On Your Way with Dr. Christina Williams

Mini session 2/5 Encourage your students to use big, bad, bodacious words in their writing, Dynamic Dictionary

INTRO

Whether you're a teacher who's on your way to school to work with kids and you're leaning into the science of reading movement, or you're on your way to tutor some great kids who are struggling with learning to read and spell well, or you're a parent who'd like to learn to better equip and inspire your children from home, the *On Your Way* podcast is for you.

I'm Dr. Christina Williams, and I'm your host.

During the main episode about vocabulary, I shared that there'd be **mini** episodes, following, where I'd share how students received vocabulary instruction in our classroom—so you can try them in your teaching situations. I've already shared mini episode #1:

~~**1** how to highlight words featured in the authentic materials you share during your read aloud time, so words are introduced in context, and you provide student-friendly definitions~~

Today I'm going to share

2 how you can encourage the use of more sophisticated vocabulary while your students are writing

Upcoming episodes include:

3 how to promote comparisons of words (make connections between words to aid in recall)

4 how to address roots and affixes with your students (that won't put them to sleep) and address words' grammar structures
5 how to provide multiple exposures to the words you've featured/intentionally noticed

Yes! Today we're going to talk about employing a Dynamic Dictionary in your teaching space. If you are writing with kids, a dynamic dictionary may be just what you've been looking for to move your students from using "safe, easy-to-spell, dime-a-dozen words" to using more sophisticated vocabulary words that better convey what your writers are trying to say.

In part one of this mini-series, we discussed how to meaningfully incorporate teacher selected vocabulary words into our daily instruction. With the Dynamic Dictionary, we are also encouraging students to contribute their own words into our classroom vocabulary instruction.

Here's the deal.

We so want to discourage our students from scrapping the use of a great word, when writing, in lieu of a word they know they can **spell correctly.**

We're going to promise our students that we'll do our best to help them as they try utilizing more big, bad, bodacious words in their daily writing, and here's how we're going to do it.

You should know that I've already posted a PODCAST about how to use a Dynamic Dictionary in your teaching space. Please check that out. In this mini-series, I'm going to go quickly through how it works and why it's so important to incorporate this practice into your daily writing time. It'll reinforce all you're doing in your word work (promoting an awareness of phonemes, reinforcing all the phonics rules you've already taught and even sharing a bit about those you have not, yet, shared, discussing roots and affixes as needed, and more), **and** you'll encourage your kids to learn how to accurately spell the words that are important to them while they're writing.

We must begin this work by simply acknowledging when authors choose wonderful words. We must also acknowledge when kids in our class use wonderful words (spoken and in writing), and even when kids just *try* to use wonderful words. It's true. Remember, we didn't encourage our kids to walk when they *began* walking. We began encouraging them when we saw anything close to trying to take a step. It's the same with vocabulary. We cannot expect perfect usage right from the start. Kids need to be encouraged to try things—even when they're not sure it's just right.

The Dynamic Dictionary got its name because it's dynamic. It's a system characterized by constant change or progress, and it's a dictionary. It's a resource that contains words, organized (mostly) in alphabetical order. The best part is that using the Dynamic Dictionary gives kids access to the words they need, when they need them, and they also get the instruction they need to make learning to spell their requested word really *sticky* all while also promoting orthographic mapping!

Let's say a student is writing a journal entry, and she wants to write about her soccer game. The problem is, she's tried a few spellings, but she knows she hasn't spelled *soccer* correctly yet. Nothing she's tried "looks right."
The student goes to a card basket, gets a card and brings it to you (where you're seated, probably at a table with other students who are writing in **their** journals as well.) You ask, "How may I help you, Rosie?" Rosie says, "I need the word *soccer* please." You will either say:

1) Sure! Stretch out the sounds for me in *soccer*, and I'll write the letters that go with them on this card.

Rosie says, "/s/" and you write s. She says, "o" and you write o. She says "/k/" and you say, "In *soccer* we use c to say /k/. In fact, we need two of them because we don't want the e in this bossy r combo to do magic." You're writing the letters as your student makes each sound in the word *soccer.* Note that it doesn't matter if you've formally taught about magic e's or blocker letters or bossy r's yet. You're providing in-the-moment instruction that can be quite helpful to the student who's asking for the spelling. The added information you've shared costs you a couple of seconds, only, and you're opening your student's eyes to how words work—a preview of upcoming lessons in your phonics progression.

You might say, "That's a tricky word, but now you know how to spell it. S-o-c-c-e-r. We don't hear an e, in soccer, but it's there. After you stretch out the sounds again and write the letters on your **own** paper, checking this card to be sure you've got it right, please place this word card for *soccer* in the s pocket so when someone **else** needs the word soccer, **they** can find it too."

Or you could say:

2) Sure! I'm going to stretch out the sounds, and you tell me which letters go with the sounds, and I'll write them on this card for you. You say, "/s/" and the student says "s." You say, "Yes! The next sound is /o/." The student says, "o." You say, "Yes!" And write the o. You say /k/. The student says, "Is it a c or a k?" You say, "In the word *soccer* the /k/ sound is spelled with two c's because we need a blocker letter to keep the upcoming e from doing magic." You then say "/r/" and your student say "r." You say, yes, but this is a bossy r. The /r/ sound is spelled with an e-r. We don't hear the e say anything because it's being bossed—but since every syllable must have a vowel, we know there *must* be a vowel *there* and in *soccer* that vowel is an e. Soccer is spelled s-o-c-c-e-r. After you stretch out the sounds again and write the letters on your own paper, check this card to be sure you've got it right. Then, please place this word card for *soccer* in the s pocket so when someone **else** needs it, they can find it too."

Do you see the difference? One way you're stretching out the sounds. The other way the student is stretching out the sounds.
Either way, you're coaching the child, telling her how the letters are working together in the word *soccer.*
You're promoting phonemic awareness, phonics, and orthographic mapping while equipping your child to spell a word that's important to her. We know it is, because she's requesting it. I mean, you can't make a situation any more conducive for learning!

All this requires is lots of blank 3 x 5 index cards, a basket from which students will retrieve the cards, Sharpie markers (for the teacher only), and a Learning Resources Alphabet Centre Pocket Chart – just the bottom half – for students to place their words into, according to words' initial letters. (I'll include a link.).

When I retired, during my exit interview, the HR folks asked, because I was pretty young for retiring, what I intended to do with myself. I shared that I was going to work in my business, Book Bums, to better equip more kids than the 28 kids I served in my classroom each year. I began sharing about how I'd created fun-focused lessons that better equipped students to read and spell well.

One of the interviewers shared that her son, who was a first grader in our district, would only write, during writing time, the names of the kids at his table. I shared that I understood why her son might do that. I guessed that he was very bright, and that it bothered him to try to write words (without having been taught using explicit, systematic phonics and with only sight word memorization) and knowing that what he'd written absolutely did not say what he *wanted* it to say. He was painfully aware of his inability to access the code to write what he wanted to say. Writing those names of his peers, he knew he was spelling them correctly.

You see, really smart kids have little patience for “take your best guess.” And every time our students misspell words, they’re reinforcing that misspelling. Ug. We don’t want misspelled words to look right to our students because they’re writing them incorrectly over and over again.

The Dynamic Dictionary does so much to advance students awareness of phonemes, promote their phonics knowledge, AND it inspires them to use the words they *want* to use in their writing—not just the words they know how to spell.

(Side benefit: Kids are welcome to move about the room to retrieve words. This is not distracting. It’s freeing.)

In truth, sometimes I did “close” the Dynamic Dictionary so kids could only access the words that were already placed in the pockets, and sometimes it was closed entirely so kids could not use the Dynamic Dictionary at all—they had to remain in their seats the whole time. But those days were rare.

I was very busy addressing words our students wanted—**needed**—for their writing for many, many weeks. As I got in more and more phonics lessons, and students had already requested most of the words they were using in their written work, I was writing fewer words onto word cards during our writing times. As pockets in our dynamic dictionary began to bulge, I’d occasionally remove the simpler words our students no longer needed for support or for simply verifying their word spellings.

With the Dynamic Dictionary, we honor and promote our students’ efforts to stretch their own vocabularies, and we magnify students’ use of powerful, beautiful, just right words in in their writing.

Remember, I <u>don’t</u> recommend presenting lists of random words and quizzing kids to see how well they’ve remembered them. Sharing words that are connected to the books you’re reading aloud, and words that are connected the individual experiences your students choose to share with one another, in conversation and in writing, will yield the best vocabulary gains.

Hey, everyone. We hope you’ve enjoyed this episode of On Your Way with, me, Dr. Christina Williams. Please follow the podcast so you don’t miss a thing. And

we'd love for you to share what we could do to make these podcasts even better.

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