

Teaching Vocabulary: Theory and Practice

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Abstract:

Vocabulary learning is critical to reading comprehension, it is important that those working with young readers help further encourage the development of a large “word bank” and effective vocabulary learning methods. There are several effective planned instruction and implied strategies that adults and children can employ with readers of any age.

One of the most effective methods of helping students learn new vocabulary words is to teach unfamiliar words used in a text prior to the reading experience. Students should see first reading materials to determine which words are unfamiliar. Then these words should be defined and discussed. It is important for the adult to not only tell the students what the word means, but also to discuss its meaning. This allows the students to develop an understanding of the word’s connotations as well as its denotation. Also, discussion provides the adult with feedback about how well the students understand the word. It can be stated that the frequent your exposure to the words the more you can master the meaning of the words. However, repeated exposure to new vocabulary words is often ignored. Giving higher opportunities for the students to the target vocabulary the more they could master the vocabulary. Sometimes student needs to repeat the word several times in order for the students to remember.

Key words: Vocabulary, Teaching Vocabulary, Style in Vocabulary English Teaching, Teaching Vocabulary, Approaches in Teaching Vocabulary

TEACHING VOCABULARY: THEORY AND PRACTICE

In pre-teaching, the keyword approach happens before a student reads a particular reading text. In this method, unfamiliar words are introduced prior to reading. However, rather than encouraging the student to remember a definition for a new word, the adult teaches them a “word clue” to help him understand it. This “word clue” or keyword might be a part of the definition, an illustrative example or an image that the reader connects to the word to make it easier to remember the meaning when reading it in context. The explanation behind the keyword approach is to make an easy remembering connection to the word’s meaning that the reader can access efficiently during a reading experience.

A word map is an effective approach for building the student’s vocabulary learning. Like the other explicit instructional approach, the student (in pair) should preview the reading text to determine which words are uncommon. For each of these new vocabulary words the student (with the support of the adult) makes a table organizer for the word. At the center of the table organizer is the vocabulary word and the meaning can be classified into three: classification (what class or group does the word belong to), qualities (what is the word like) and examples. Using prior knowledge the student fills in each of these three categories. Word maps help readers develop complete understandings of words. This approach is the best approach to be used with students in grades three to twelve or college.

While root analysis is taught clearly, the ultimate aim is for readers to use this method with other approach. Many of the words in the English language are come from Latin or Greek roots. They either contain a “core” root (the primary component of the word) or use prefixes or suffixes that hold meaning. Teaching vocabulary to the students start with familiarization with the roots words, prefixes and suffixes. As each is taught with examples of its use in the common word should be shared and examined. The student should see how the root helps

understand the word's definition. Students be reminded about the meaning and should then be given practice analyzing words to determine their roots and definitions. When a student is able to break down uncommon words it can be done into their prefixes, suffixes and roots they can start to determine their meanings.

This approach is simply effective for helping low achiever students improve their vocabularies. Sometimes instructional materials are inaccessible to the students because there are too many unknown words in them. Students restructure the materials in several different ways to help student's comprehend them more easily. A portion of the difficult words can be replaced with "easier" synonyms to help the reader understand the overall text. Vocabulary footnotes (definitions provided at the bottom of the page) can be added for particularly challenging words so that the reader can easily "look up" the word while still reading the text. An accompanying vocabulary guide can be provided for the text. The words that are included in the instructional materials must be emphasis or printed in bold text to guide and easily seen by the students to check the vocabulary if the word or its meaning is unknown.

Moreover, incidental vocabulary learning happens when students read. Based on the way a word is being used in a text you are able to get the meaning. While you may not know what a specific word means, many times you can get its meaning on what the rest of the sentence focuses on if you read them carefully. Students show this of incidental vocabulary learning for the students to help them develop their own skills.

Context skills are the approached that a reader uses for incidental vocabulary learning. Texts are full of "clues" about the meanings of words. In other words in a sentence or paragraph, captions, illustrations and titles provide the students with information about the passage that they can use to see and get the meanings of unfamiliar words. These features are often referred to as "context clues" because they are contained within the context of the piece of writing rather than

outside it. Students should be taught to find and use context clues for studying new vocabulary words. Student modeling and practice are factor for helping students develop this important reading skill.

Vocabulary is the study of words and word meanings. As Steven Stahl (2005) puts it, "Vocabulary knowledge is knowledge; the knowledge of a word not only implies a definition, but also implies how that word fits into the world." Vocabulary knowledge is not something that can ever be fully studied; it is something that expands and deepens over the course of a lifetime. Instruction in vocabulary involves more than checking up words in a dictionary and using the words in a sentence or paragraph. Vocabulary is obtained incidentally through indirect exposure to words and intentionally through explicit instruction in specific words and word-learning strategies. According to Michael Graves (2000), there are several methods to learn vocabulary effectively: (a) wide or extensive independent reading to expand word knowledge; (b) instruction in specific words to enhance comprehension of texts containing those words; (c) instruction in independent word-learning strategies, and (d) word consciousness and word-play activities to motivate and improve learning.

According to National Reading Panel (2000), they recommended a numerous of direct and indirect methods of vocabulary instruction. Explicit instruction of vocabulary is highly effective. To enhance vocabulary intentionally, students should be explicitly taught both specific words and word-learning strategies. To deepen students' knowledge of word meanings, particular word instruction should be robust (Beck, 2002). Seeing vocabulary in rich contexts provided by authentic texts, rather than in isolated vocabulary drills, produces robust vocabulary learning. Such instruction often does not begin with a definition, for the ability to give a definition is often the result of knowing what the word means. Rich and large vocabulary instruction goes beyond definitional knowledge; it gets students actively engaged in using and thinking about word meanings and in creating relationships among words.

Explicit instruction in word-learning approaches gives students tools for independently determining the meanings of uncommon words that have not been explicitly introduced in class. Since students experience so many uncommon words in their reading, any help provided by such approaches can be beneficial.

Word-learning strategies include dictionary use, morphemic analysis, and contextual analysis. For ELLs whose language shares cognates with English, cognate awareness is also an important strategy. Dictionary use teaches students about multiple word meanings, as well as the essential of choosing the correct definition to fit the specific context. Morphemic analysis is the process of deriving a word's meaning by analyzing its meaningful parts, or morphemes. Such word parts include root words, prefixes, and suffixes. Contextual analysis involves inferring the meaning of an uncommon word by analyzing the text surrounding it. Instruction in contextual analysis generally involves teaching students to employ both generic and specific types of context clues.

A more general way to help students develop vocabulary is by displaying word consciousness, an awareness of and interest in words. Word consciousness is not an isolated component of vocabulary instruction; it needs to be taken into account each and every day (Nagy, 2004). It can be developed at all times and in several ways: through encouraging adept diction, through word play, and through research on word origins or histories. According to Graves (2000), "If we can get students interested in playing with words and language, then we are at least halfway to the goal of creating the sort of word-conscious students who will make words a lifetime interest."

One principle of effective vocabulary learning is to enhance multiple exposures to a word's meaning. There is great improvement in vocabulary when students encounter vocabulary words often (National Reading Panel, 2000). According to Stahl (2005), students probably have to see a word more than once to place it firmly in their long-term memories. "This does not mean mere repetition or drill of the word," but seeing the word in different and multiple contexts. In other

words, it is essential that vocabulary instruction enhance students with opportunities to encounter words repeatedly and in more than one context.

Restructuring of vocabulary tasks, the students should be exposed to the following methods: (a) intentional instruction of vocabulary items is required for specific texts, (b) repetition and multiple exposures to vocabulary items are important, (c) learning in rich contexts is valuable for vocabulary learning, (d) vocabulary tasks should be restructured as necessary, (e) vocabulary learning should entail active engagement in learning tasks, (f) computer technology can be used effectively to help teach vocabulary, (g) vocabulary can be acquired through incidental learning. How vocabulary is assessed and evaluated can have differential effects on instruction, and (h) dependence on a single vocabulary instructional method will not result in optimal learning.

It is often assumed that when students do not learn new vocabulary words, they simply need to practice the words some more. Research has shown, however, that it is often the case that students simply do not understand the instructional task involved (National Reading Panel, 2000). Rather than focus only on the words themselves, teachers should be certain that students fully understand the instructional tasks (Schwartz, 1985). The restructuring of learning materials or strategies in various ways often can lead to increased vocabulary acquisition, especially for low-achieving or at-risk students (National Reading Panel, 2000). According to Kamil (2004), "once students know what is expected of them in a vocabulary task, they often learn rapidly."

In incidental vocabulary learning reveals that most vocabulary is acquired incidentally through indirect exposure to words. Students can acquire vocabulary incidentally by engaging in rich oral-language experiences at home and at school, listening to books read aloud to them, and reading widely on their own. Reading volume is very important in terms of long-term vocabulary development (Cunningham, 1998). According Hilbert (2005) reason that extensive reading gives

students repeated or multiple exposures to words and is also one of the means by which students see vocabulary in rich contexts. Cunningham (2005) recommends providing structured read-aloud and discussion sessions and extending independent reading experiences outside school hours to encourage vocabulary growth in students learning vocabulary.

This research clearly indicates that enlargement of vocabulary has always been and continues to be an important goal in literacy and learning (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2004). Educators have long recognized the importance of vocabulary development. In the early 20th century, John Dewey (1910) stated that vocabulary is critically important because a word is an instrument for thinking about the meanings which it expresses. Since then, there has been an “ebb and flow of concern for vocabulary” (Thomas, 2006). At times, interest in vocabulary has been high and intense, and at other times low and neglected, alternating back and forth over time (Berne, 2008).

Vocabulary has long been an important topic in middle grades education, but today it could be considered a hot topic (Cassidy, 2003). The National Assessment Governing Board, for example, has added a separate vocabulary component to gauge student achievement in reading nationwide (Manzo, 2004). Learning vocabulary is an important instructional aim for teachers in all content areas in middle grades schools (Harmon, 2009). Recent research, however, indicates that vocabulary instruction may be problematic because many teachers are not “confident about best practice in vocabulary instruction and at times don’t know where to begin to form an instructional emphasis on word learning” (Blachowicz, 2008). The importance of vocabulary can be defined as “the words we must know to communicate effectively: words in speaking (expressive vocabulary) and words in listening (receptive vocabulary)” (Neuman, 2009). When does learning vocabulary start? One important finding from research suggests that vocabulary learning never stops (Smith, 1998) it is a natural and lifelong phenomenon. Vocabulary learning is a continual process of

encountering new words in meaningful and comprehensible contexts (Harmon, 2009). Consider how young students initially encounter printed text in their surrounding environments. When they walk through supermarket aisles, they can often recognize the name of their favorite box of cereal; or while riding in the family car, they can identify a McDonald's restaurant or a Toys-R-Us sign. Students do this easily, routinely, and usually without parents or other adults explicitly drawing their attention to print. In short, throughout the life span, people develop vocabulary effectively and almost effortlessly as long as they see words in meaningful contexts.

In addition, individuals learn new words at an amazing rate. During childhood, children learn vocabulary at the rate of approximately 1,900 to 3,900 words per year (Villaume, 2002), or an average rate of seven words per day (Anderson, 1991). Amazingly, individuals learn new words at this rate "without conspicuous effort or organized instruction and without any forgetting" (Smith, 1998). It was stated that in school, students will encounter in excess of 100,000 words in their reading. Students' vocabularies may increase by 3,000 to 5,000 words per year by reading, resulting in a reading vocabulary of nearly 25,000 words by the eighth grade and over 50,000 by the end of high school (Graves, 2000). Once again, whether in school or out of school, the key to learning words at this amazing rate is that individuals experience words in comprehensible and meaningful contexts (Allen, 1999).

What does learning vocabulary mean? Learning vocabulary is fundamentally about learning definition of words. Many teachers believe that defining words before reading a text is an effective instructional technique to support vocabulary growth and enhance reading comprehension; however, research indicates otherwise. For example, the popular practice of requiring students to find definitions of words and write those words in sentences before reading appears to have little apparent impact on their word knowledge and language use, and has not improved student comprehension of texts that contain those words (Kameenui, 1991). Similarly, Stahl and

Fairbanks (1986) found that instructional methods that provide only definitional information about each word to be learned or that involve multiple repetitions of definitional information about a target word do not appear to have reliable effects on reading comprehension. Allen (1999) identifies three reasons why strategies that focus on word definitions are not effective: (1) a word can have multiple definitions and meanings depending on the geographic location in which a person lives, (2) a word can have a definition that may not be correct in a particular context, and (3) definitions of words often lack adequate information for students to use them correctly. These findings suggest that learning vocabulary is more complex than simply memorizing definitions of words; rather, it involves seeing, hearing, and using words in meaningful contexts (Daniels & Zemelman, 2004, p. 13). Approaches that focus on word recognition and word use in meaningful contexts are most likely to positively affect vocabulary growth.

CONCLUSION AND RECAPITULATION

Vocabulary learning is a continual process of encountering new words in meaningful and comprehensible contexts (Harmon, 2009). How is vocabulary learned? While some vocabulary learning occurs in school, it is not just a school-based phenomenon. Many children begin formal schooling “with rich vocabularies but no formal vocabulary instruction” (Brabham, 2002), and while they are in school they may continue to learn vocabulary without much direct and explicit help from teachers (Carey, 1978). For the most part, vocabulary growth in school occurs informally and incidentally rather than formally and intentionally (Perman, 1985). Students learn vocabulary best in classrooms in which teachers read to them and highlight important and interesting words. In these classrooms, students regularly read independently and in groups and they discuss their understandings in literature circles during and after reading. Informal and incidental vocabulary learning is quite efficient and effective. Twenty-five to fifty percent of annual

vocabulary growth can be attributed to incidental learning from meaningful context while reading. Leung (1992) found read-alouds seem to be a particularly powerful instructional strategy for supporting incidental vocabulary growth in the elementary grades. According to Vandevier (1991) explored indirect learning of vocabulary words with sixth graders and found that students were able to learn a significant number of vocabulary words from reading, discussing their reading, and listening to orally presented passages. Collectively, these findings indicate that vocabulary growth occurs when we immerse students in words in a variety of ways and get them personally and actively involved in constructing word meanings.

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