

List-Group-Label: A Simple Strategy for Improving Vocabulary and Activating Prior Knowledge

What is LGL?

List-Group-Label (LGL), also called semantic mapping, is designed to encourage children to

- improve their vocabulary and categorization skills,
- organize their verbal concepts,
- aid them in remembering and reinforcing new words, and
- activate their prior knowledge about the subject.

The rationale behind this strategy is based on the notion that categorizing words can help children organize new words and experiences in relation to previously learned words. LGL attempts to improve upon the way in which children learn and remember new words. LGL was originally used in science and social studies classes; however, the strategy seems appropriate across the curriculum.

Description of the Procedure

List-Group-Label is an easy-to-implement, 3-part strategy with the following steps:

- listing,
- grouping/labeling, and
- follow-up.

1. Listing. The teacher begins the LGL lesson by selecting a one or two-word topic to serve as a stimulus for listing words. The stimulus topic is written at the top of the board or student's paper. Topics should be drawn from the materials that children are reading and from which they are learning. For example, if children are about to start a unit on volcanoes, volcanoes might be used as the topic to begin an LGL lesson. On the other hand, almost any topic of which the children have some **prior knowledge** might be suitable.

Children are asked to **brainstorm** related to the topic, that is, to think of any word or expression related to the topic. Using our volcano example, the teacher might say, "Think of any word or words that remind you of the topic *volcano*." Responses are recorded, and the teacher should accept all word associations given by the children, unless the response cannot be justified by them.

Keep the list of words manageable. Approximately 15-20 responses should be adequate. When most children have had an opportunity to offer a response, the listing portion of the lesson can be terminated by stating, "I'll take only two more words." Below is a list of responses children might generate using volcano as a stimulus topic:

Volcano		
lava	explosion	destruction
fire	dust	mountain
ash	magma	death
smoke	cinders	Mt. St. Helens
eruption	rocks	Hawaii
earthquake	heat	molten

2. Grouping/Labeling. The teacher will read the list orally, pointing to each word as it is pronounced. For older children this step may not be necessary, but it is cautioned that even older readers, particularly **struggling readers**, may benefit from it. The children are then instructed to make smaller lists of words related to the topic (in this case, volcanoes), using only words from the large list that the class generated. These smaller groupings should consist of words that have something in common with one another; and each grouping should have at least three words in it. Words from the large list may be used in more than one smaller group, as long as the groupings are different. Children are also told they must give their group of words a label or title that indicates the shared relationship they possess.

3. Follow-up. Using another part of the chalkboard or piece of paper, the teacher solicits and records categories of words and their labels from the children, one grouping at a time. After a category is recorded, the child offering the group must state verbally why the words have been categorized in the particular way stated. In this way, all children can see category possibilities that may not have occurred to them. The following are possible groupings that may be generated from the large list of volcano words:

- a. lava, ash, rocks, dust, smoke = things that come out of a volcano
- b. explosion, destruction, death, earthquake = results of an eruption
- c. lava, fire, cinders, molten, magma = hot parts

Cautions and Comments

Perhaps the most beneficial aspects of List-Group-Label are the modeling and sharing that are built into the strategy. It is through this sharing that children are exposed to ideas and concepts that may be beyond their experiential background and, thus, enable learning to occur. Therefore, it is most important that modeling and sharing be emphasized as part of the lesson. Modeling may also occur as part of the instruction that the teacher provides. For children for whom categorization might prove to be a problem, the teacher should "walk" children through the "how" and "why" of LGL. This might include

- (a) constructing the first category and providing a title for it to show children the process of categorization,
- (b) providing an initial list of words for children to group and label,
- (c) making the categories yourself and having children label them, and
- (d) providing the labels and having children find words to fit the category.

Other suggestions for using List-Group-Label include the use of small groups of children to categorize and label rather than just having individual children accomplish this task on their own. This increases the interaction and sharing among individuals, as well as streamlines the whole group discussion that follows groupings and labeling where only a spokesperson for each small group does the talking. For younger children or groups of children, LGL may also be personalized by recording the individual's or group's name by the category that has been offered.

It must also be mentioned that LGL is based on the notion that **some prior knowledge is essential for the lesson to be successful**. If a teacher assumes prior knowledge on the part of children where little or none exists, LGL stands little chance for success. For instance, using volcano as a stimulus topic for children who are too young will probably result in very few word associations being given. Similarly, using an unfamiliar topic such as "parts of the brain," even with older children, will usually result in failure, too. Obviously, prior knowledge plays much less of a role in LGL if the strategy is used as a means of reinforcement in the postreading portion of an instructional lesson. In such a case, knowledge gained from the text is going to take precedence over prior knowledge. Therefore, LGL can be an excellent strategy for review purposes, even if the topic was originally unfamiliar.

Other problems that may occur with LGL involve aspects of categorization. It is cautioned that semantic, meaning-oriented groupings be emphasized rather than those that focus on surface commonalities of words chosen for a grouping. For example, the following category is perfectly legitimate, though not what is called for in LGL:

explosion, destruction, eruption = three syllable words

If such a category should occur, teachers are cautioned that they must accept the category but point out that meaningful, rather than surface, associations are desired.

Another categorization problem that might occur is the propensity of some children to try to make the largest grouping they possibly can. This can be dealt with by simply limiting the number of words that may be used in one group to five or, at the most, to seven words. Finally, some words defy classification. To deal with this, create a "misfit" list of all those words that do not fit a category. Exploring why certain words do not fit a category can also prove instructionally beneficial for children.

As a closing note, the diagnostic value of LGL should be mentioned. In a prereading situation, teachers can find out what it is that children know and what it is that will require teacher instruction. In a postreading situation, teachers can find out what children have learned and what will require reteaching. Finally, as a straight vocabulary development lesson, teachers can find a source of words from children' experiences that might require clarification and expansion.

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