

Contents

Introduction

DEVELOPING A COMPREHENSIVE VOCABULARY PROGRAM

- Defining Types of Vocabulary
- Reference Chart for Vocabulary Types

PROVIDING RICH AND VARIED LANGUAGE EXPERIENCES

- Read, Reflect, Respond, & Remember
- Word Talk with Word Questioning
- Words from the Inside Out

TEACHING INDIVIDUAL WORDS

- 5 W's and H of Knowing a Word
- Comparison by Analysis
- Word Logs
- Multiple-Meaning Words: From General to Domain-Specific Knowledge
- Naming and Knowing Text Features
- Collecting Topic-Specific Language for Writing
- Preview/Prediction Vocabulary Guide
- Word Webs
- Words in Context Plus
- Graphically Organized Learning: Integration, Repetition, and Meaningful Use

TEACHING WORD-LEARNING STRATEGIES

- How to Use Internal Context Clues: Prefixes, Root Words, Suffixes
- How to Use External Context Clues to Learn New Words
- How to Use Resources to Support Learning New Words

FOSTERING WORD CONSCIOUSNESS

- Using the Just-Right Word: Arrays of Word Meanings
- Word-Rich Instruction

APPENDIX

(• indicates a reproducible form in the appendix.)



Hawker Brownlow Education

Introduction

I don't think my handwriting has improved because I have been doing it "half fast."

—Fourth grader's self-assessment

If I were assessing my teaching of vocabulary, I would have to admit that my assessment would be similar to this fourth grader's self-assessment of his progress. Knowing no other options, I tried to teach and assess knowledge of words in the same ways I had been taught. Our district used programmed-vocabulary books and it seemed an "efficient" way to teach vocabulary. The troubling aspect for me was that students seldom used the words in their writing or speaking. I felt what I was doing wasn't really increasing their vocabulary, but I didn't know what else to do. I fell into the trap of seeing vocabulary as something we did but not part of everything we did.

The purpose of this text is to develop a deeper understanding for effective academic vocabulary instruction and provide you with tools to help your students learn new words, become more conscious of words, and increase competence in knowing when and how to use the words. Like the two previous flipcharts I've written—Tools for Teaching Content Literacy and More Tools for Teaching Content Literacy—Tools for Teaching Academic Vocabulary is not designed to provide you with a program. It is designed to provide you with resources to create your own program that meets the needs of your students and your learning goals, as well as the demands of rigorous texts and high-stakes assessments.

Tools for Teaching Academic Vocabulary begins with Developing a Comprehensive Vocabulary Program, which is an overview of the components of a research-based vocabulary program (Graves 2000, 2006). This is followed by Defining Types of Vocabulary: General Academic; Domain- or Discipline-Specific; Topic-Specific; and Passage-Critical (Text-Specific), with a quick reference chart (Reference Chart for Vocabulary Types) that highlights the salient characteristics for each type of vocabulary.

Following these introductory materials, you will find the instructional tools I have included to support teaching academic vocabulary. For ease of use, the tools are ordered based on the four components of effective vocabulary instruction. An overview page is provided for each of the four components followed by tools that can be used to develop effective instruction for that component.

As educators, we know it will take a wide variety of resources to ensure that all students experience the power of knowing and choosing the right word for any task. It is my hope that this resource will add to your existing repertoire for accomplishing that goal.

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Developing a Comprehensive Vocabulary Program

It is certainly possible to know the what of a thing without knowing the how or when of it.

—P. A. Alexander, D. L. Schallert, and V. C. Hare, “Coming to Terms”

With each new wave of literacy reform, we seem to know more of the “what” of vocabulary instruction without clearly knowing the “how” or “when” of that instruction. The publication and widespread adoption of the Common Core State Standards (2010) have heightened the discussion about the importance of effective teaching of vocabulary. However, all state standards include standards focused on increased knowledge of language. In spite of the pressure to meet and exceed standards, many educators say that creating a comprehensive vocabulary program that is effective, efficient, and engaging still eludes them.

Fortunately, today we have access to a great deal of research that documents and describes components of a comprehensive vocabulary program. Understanding these components and knowing how to focus instruction so all components support word learning in every classroom is critical. The components are not grade-level or discipline specific and should apply to any words you want students to learn. You may want to use the organizer on page A1 in the appendix (Graves 2006) to guide discussion and assess the degree to which these components are established and used in your classrooms.

1. Providing Rich and Varied Language Experiences: This component is a cornerstone for all instruction. If students have access, including time, to read, discuss, and write a wide variety of texts, they will encounter many unfamiliar words. The chart below shows the potential benefits (Nagy and Herman 1987).

Amount of Reading	Number of Days Reading	Number of Words Encountered	Number of Unfamiliar Words Encountered	Annual Gain in Vocabulary
25 minutes/day	200	1,000,000	15,000–30,000	700–1,500 words

2. Teaching Individual Words: Teaching individual words that are essential to content is critical, but the sheer volume of words that would need to be taught is overwhelming. Stahl and Fairbanks summarized the problem: “Since a vocabulary teaching program typically teaches 10 to 12 words a week or about 400 a year, of which perhaps 75% or 300 are learned, vocabulary

instruction is not adequate to cope with the volume of new words that children need to learn and do learn without instruction” (1986, 100).

- 3. Teaching Word-Learning Strategies:** This component is based on the importance of supporting students in becoming independent word learners. Vygotsky’s words, “What a child can do in cooperation today, he can do alone tomorrow” (1962, 104), aptly describe the necessity of students knowing and using a wide range of strategies for learning words independently.
- 4. Fostering Word Consciousness:** Word consciousness activities are often the most engaging part of word study. Many activities fall into this component: activities involving word play, researching and sharing word origins, and helping students become aware of the structure, subtleties, and use of language.

References

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5 W's and H of Knowing a Word

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you can make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master—that’s all.”

—Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*

What Is 5 W's and H of Knowing a Word?

As educators, we have all seen oral and written examples of students using sentences that indicate their knowledge of a word is one-dimensional or even incorrect. While these sentences can be extremely humorous, it is easy to see how shallow knowledge of a word could have a significant impact on comprehension. In *Teaching Mathematics Vocabulary in Context*, Murray highlights the complexity of knowing a word: “Constructing word knowledge involves developing meaning over time through many rich encounters in a variety of contexts, and using a variety of strategies, ranging from incidental references to direct instruction” (2004, 23). The graphic organizer on page A6 in the appendix provides students with a series of considerations when learning new words. Each of the sentence-starter words in the first column is extended into a question about the target word. The completed one shown here contains the questions I used, but a blank one is provided on page A7 of the appendix so you can create question extensions that support learning vocabulary in your content area.

How Could the 5 W's and H of Knowing a Word Work in the Classroom?

Use the graphic organizer to guide your students through steps they can take to gain in-depth knowledge of a word.

1. Introduce students to the lesson by sharing some examples of misused words in order to illustrate the importance of knowing a word. If you don't have examples, there are many on websites such as <http://examples.yourdictionary.com/examples/examples-of-malapropism.html>.
2. Explain to students that with the widespread use of academic vocabulary across all disciplines, in conversations, and in testing situations, it is critical that they have deep knowledge of these words. Give them a few examples of general academic words and ask them to add others commonly used in their classes.
3. Use the organizer and guide students through one of the general academic or discipline-specific words used in a text or on an assessment. For a general academic word such as *interpret*, I would modify the questions as shown on page A8 in the

appendix. When possible, choose a word that is naturally occurring in a text or task for the day.

4. Brainstorm other ways students could know a word. In Sprenger's book *Teaching the Critical Vocabulary of the Common Core* (2013), she provides several ways for students to know words: definition, synonyms, jingles that demonstrate knowledge of the word, movement activities, and examples. You may want to add these to the strategies students offer.
5. Give students time to add this general academic word to their word cards or academic notebooks.
6. Take the opportunity to revisit previous words as new words are taught. Occasionally, give students a chance to note examples of the word being used in other classes or contexts.

When and Why Should I Use Knowing a Word?

Whether you have created a schoolwide list of general academic words or created a list for your discipline, I would recommend you teach a new word every two or three days. This work is important for all students but it is critical for students in poverty. In Jensen's *Engaging Students with Poverty in Mind* (2013), he notes that low socioeconomic status puts children at risk for academic failure. This makes the teacher's role even more critical in their lives. Jensen says: “Academic vocabulary—the vocabulary students need in order to understand the concepts and content taught in the various subject areas and to succeed on tests—is particularly critical. Teachers must be relentless about using nonverbal communication, visual aids, and context to add meaning and incorporate vocabulary building with engagement activities whenever appropriate” (2013, 12). The importance of this became clear to me when working in state assessment testing. I realized that if students know the content but not what they are being asked to do, they will struggle in school—and in standardized testing.

References

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Words in Context Plus

Key to this concern is to understand that no formula exists for selecting age-appropriate vocabulary words despite lists that identify “fifth-grade words” or “seventh-grade words.” There is simply no basis for determining which words students should be learning at different grade levels.

—I. L. Beck, M. D. McKeown, and L. Kucan, *Bringing Words to Life*

What Is Words in Context Plus?

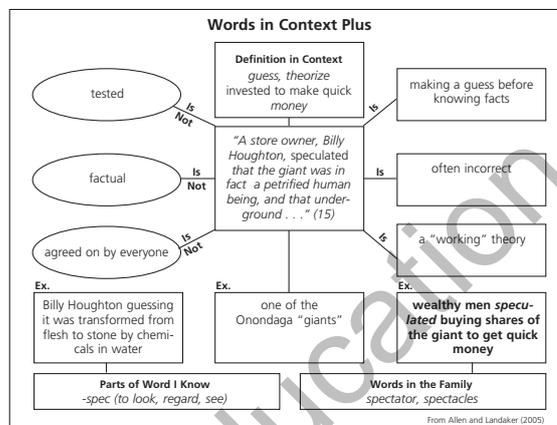
Words in Context Plus is a word web that supports students in learning an individual word: what it is, what its characteristics are and are not, and what its word families are; a blank version is included on page A26 in the appendix. I had used my original version of a word web, Words in Context (Allen 1999), for many years when I began conducting research in Christine Landaker’s middle school social studies classroom. Christine was using a modified version of Words in Context: she eliminated the nonexample category and added categories for noting parts of the word as well as its word families. With these additions, Words in Context Plus became more generative in terms of students learning other words because they were in the word family of the target word. Graves summarizes the research by noting: “Vocabulary instruction is most effective when it is rich, deep, and extended” (2009, 6). Using Words in Context Plus is one way to provide students with “rich, deep, and extended” learning.

How Could Words in Context Plus Work in the Classroom?

When teaching individual words, the sequence of instruction will vary depending on the time you are able to devote and the emphasis the word will require. A typical sequence with the target word speculated is outlined here, and a completed organizer is shown in the figure. Italicized words in the figure indicate prereading; nonitalicized words indicate postreading. The example is based on a quote from Murphy’s *The Giant and How He Humbugged America* (2012).

- Before reading, display the organizer and provide students with individual copies or ask them to sketch the organizer in their vocabulary notebooks.
- Identify the target word as speculated. Give students a short time to discuss the word as it is used in this context.
- If applicable, highlight the parts of the word and brainstorm other words in its family.
- Determine and note a working definition for the word. Note words students come up with in prereading in italics or highlight in some way.
- After reading, return to the organizer and ask students to expand the definition by noting what it is and what it is not. Change cells to match the word (e.g., can/cannot, would/would not) if necessary.

- Revisit the organizer when new encounters with the word occur. Bold in the figure indicates a new definition and use of the word.



When and Why Should I Use Words in Context Plus?

There are many versions of graphic organizers that help students learn passage-critical words, and they all have a common element: they take time. Words in Context Plus, like many word-exploration organizers, could and should be modified to meet the depth and breadth of word knowledge needed to support comprehension. Graves notes several considerations when deciding how much emphasis (and time) to place on teaching individual words. “It is important to realize that all word-learning tasks are not the same; in fact, the task of learning a word can vary a great deal from one word to another” (2009, 15–16). He notes four criteria when considering how much emphasis and time you would choose to spend on an individual word: conceptual difficulty; students’ prior knowledge of the word; how well you want them to know the word; and, what you want them to be able to do with the word.

It is absolutely necessary that individual words be taught as part of any comprehensive vocabulary program. Given time limitations, it is also necessary to make sure the most important words are chosen for in-depth instruction. The rule of thumb for me is deciding if a word is critical to comprehension and it will be encountered in other texts and used frequently in other classes and life. If so, this type of organizer will help students develop a deeper knowledge of this high-utility word.

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Word-Rich Instruction

Rich instruction is very open-ended; it is not some particular set of activities but rather any activity that gets students to use, think about, and become involved with words. The major concept is to provoke thought.

—M. D. McKeown and I. L. Beck, “Direct and Rich Vocabulary Instruction”

What Is Word-Rich Instruction?

As McKeown and Beck note, rich instruction is open ended. While each teacher might develop very different strategies for enriching all components of a comprehensive vocabulary program, the common denominator will be that students will experience an enriched environment where they are immersed in interesting language. They will learn in classrooms filled with texts that use language in ways that make students want to read one book after another. They will learn from teachers who enjoy language, and they will want to emulate that language.

How Could Word-Rich Instruction Work in the Classroom?

Unlike the other specific activities and strategies highlighted in this text, there is no formula for what word-rich instruction might look like in your classroom. Some examples of activities that help create word-rich environments follow.

- Begin class some days with word or critical thinking puzzles. While you won’t find this type of activity in state standards documents, it is amazing to see how those three or four minutes can take students from lethargic to energetic. Puzzles can be found in lateral-thinking books, on the Internet, and from companies such as www.mindware.com. They will highlight interesting ways to help students become intrigued with words and learn mnemonic devices for remembering words. For example, you might ask your students what the following words have in common: banana, dresser, grammar, potato, revive, uneven, voodoo, assess.* Or, ask them to interpret these mnemonic devices: “Please Excuse My Dear Aunt Sally” (order of operations in math); “Kids Prefer Cheese Over Fried Green Spinach” (order of taxonomy in biology); or, “Now I Need a Verse Recalling Pi” (a way to remember the first six digits of Pi).
- Begin some days with definition poetry such as those you would find in Michael Salinger’s *Well-Defined Vocabulary in Rhyme* (2009), and ask students to write their own definition poems for general academic or domain-specific vocabulary words.
- Show clips of speeches, talk shows, or news reports, and give students the opportunity to identify propaganda techniques as elements of persuasion: simplification, fallacy, ambiguous words, emotional appeal, hot/cold words, innuendo, exaggeration, bandwagon, and double talk.
- Develop lessons focused on language register. In the activity *Whose Talk? Understanding Language Register* (see page A49 of the appendix), students are challenged to identify street talk or slang, define the words or phrases, translate the words into Standard English, and identify contexts for both types of

language. The example in the figure is based on language used in Aronson and Smith’s *Pick-Up Game* (2011). Use informal language from any text as an introductory activity to segue into changing language register for audience and purpose in writing and speaking.

- Create language activities for student collaboration and friendly competition. Students are always more engaged with language activities that offer time to talk and create challenges for other students. Teaching collective nouns with an activity such as *A Pod of Dolphins?* is one example of an interesting way to study grammar and usage. A sample version is on page A50 of the appendix, and a blank version appears on page A51. This activity can be extended to a lesson on single and plural nouns and subject-verb agreement.

Street Talk or Slang	Definition	Standard English	Context for Use
front us/fronting	an advance of money before anything else can happen	Provide some up-front capital as an investment.	If I’m hanging out with a friend and he wants us to do something, we would ask him to front us. If I want investors like on Shark Tank, I would ask for up-front capital as an investment against profit.
sweeten the pot run-mouth dude chick skinhead “bumped out” clocked			

When and Why Should I Use Word-Rich Instruction?

Word-rich instruction is a significant part of fostering word consciousness. It can be a natural part of all that you do, and it can also be planned as support for your instruction. As students become more interested in language, you will find that you won’t have to plan as many activities as they will be providing much of the enriched language use in the classroom. McKeown and Beck continue their support of rich instruction with these words: “Give students a variety of information—examples, contexts, pictures, relationships. Then have them engage in interactions—create contexts, compare features of words, explain their reasoning, and discuss meanings and uses” (2004, 21). Fostering word consciousness in these ways forms the foundation for learning all types of academic language.

*Did you figure it out? Move the first letter of each word to the end of the word and you have the same word when read in reverse (e.g., banana—ananab).

References

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