabulary instruction?

Do you think this child would benefit from more exposure to this strategy?

2. Look again at the generalizing strategy as discussed in the *Read It Again–PreK! Learners' Ladders*. Do you use this strategy often in your classroom? Why or why not?

What could you do in your classroom this week to use this strategy more often?

3. Read over this excerpt from the book *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak.

And when he came to the place where the wild things are
They roared their terrible roars and gnashed their terrible teeth
And rolled their terrible eyes and showed their terrible claws
Till Max said, "BE STILL!"
And tamed them with the magic trick
Of staring into all their yellow eyes without blinking once.

Next reflect on these questions:

How could you use this excerpt to teach children the meaning of the words *terrible* and *tamed*? Give a specific example of what you might say or do to teach children the meanings of these words.

Are there children in your classroom who may easily complete these activities and need to be challenged?

If students need to be challenged, how could you use the strategy of generalizing to support their learning?

Apply

1. Find a storybook in your classroom that has some interesting vocabulary words. Select a child in your classroom to read with and pause while reading to discuss three interesting words in the book. Practice using the generalizing strategy to discuss these words with the child. What kind of words did you use? Did you feel that the generalizing strategy detracted from your storybook reading session?

2. Gather a small group of children in your classroom who have very strong vocabulary skills. Ask the children about the meanings of new vocabulary words while you read a storybook to them. First, deliver the activity without providing the strategy of generalizing. Simply ask children to tell you the meanings of some words in the book. Note here their responses:

Now introduce generalizing into the vocabulary activity. Note the children's responses and compare them to those listed above. Do they differ? If so, in what way?

3. Gather a small group of children and read a storybook from your classroom library that features an interesting setting. As you read, ask the children to help you identify different settings and characters. First, deliver the activity without providing the low-support strategy of generalizing. Then introduce the low-support strategy of generalizing into the activity. Note here any differences in the children's responses:

Resources

Cain, J. (2000). *The way I feel*. Seattle, WA: Parenting Press, Inc.

Carroll, L. (1865). *Alice's adventures in wonderland*. London, England: Macmillan.

Martin, B. Jr., & Archambault, J. (1989). *Chicka chicka boom boom*. New York, NY: Scholastic, Inc.

National Reading Panel (2000). *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction*. Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Health and Human Services.

O'Connor, R. E., Notari-Syverson, A., & Vadasy, P. F. (2005). *Ladders to Literacy*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

Sendak, M. (1988). *Where the wild things are*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.

