

The explicit teaching of vocabulary

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There has never been a more important time than now to make it a priority to plan for deliberate vocabulary instruction. In any classroom, a high percentage of students suffer from 'word poverty': the inability to effortlessly and confidently choose, use and comprehend tiered words for a purpose. There is a growing trend of students who use less than half the number of words expected for their age (Tuck 2009). Traditionally, teaching focusses on the implicit learning of vocabulary through the explicit teaching of reading, writing, spelling and oral language activities. Now, it is time to explicitly teach vocabulary instruction as its own area of literacy to avoid more students falling into the arena of word poverty.

Recent research reveals that vocabulary knowledge is an important factor in contributing to reading comprehension (Pressley 2000), and plays a significant role in improving comprehension. Stahl (2005) describes vocabulary knowledge as: the knowledge of a word implies a definition and implies how that word fits into the world. This definition suggests that instruction in vocabulary involves more than looking up words in a dictionary and using the words in a sentence. Vocabulary is also acquired incidentally through indirect exposure to words and intentionally through the explicit instruction of specific words and word-learning strategies.

Vocabulary instruction versus word study

Vocabulary instruction can be defined as a series of steps specifically taught so that students develop 'word learning strategies' to comprehend the meaning of new words encountered and use those new words to support their overall literacy development. (Diamond & Gutlohn 2006)

Word study is learning about how each word is constructed through the layers of orthography. Students understand how letters and sounds blend in a particular order to produce a word that has meaning or where parts of words have originated from to explain the spelling of a particular word.

The three cueing systems (semantic, syntactic and graphophonic) are still highly relevant and help to support professional understanding when constructing meaning about the above terms.

Building word wealth and eliminating word poverty

A daily plan will support intentional teaching of new words within the components of an effective vocabulary program (Graves 2000). A vocabulary program must include:

1. wide or extensive independent reading to expand word knowledge
2. instruction in specific words to enhance comprehension of texts containing those words

3. instruction in independent word-learning strategies
4. word consciousness and word-play activities to motivate and enhance learning.

An important reading skill is to know and control cognitive and metacognitive strategies to develop and use a wide vocabulary. Students need to be taught how to use morphological and context strategies to help them work out unknown words. For students to be able to do this, word-learning strategies should include intensive, explicit teaching in word study

Get excited about words

The first step to engaging student learning is to get excited. A 'word-of-the-day' strategy ignites students' interests and curiosity. For example, teach new vocabulary for a new unit of work or re-teach words from a previous unit. Students share their word-of-the-day with the class and add it to a class board.

The next step to engage students is explicitly teaching a new or unfamiliar word. Word-learning strategies include:

1. using context to unlock the meaning of unknown words (contextual analysis)
2. using word parts (morphemic analysis) to unlock the meaning of unknown words
3. using the dictionary and related reference tools
4. developing a strategy for dealing with unknown words (goal setting)
5. teaching students to adopt a personal approach to building their vocabularies (Diamond & Gutlohn 2006).

Teachers need to develop 'word consciousness' as a daily routine with students to improve the learning of new words.

Lesson planning for word-learning strategies

When lesson planning for word-learning strategies, the starting point involves pre-reading the text before reading it with students.

Teachers anticipate the challenges of the words in the text that the students will read:

1. pre-read the text
2. make a list of difficult vocabulary
3. plan an engaging way to interact with challenging vocabulary that teaches the strategies
4. set a learning goal. For example, today We Are Learning That (WALT) good readers use word-learning strategies to decode new vocabulary
5. display success criteria. For example, I know I have learned today's goal when I can show my teacher how I use the five word-learning strategies and investigate what the words mean in context.

Which words to teach?

Research suggests that teachers should choose high-frequency words with multiple meanings (or Tier 2 words) (Beck 2002). These words need to be important to learn and frequently appear across a variety of subject areas. They should be 'mature' words. Students can build rich representations of the words and can make connections to other words and concepts (Beck 2002) The following is an example of which words you would focus on in the sentence, 'The servants would never comment on this strange occurrence'.

Tier 2 words	A student's normal choice
servants	helpers
comment	say
occurrence	thing, happening

There are thousands of engaging activities to build vocabulary. The following activities also teach word-learning strategies.

Classroom activities to explicitly build a student's vocabulary

Oral language activities

'Interview a word'. Students are given a word for an upcoming unit. From a list of prewritten questions, students ask and answer those questions in pairs. For example:



- How many letters does your word have?
- Does your word have a blend?
- Is there a little word inside?
- What does your word mean?
- Can you use it in a sentence?

'Take a book walk' supports the development of three areas: oral language, vocabulary and retell (Child Care Providers Resource Network

Step 1	The teacher provides a description, explanation or example of the term
Step 2	Linguistic: Students restate the description, explanation or example in their own words
Step 3	Non-linguistic: Students construct a picture, pictograph or symbolic representation or act out the term
Step 4	The teacher extends and refines understanding of the word by engaging students in activities that help them add to their knowledge of the terms in vocabulary notebooks
Step 5	Periodically ask students to discuss the terms with one another
Step 6	Involve students in games that enable them to play with the terms and reinforce word knowledge

(Marzano & Simms 2013)

2013). Each page of a chosen book is mounted to a board. Underneath each board is a bucket of items that are important to the story. The students walk to each numbered board. A helper reads the text, and each student collects one of the items in the bucket. When they come back to class, the students order the items and orally retell the story.

Structured lessons with PowerPoint

Choose a text and create a list of challenging vocabulary. Find real pictures to match the words. Make up and tell a story to match the words. Students can 'turn and talk' about what has been shared with them and what they have learned. As a memory activity, students list the new vocabulary.

Picture talk

Print a picture to match an essential word to a story. For this example, the text *Schumann the shoeman* (Danalis & Danalis 2009) was chosen. Students connect with and understand the word *cobbler*.

Students respond to stimulus questions such as:

- What can you see in the picture? Let's label it.
- What do you already know about what you see in the picture? Who makes shoes?
- What might you learn more about if you read a book containing this picture?
- What type of text does this picture come from? How do you know?
- What do the following phrases from the book mean? For example, 'promenade the footpath' and 'like clouds to walk on', in the context of shoes.



Five-word activity

This activity is adapted from an online tool called 'vocab foldable' (Candler 2016). It is similar to using the Frayer model (Lupiani 2016). These resources engage students in learning about words and being conscious of what we know about them.

Process:

1. Pick five words from a text you will read.
2. Choose topic words that will present a challenge.
3. (Students do not see the text.) Ask students to show their knowledge of each word.
 - Write a synonym.
 - Define the word.
 - Write the word in a sentence.
 - Use the word in a sentence as a cloze.
 - Sketch the word.
4. Teachers explicitly teach how to use the work sheet.

Provide a proforma for students to keep a record of their work. After completing that task, ask students to make a prediction about what they think the text is going to be about. Show them the front cover. Discuss. Go back to the record sheet and add new ideas or change original definitions. Now read the first page of the text. Highlight the new vocabulary on the page. Go back to the original record sheet and add more ideas about the five key words. Extend this activity to include some comprehension questions about the text containing the new vocabulary.

Word knowledge

Select words to engage students in word investigation activities. This strategy aids comprehension. Lesson ideas (WGBH Educational Foundation 2002) using the book *Click clack moo, cows that type*, and using the words *note* and *farm*:

- **note** – has more than one meaning. It can be a noun or a verb. Compound words include notebook, notepaper, notepad
- **farm** – list/discuss what students know about farms. Discuss different types of farms. Farm can be a noun or a verb. The

word farm can be morphed – farms, farmer, farming, etc. Compound words include farmhand, farmhouse.

In conclusion, the critical feature of an effective comprehension program is explicit and systematic vocabulary instruction. The activities listed above will support the explicit and systematic vocabulary instruction required to improve reading comprehension.

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