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Verbs in Context: Project Based Learning as Intrinsic Motivation

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Verbs in Context: Project Based Learning as Intrinsic Motivation

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Senior Honors Project/Thesis
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VERBS IN CONTEXT: PROJECT BASED LEARNING AS INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

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Abstract

This capstone project studied the effects of teaching grammar in context and allowing students to engage in content through project-based learning. Data shows that teaching grammar in context through project-based learning and a broader plan of study effectively gives weight to the study of grammar, and helps students gain current mastery while preparing for future learning. This unit started with a pretest, had seven days of instruction and formative assessment, and ended with a summative project that students had three days to complete. Students designed verb posters as their summative assessment and these posters were saved for future seventh graders to use. Data collected from the summative poster assessment overwhelmingly showed mastery and a marked improvement from the original pretests. This was proven by students retaking the original pretest and scoring significantly higher than on the pre-assessment. The data collected during the capstone project was analyzed to alter future grammar units to integrate new instructional strategies.

Background

Throughout my clinical practice placement, I was at a public middle school in the Nebraska system. As a middle school, it is home to students from grades 6-8. With 916 students, this building is considered a title 1 school. The student to staff ratio is 15:1. The school has 60 full-time teachers and 3 full-time counselors, with 3 building administrators, and a wide variety of other hourly and certified staff. While in this placement, I worked with seventh grade English Language Arts students. My class sizes varied from 22 to 28 students, which is typical for this middle school. For my senior capstone project, I chose to focus on my second hour class period. This class was selected for study due to it having the most even split between male and female students. This class consisted of: 13 boys and 14 girls, 2 students on IEP plans, 12 High Ability

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Learners, and 2 students with behavior plans. This project was supervised by my cooperating teacher, who has 23 years of teaching experience in the district. We decided that for my capstone project, I would plan, teach, and assess a unit on using verbs in context to design verb posters.

Introduction

The goal for this unit was that students would be able to identify and elaborate upon the difference between action, linking, and verb phrases, demonstrating this knowledge through meaningful classroom activity. Each year, my building requires that seventh grade ELA teachers focus on a variety of grammatical and syntactical structures as part of an ongoing focus on usage. However, in recent years, as research shows that students learn grammar best in context of reading, writing, and conversational English. This is because, “teaching grammar in context will give learners opportunities to see how grammatical structures function in sentences,” (Mart, 2014). Teachers have attempted to adapt these grammar units to feel less rule oriented, and flow more smoothly into everyday classroom activities—when these units focus too exclusively on rules, students stop caring and mentally check out rather than accessing higher level thinking. With this in mind, I created three objectives for this unit. First, students would be able to identify the difference between action, linking, and verb phrases. Second, students would use these verbs in the context of independently created sentences. Third and finally, students would create posters demonstrating their mastery of verb use in context of large scale writing.

The guiding question of my project was, “How will teaching grammar in context and using intrinsically motivated project based learning help students master verb rules?” I knew previous data analysis from various studies, such as Mart (2014) and Chatterjee & Halder (2023),

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suggests that teaching grammar in context will create more meaningful connections for students and allow them to glean more usage from the grammar, which will carry into other classes and future skills. With this question in mind, the unit began with a formative, class-wide pretest. This pretest was not entered into the grading system but designed to check students' prior knowledge. On this pretest, only 3 students earned a 1 (90% or above.) This showed me students entered this unit with very little previous understanding of verb rules. With this understanding in mind, I planned the unit with a variety of instructional, engagement, and assessment strategies. The unit culminated in the final project analyzing verb usage and comprehension within student designed verb posters.

Understanding of Instruction Methods

Gradual Release

One of the biggest necessities to keeping students engaged and ensuring they comprehend course content is gradual release of responsibility (GRR), "The gradual release of responsibility model of instruction suggests that cognitive work should shift slowly and intentionally from teacher modeling to joint responsibility between teachers and students, to independent practice and application by the learner" (Frey & Fisher, 2014). GRR ensures students receive enough instructional time, time working with peers, and time proving their knowledge through individual activities. The first step of GRR is "I Do", otherwise known as direct instruction, and is mostly lecture based. The second step is "We Do" and involves students working with other students in small groups of learners, or with the teacher's guidance as a whole class. Third and finally, "You Do" involves the student working independently on the newly learned skill. Through this unit, I began class with a presentation on grammatical structure and connected to course readings and student writing examples, taught by me (I do), launched

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into large or small group discussion, or partnered activities (We do), and closed with an exit ticket or assessment (You do.)

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning connects to one step of gradual release (We do) and is imperative for students to interact with one another in order to build on each other's understandings of course content. According to a study from *Frontiers in Psychology*, "cooperative learning "encourages the development of interpersonal skills and motivates students to participate more actively in the teaching and learning process" (2022). One way to include cooperative learning in the classroom is through speaking activities and strategies. Some that I implemented included. Think-Pair-Share, Stand Up-Hand Up-Pair Up, Random Numbering into Groups, and use of a Group Leader (Assigned Discussion Roles.)

Cooperative learning is only effective if students are actively engaged with it, so ensuring participation and higher level thinking was a priority. I ensured that I used talk moves, such as think-alouds, rhetoric modeling, and prompting in class or small group discussion. to keep all students engaged in this cooperative learning. Guided note taking was also helpful, especially when thinking through character analysis and in comparison activities. If you have specific examples here that drives the point home.

Understanding of Assessment Methods

Graphic Organizers

Graphic organizers give students specific information to look for and helps make details feel accessible Graphic organizers can be formatted a variety of ways– from Venn diagrams, to tables, to flow charts, etc.– but they all help students to sort information and have research

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proven benefits with reading comprehension. By presenting students with a graphic organizer, you can eliminate the “idea clutter” which can stem from students attempting to take notes without any kind of guide. While unguided note taking certainly has its place, such as used in initial idea building exercises, or low stakes lectures, the intentionality of graphic organizers can be an especially useful scaffold for students when focused on helping learners glean details. Graphic organizers also aid in comparison activities, as visually sorting information keeps things much clearer than simply mentally sorting. The biggest necessity with graphic organizers is that they are designed or adapted to be well-suited to a lesson, which is why Green and Dillard state, “When we couldn’t find a tool that scaffolded our students’ ability to create language objectives, we created our own content and context-specific graphic organizer tool as a way to mediate student understanding of a complex concept” (2021, p. 2). I did the same in my classroom. Since graphic organizers are well suited to sorting activities, they flowed easily into a unit devoted towards categorizing, identifying, and using different verb types and verb phrases. Graphic organizers were useful in helping my students be able to recognize patterns in these different types of verbs. One specific activity we used with graphic organizers involved students creating a chart of verbs that began with each letter of the alphabet, before cutting apart the chart and sorting it into a bigger class wide graphic organizer of the different verb type categories. This not only turned into some friendly competition through game based learning, it helped students to see trends in the grammatical structure.

Graphic organizers were also used for guided note taking throughout the unit. During direct instruction, students were provided with packets that had sentence stems, charts, and verb rules to fill in. These notes were a tool students could hold onto when creating their own individual poster, and they could refer back to these notes while completing assignments.

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Exit Tickets

Exit tickets can take a vast variety of forms, but their commonalities are easily noted. All exit tickets are quick, engage every student, offer formative feedback on student understanding, and are given at the end of a class period/content topic (Leigh, 2014). These are used as an effective “exit” because it addresses multiple classroom needs: helping students lock in information, winding down the class/closure procedures, and providing data to plan for future learning. Exit tickets have been proven to be “an effective way to help answer students’ questions, motivate students to take ownership of their learning, and provide the teacher with an accurate picture of where students are in their understanding of the material through labeling these activities as “tickets” out of the classroom” (Izor, 2019, p.7). There is an engaging twist added to required activities and extrinsic motivation for learning. Within this unit, exit tickets proved incredibly effective as formative assessments.

Exit tickets had a dual purpose— students were able to show their understanding of class content from the day, as well as writing any questions they had lingering. Every exit ticket implemented over the course of the unit had space for students to write up to a paragraph of notes, as well as completing the assignment itself. These notes were utilized by roughly 20% of the students each day to ask for additional support on concepts which confused them.

Project Based Learning Assessment

The biggest assessment of the unit was the students’ final verb posters project. For this summative assessment, students were given a list of information they had to include on their poster (definitions of verb rules, example sentences, color coding), but also given the space to make their posters highly individualized. This helped ensure students were able to express their own creativity, and have an intrinsic sense of motivation and investment in their learning. As

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opposed to a traditional test as a summative, students were able to work at their own pace and were given ample time in both class and during guided study to put as much effort as they chose into these projects. Students self-assessed through exit tickets that they cared more about their learning because there was a creative element, and they expended more effort into their verb posters than they would have a non-project based assignment.

Participants

For my capstone project, I chose to focus on my second hour class period. This class consisted of: 13 boys and 14 girls, 2 students on IEP plans, 12 High Ability Learners, and 2 students with behavior plans. The two students on IEP plans receive ongoing support academically for reading and math, and one of these students is in a reading interventions class. These two students also both are on behavior plans and meet regularly with one of the school's three certified counselors. Of the 12 qualified high ability students, all 12 are qualified for English Language Arts HAL pull-out units, and 8 qualify for HAL services in other content areas. Although the building has a quickly growing English Language Learner population, and two full time ELL teachers, my second hour class did not contain any ELL students. I chose this class because it had the most even ratio of male to female students of all four ELA class periods.

Methods and Materials

This unit connected to three Nebraska state standards for ELA:

- LA.7.W.1 Create grammatically correct multi-paragraph compositions with varied sentence structures.
- LA.7.W.5 Write informative/explanatory pieces to examine a topic or text and clearly convey ideas and information. a. Introduce a topic clearly and provide a specific

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focus, grouping information logically and including text features, illustrations, and/or multimedia elements.

- LA.7.SL.1 Prepare for and participate in structured discussions and collaborations about 7th grade topics and texts.

b. Demonstrate interpretation of verbal and non-verbal messages in a conversation.

From these state standards, I created a unit of study that aligned with individualized district standards for grammar comprehension.

A district assessment driven pretest was given to students on the first day of the unit to gauge their prior knowledge of verb usage. Students were informed that their scores on this pretest would be reported to district personnel but would not be entered into the gradebook on Google Classroom or Synergy. They were told to take their time and answer thoughtfully, but not allow it to cause them any anxiety. Students took this pretest individually. Of the 27 students in the class, only 3 received a 90% or higher (a district score of 1, equivalent to an A grade.)

After these pretests had been graded and analyzed, I explained the unit objective to students– that they would not only be able to understand verb types, but use them in context and explain the concepts to future seventh graders. I chose to inform students of their final project at the very beginning of the unit, so they would know what goal they were working towards, and what to expect.

For the first seven days of the unit, our class schedule followed a similar routine. Students would be given their guided note taking graphic organizer and follow along with a presentation on verb types and how to identify and use them. Then, for the remainder of class, we would engage in partnered and individual activities that harnessed this learning. Every day

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included some aspect of game based learning in order to make class enjoyable and keep students engaged, and every day ended with an exit ticket to check progress on overall improvement and understanding.

Students had the opportunity to find examples of verb types in their course required AR reading rather than simply being handed a list of verbs. One of the routines of seventh grade ELA is that each day includes ten minutes of silent sustained reading time in order for students to hit their reading goal. During this verb unit, students were required to find at least five examples of verbs within their reading for the day, categorize these verbs, and explain to a partner how they knew these verbs fit within a certain type (action, linking, or phrase.) This helped ground the unit in context rather than simply seeming like a list of rules. Students were also given the chance to restructure these verbs into modeled conversational exchanges to express usage instead of just diagramming.

In the final three days of the unit, students were given time to create their individualized verb usage posters. These posters had a set of instructions with the requirements for a passing grade (Appendix A) but beyond that, students were given the opportunity to individualize their work. Students were allowed to move throughout the room and work wherever they chose, listen to music while working, and peer review their work with a partner.

Results/Data Analysis

Students showed marked improvement from the beginning of the unit to the completion of the summative assessment. As noted previously, at the beginning of the unit on a class-wide, unscored pretest, only 3 students earned a 1 (90% or above.) After ten days and following the completion of the summative posters– this same pretest was given as a true assessment at the

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end of the unit and this time 22 students earned a 1. This shows a clear transformation in student comprehension.

Through a final exit ticket that focused on self-assessment, I found students demonstrated a much higher sense of confidence, and more accuracy in identifying and using verb types. The formative assessments through the initial seven days of instruction showed steady improvement at not only categorizing verb types but being able to identify and use them correctly in the context of novels and conversations. Students self-assessed as feeling confident that they would be able to correctly use these verbs in ongoing schoolwork.

Students' summative assessment, the verb posters, were graded according to a rubric that was made available to students throughout the project design period (Appendix B) They were given the opportunity to modify their posters if they received a grade, they were unhappy with, and two students did so, with their scores moving from 3's to 2's (approximately 70% to 80-89%.) Overall, students did very well on their posters, as the data suggests (Appendix C). There were no students that failed the summative assessment.

Discussion and Conclusions

This unit suggests that choosing to analyze grammar in the context of a broader scope of study helps to give motivation for learning. Students were able to learn not just grammatical rules for verb usage, but understand how to apply this knowledge to academic and conversational connections. Students were able to not only identify and categorize verbs, but identify situations that their learning would be necessary. This will be helpful for them as they continue into eighth grade, high school, and beyond.

This study shows that project-based learning can help provide motivation for students at an intrinsic level— in the past within this seventh-grade classroom, all grammar study was

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done through test-based assessment, and there was less marked improvement from pre to post assessment. By altering instruction to include a project that would help future learners and accommodate for individuality, students became more aware of their own value. They have a higher stake in their own learning outcomes because they see themselves reflected within their work. The project helped provide depth to not only knowledge, but motivation to continue to improve. When students feel as though there is more asked of them than simply correct responses, they are more likely to expend real effort. According to the Harvard Graduate School of Education “When students have a sense of control over their learning, their intrinsic motivation improves; they are likely to persist at tedious academic tasks, and they learn to process information at a deeper level,” (2016).

If I were to teach this unit again, I would keep things very similar. However, I would start having students gather verbs from their AR readings further in advance prior to instruction of the unit. Within the unit, students collected verbs from these readings. I think if they had begun gathering verbs in advance, they could have hypothesized over the course of a week or so about what made these verbs different. We did do this kind of discussion, but I think it could have functioned as a kind of hook to begin the unit.

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Appendix A

This information must go on your poster

Fill in any blanks, and follow directions carefully.

Each section will be done in a different **color**, but can go in any order.

Anything Written in **BOLD** will be copied onto the poster, sentences must be written INDIVIDUALLY.

Label EACH SECTION with which type of verb is being discussed.

You can NOT write every sentence with the subject "I".

Section 1: (Action Verbs)

Every sentence has a _____ (the WHO or WHAT) and a _____ (the action or state of being).

_____ verbs describe something done with the body or the mind (physical or mental action).

Write FOUR sentences that use action verbs. Underline the verb, and draw an arrow pointing to the subject.

Section 2: (Linking Verbs)

_____ verbs describe a state of being. This verb tells us about what a subject IS, not what a subject DOES.

All forms of "to be" are linking verbs.

Some common linking verbs are...

Am is are

Was were

Be being been

Write four sentences that use a form of "to be." Underline the verb, and draw an arrow pointing to the subject.

There are certain words that LOOK like action verbs, but really are often linking verbs. An easy way to remember them is by the acronym GRABS.

Grows

Remains

Appears

Becomes

Seems

Write two sentences using two DIFFERENT "GRABS" verbs. Underline the verb and draw an arrow back to the subject.

The five senses can be linking verbs:

Look Sound Feel Smell Taste

Write two sentences using two DIFFERENT senses linking verbs. Underline the verb and draw an arrow back to the subject.

Section 3: (Verb Phrases)

_____ are a group of verbs that work together.

Helping verbs=added to main verb to make verb phrase.

Do, Does, Did Has, Have, Had

Must, Might, May

Could, Can

Would, Will

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Appendix B

10 points= all bolded text is copied onto poster

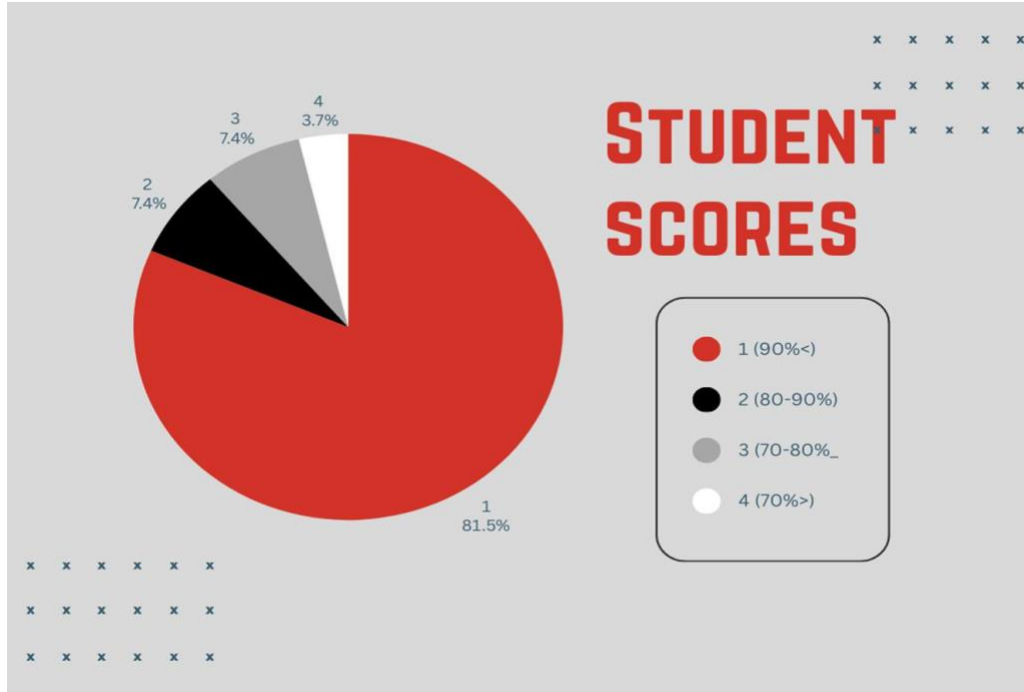
10 points= all example sentences are there AND written correctly

5 points= color coded and legible

5 points= all verbs are underlined, with arrows pointing to the subject

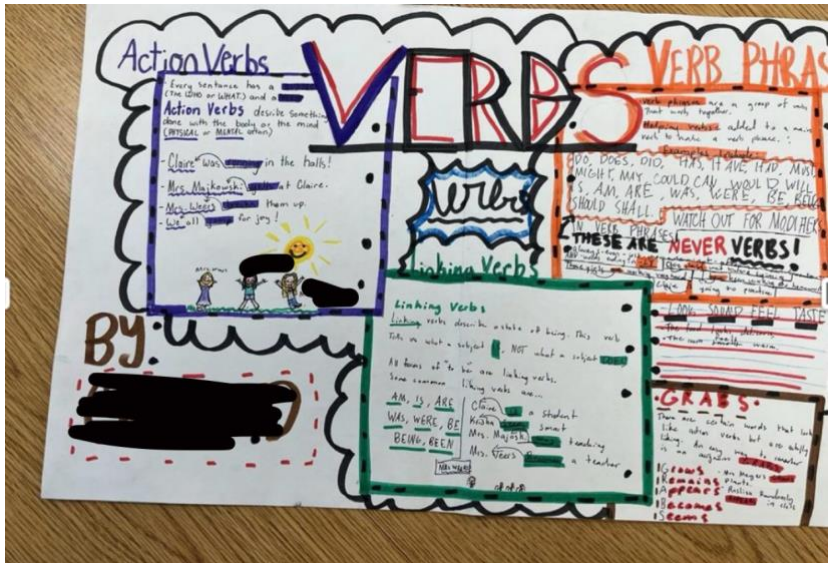
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Appendix C



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Appendix D



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Appendix E

Action Verbs!

EVERY SENTENCE HAS A SUBJECT (THE WHO OF WHAT) AND A VERB (THE ACTION OF WHAT DOING)

ACTION VERBS DESCRIBE SOMETHING HAPPENING WITH THE HELP OF THE MAIN (PHYSICAL OR MENTAL ACTION).

1. CHARLES WAS THINKING TO WITNESS.
2. DAN WAS PLANNING A GAME TO CHECK THIS ART PROJECT.
3. I WALKED TO LAW AND PUBLIC SERVICE CLASS AND SHOULD STUDY.
4. I OPEN UPSTAIR IN CREATIVE WRITING CLASS.

Linking Verb

LINKING VERBS DESCRIBE A STATE OF BEING. THE VERB TELL US ABOUT WHAT A SUBJECT IS, NOT WHAT SUBJECT DOES.

ALL FORMS OF "TO BE" ARE LINKING VERBS. SOME COMMON LINKING VERBS ARE...

AM IS ARE WAS WERE BE BEING BEEN

THESE ARE CERTAIN WORDS THAT LINK ONE ACTION VERB TO ANOTHER VERB. ALWAYS USE AFTER THE SUBJECT AND BEFORE THE OBJECT VERBS.

Grave
Remains
Appears
Seems

A SHOPPING BAGS IN THE POTTERY. HE COULD HEAR THE OFFER AND HEARS AND TALK TO HIS LIPS. MEAT FOR SOME TIGHTER ABOUT THE CLASS AS I CAN FOR MANY.

THATING SENTENCES CAN BE LINKING VERBS: LOOK SOUND FEEL SMELL TASTE.

VERB PHRASES

VERB PHRASES ARE GROUPS OF VERBS THAT WORK TOGETHER. LINKING VERBS ARE USED TO MAIN WITH IN PHRASES & VERB PHRASES.

DO, DOES, DID
MUST, MIGHT, MAY
WILL, WOULD
WANT, WANT

PLEASE NOTE, HAVE
CAN, CAN
NEED, NEED
DO, DOES, DEEM
SHOULD, SHOULD

WORKS OUT FOR PROBLEMS IN VERB PHRASES!

THESE ARE NEVER VERBS. ALWAYS, EVEN, UPON, MORE, NEVER, NEVER, NEVER, IN A, WELL, AND... ONLY USE WHAT CAN BE IN IT

1. ALWAYS USE VERBS MAINLY IN AND IN BONE.
2. I AM A FUTURE YEAR OLD, BOY.
3. I CAN PLAY CHECKERS AND WILL GAMES.
4. MY FRIENDS PLAY WITH BRUNNEN'S HIGH SCHOOL.

UNDERLINES ARE THE ACTION VERBS IN THE FOUR EXAMPLES.