

Words! Words! Words!

Best Practices in Vocabulary Instruction



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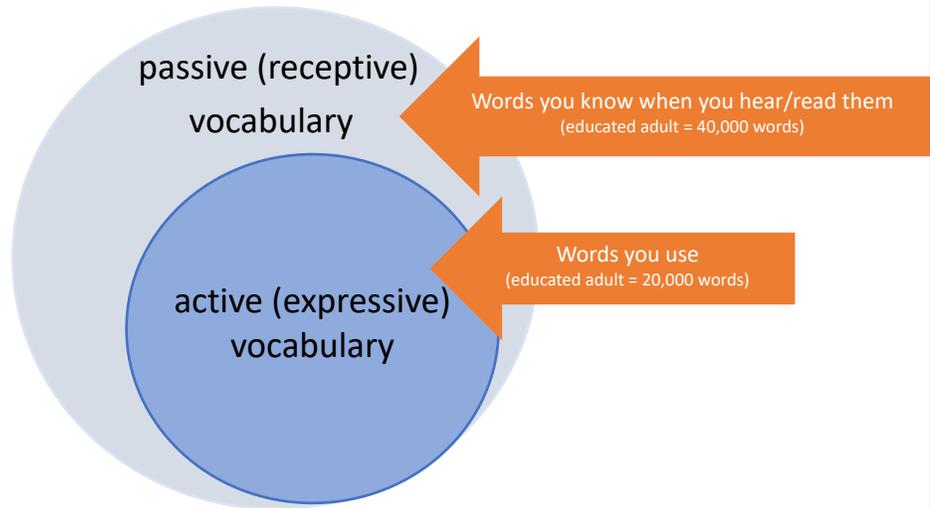
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1

Framing Our Discussion

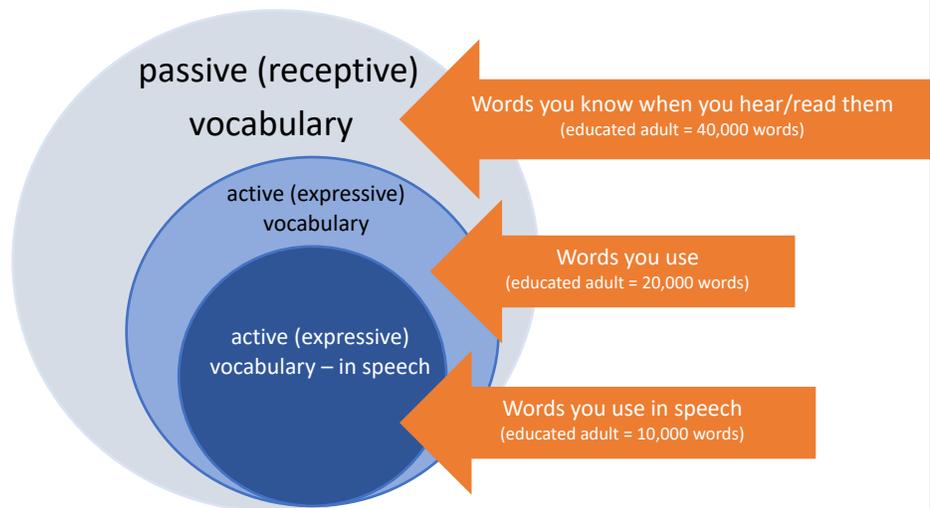
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Passive & Active Vocabulary



3

Active Vocabulary: Writing & Speaking



5

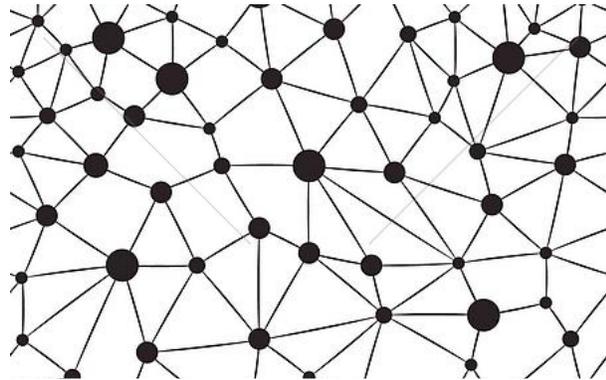
Vocabulary in the Brain

Old view of vocabulary in the brain...

- Words matched with their definitions

New, more sophisticated and realistic view...

- Words related to other words, experiences with those words, etc.
- Not about “I know it” or “I don’t know it”
- Knowledge in layers and associations



7

Vocabulary For Reading But Also For Writing

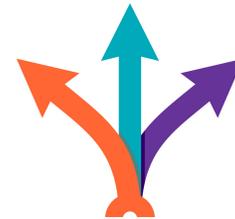
- Through 3rd grade, vocabulary is primarily learned through oral language.
- Starting in 4th grade, most words we learn are through reading.

For Reading:

McKeown et al (2017) note that “the lynchpin of deep comprehension is word knowledge” (Perfetti & Adlof, 2015 as cited in McKeown et al, 2017, 2).

For Writing:

Vocabulary also affects writing quality. Strong vocabulary in writers begins to vary by genre, reflecting variances in writing expectation based on genre (Olinghouse & Graham, 2009; Olinghouse & Wilson, 2013 as cited in McKeown et al 2017).



8

Vocabulary Loop (Duff, Tomblin, & Catts, 2015)

- If you have a larger vocabulary, it makes reading easier.
- If you read more, you build vocabulary.
- It's a positive cycle—but it functions in strong readers and/or students with strong vocabularies.
- In other words, the strong get stronger while weak get weaker.
- Good readers "flesh out" meanings of new words through repeated but varying exposures. Since weaker readers don't do that, we need to teach words quite deeply.
- So, what does deep instruction look like?



9

Why vocabulary is undertaught and poorly taught

"Expertise depends on developing new ways to see and label the world" (4).

Most teachers see vocabulary as important, but most also neglect it in instruction. Stahl and Nagy (2006 as cited in McKeown et al 2017) note that teachers often "think of vocabulary as separate from higher-order language processes," which means they avoid it in favor of other activities misperceived as more valuable and also that instruction is often perceived as looking up definitions and writing definitions (6).

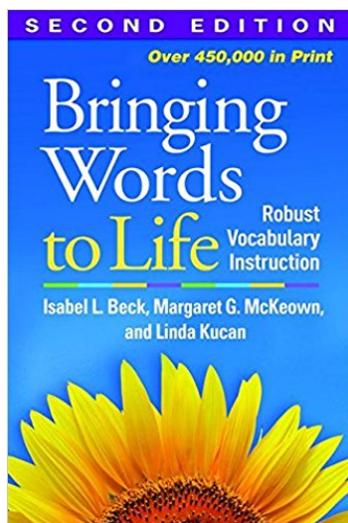
Vocabulary instruction takes time.



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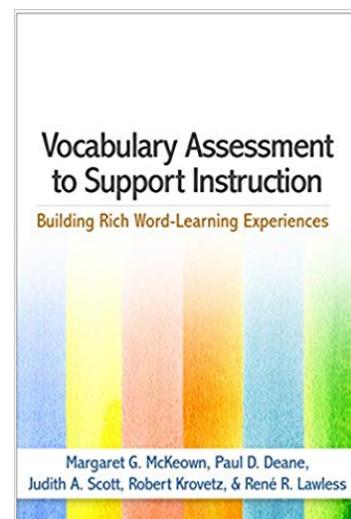
Word Selection

11



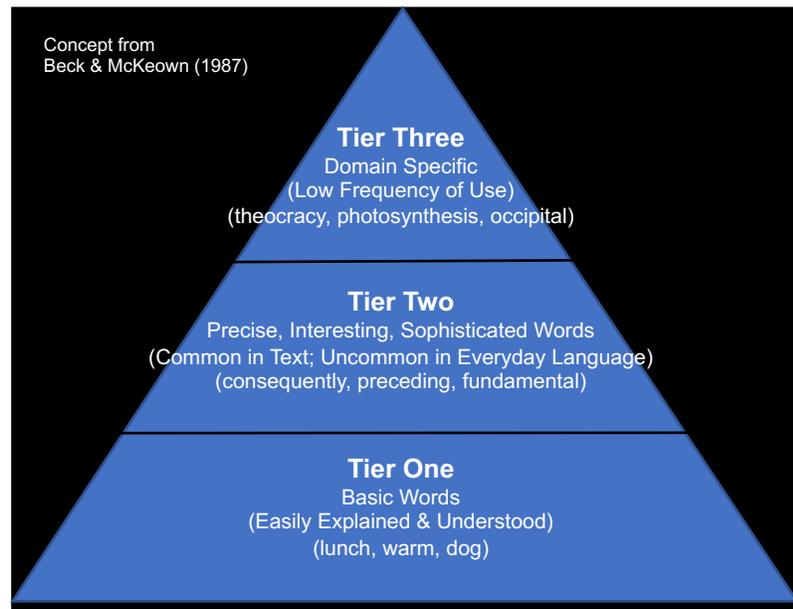
If you haven't read *Bringing Words to Life*, you need to. This book will change how you *think about* vocabulary. More importantly, it will change how you *teach* it. The much-expanded 2nd edition was published in 2013.

McKeown, one of the book's coauthors, is also coauthor to *Vocabulary Assessment to Support Instruction*, a deeper dive into the *relationship* between vocabulary assessment and instruction.



12

Three Tier Vocabulary Model



13

How to Choose...

Younger students...

- Read-alouds, rather than books they are reading.
- 6-10 words a week, but not introduced all at the same time. (Beck et al, 2013)

Older students...

- From books they're reading.
- 10 words a week, but not introduced all at the same time.
- 10 exposures each. (Stahl & Fairbanks, 1986)

14

Selection of Words:

1. Essential – got to have them to understand text
2. Top-of-the-class words
3. Tier Two, high impact words
 - Words that can be related to other words/experiences outside the text
 - Words that apply to multiple areas of study/interest
 - Teachable moment words – polysemy
4. Words that have interesting morphemes, or meaning parts, that can be used to build vocabulary beyond the text

15

Polysemy: A Deeper Look

16

Polysemy: How Do Students Make Use of It?

- First meanings are easier to retrieve.
- Secondary meanings are more difficult to retrieve.
- Stronger students (readers) access context to interpret secondary meanings and are able to make connections between those new contexts/meanings and their original understanding.
- Problematically, strugglers do not make this jump as readily or easily. Someone has to show them.

(McKeown et al, 72)

17

The Importance of Polysemy: Learning with Your Blinders On

Do you know the word deeply enough to understand it when you see it in a new context?

- “began a book” (author Louise Penny)
- pioneer
- segregation
- parallel
- relationship
- text

18

Prime—A Great Example of Polysemy

Remember, your knowledge of a word is based on your experiences hearing, reading, speaking, and writing it. Your knowledge *deepens* as you are exposed to the word over time. In particular, polysemy, or the existence of multiple meanings of a word, allows us to develop our understanding of a word's meaning over time, and perhaps over a lifetime. Polysemy is, in fact, a significant factor in vocabulary expansion in students (71).

The word prime provides a terrific example of polysemy.

19

Prime

So we deepen and expand our understanding, knowledge, and application of terms over a lifetime. Memorizing the definition of a word may (or in fact may not) begin that study—but it certainly isn't the end result.

When we learn words effectively, we are also learning how to learn words – so that we are more adept at learning new words later.

23

Vocabulary Journals

One recommendation is that students keep vocabulary journals. They “log” a word and its definition along with any accompanying information, which might include illustrations, experiences with the word, and so on. When the word comes up again, in another subject or in an experience outside the classroom—a discussion, a book, a movie, etc.—they return to the journal and add the new experience, expanding their understanding and application of the word.

24

Myth Busters: Dictionaries, Context, and More

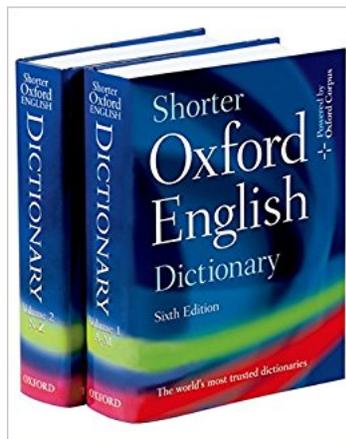
25

On Dictionaries

versatile – capable of or adapted for turning easily from one to another of various tasks, fields of endeavor, etc.
(dictionary.com – extracted 5/18)

26

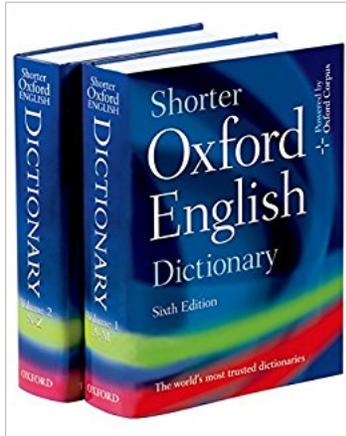
On Dictionaries



Traditional dictionaries and most basal readers do not provide accessible, useful definitions. They're meant for reference, not instruction. They presume metalinguistic knowledge – or the way words connect with experiences, text, the world.

29

On Dictionaries



No research indicates a positive effect from looking words up in a traditional dictionary.

Further, knowing a word doesn't mean knowing its definition.

Knowing a word means knowing how it functions with other words and how you can use it (and how you can't).

30

On Wide Reading...

Yes, wide reading is important, but...

Here's the problem.

The students most in need of vocabulary growth are unlikely to read widely...and to read widely in content needed.



Wide reading benefits students when...

- they read a lot.
- they read difficult enough text.
- they have the skills to infer word meaning.

31

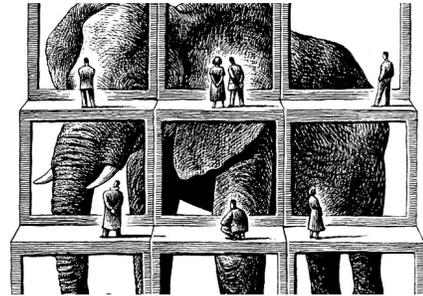
Context matters, but...

Yes, context matters...but direct instruction has a much stronger effect.

Here's the problem.

Often...

- meaning is not evident or obvious from the surrounding text.
- students who struggle most with vocabulary also struggle with word decoding and therefore may be unable to discern context even when provided.
- even when context is provided and understood, students may not retain meaning for other contexts.
- the strongest readers/writers get more out of context than weaker readers/writers, so the very students whose vocabulary you want to improve benefit least from the context clues that teachers often expect students to rely upon.



32

On incidental coverage...

- Many good teachers think incidental exposure will accomplish a lot.
- It's real and natural, it occurs during instruction, and it's embedded in content—all good.

Here's the problem...

- It's useful for stronger readers who are honing solid knowledge of language, but not for strugglers.
- There aren't enough repetitions for anyone except strong readers; there isn't enough emphasis to help strugglers.
- Teachers tend not to do incidental vocabulary coverage as much as they think they do.

33

On using words in sentences...

- Many good teachers believe the best way for students to show knowledge of a word is to use it in a sentence.
- It's a genuine, application activity, it helps students anchor their knowledge of a word in their own context, and it allows them to practice with how they might use it in the future in their own thinking and writing—all good.

Here's the problem...

- Application is one of the highest-level tasks used to practice vocabulary.
- You can have a decent understanding of the meaning of a word and fail miserably at using it in a sentence.

34

On using words in sentences...

Examples of usage errors from a 9th grader's work:

- The funeral was full of **solace** after the coffin was buried into the ground.
- I took a long **strode** to second base so that I would not get out.
- I have been told I have many **droll** personalities that no one has ever seen.

63% of students' sentences were judged to be "odd" (Miller & Gildea, 1985).

60% of students' sentences were judged unacceptable (McKeown, 1991, 93).

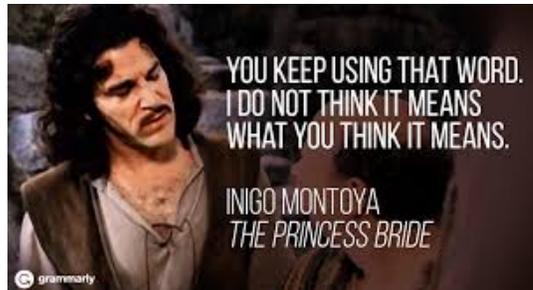
- See the problem? We'll come back to this during the best practices portion of our project to discuss some solutions.

35

Don't ask...

“What do you think _____ means?”

Why? When would it be okay?



36

A Sampling of Best Practices...

37

First – a “word conscious classroom...”

Keep your eye on the ball

- Improve understanding/comprehension
- Improve ability to express in speech/writing
- Improve ability to explore words on your own – metalinguistics – giving them the tools to do this for themselves

Your attitude matters

- Word play – using smart words, particular uses of words – modeling with intentional use of powerful, meaningful words...
- Aim for breadth but more importantly depth – fewer words, more deeply
- Aim for not just more words, but more precise use of words
- Yes, this takes time! Systematic, focused vocabulary instruction – a curiosity about words.

38

Some good practices

Discuss how authors use vocabulary to convey a message.

- Deep dive; takes time.
- Typically done once you’ve finished reading...so you don’t kill the flow of the text.
- Positive effect shown in students’ writing

Build into your peer editing/revising practices...

- Is there a better word for this? Or a different word for this? What other word could go here?

39

Alter the definition each time...

contemplate

- consider
- look at carefully
- think about for the future
- consider all the angles of
- meditate on

40

Continuum Vocabulary Activity

smart	shrewd
intelligent	insightful
clever	brainy
fast	wise
sharp	bright
astute	brilliant

41

Word Knowledge

1 Never encountered word
2 Heard word before but can't define it
3 Recognize word due to context or tone of voice
4 Able to use and understand but not explain word
5 Fluent with word – both use and definition

When you introduce a word, get kids to rank it on a scale of 1 to 5.

42

Teach ? Recall

From Teach to Recall – a Problem

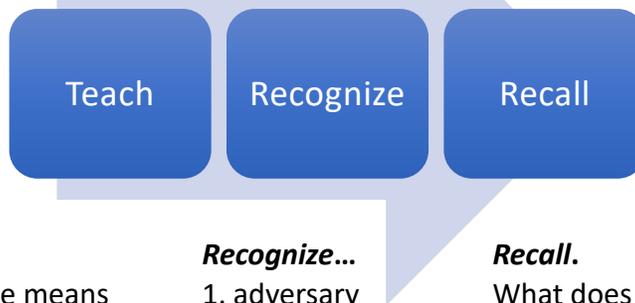
43

from Shirley A. Kokesh...



Recognize – The Missing Link

44



Teach...

- versatile means flexible
- clarification – not like touching your toes
- nuances, etc. – deep teaching.

Recognize...

1. adversary
2. brandish
3. diminish
4. ominous
5. versatile

Recall.

What does [versatile](#) mean?

45

finally...Apply...

- 1) Explain when you could use **versatile**.
- 2) Create a context for student sentences.

If using words in sentences isn't working, try sentence frames.

You might try...

The versatile student was able to...

or

Claudius acted maliciously when...

or

An exasperated player on the court might...

46

Create associations.

Define in student-friendly terms but also include words associated with the word in question.

dawn (n.)

user-friendly definition:

- first time you see light before the sun rises

associated words:

- morning, sunrise, walk, first light, beauty, jog, dew

47

Create associations.

Define in student-friendly terms but also include words associated with the word in question.

catastrophe – sudden and widespread
disaster (dictionary.com – extracted 5/18)

Wait a minute. Couldn't you just say
disaster? Or *major disaster*?

48

catastrophe
major disaster

Students and teacher...

- Pronounce it.
- Write it.
- Read it.
- Discuss it.

49

catastrophe
major disaster

Why wasn't spelling on the list?

- Spelling words should be words students frequently and readily use in their writing.
- Vocabulary words do NOT make good spelling words.

50

catastrophe
major disaster

- ✓ Teacher provides examples *interactively*.
- ✓ Students generate additional examples.
- ✓ Teacher uses it in sentences *interactively*.
- ✓ Students use it in a sentence.

Application continues throughout the week, the year, and the decade, ideally in multiple contexts.

51

A robust approach to vocabulary involves directly explaining the meanings of words along with thought-provoking, playful, and interactive follow-up.
(Beck et al, 2013)

52

Tier Two/Academic Vocabulary Lists

Coxhead, Averil. (2000). The Academic Word List.

<https://www.wgtn.ac.nz/lals/resources/academicwordlist>

Davis, Mark & Dee Gardner. (2013 to present). Academic Vocabulary Lists.

<https://www.academicwords.info/>

Resources Worth Exploring

Etymology website. etymonline.com

Cobuild. collinsdictionary.com

Corpus of Contemporary American English. english-corpora.org.

Longman Dictionary. ldoceonline.com

Onelook. onelook.com.

Reverso Dictionary. mobile-dictionary.reverso.net

Visual Thesaurus. visualthesaurus.com

Vocabulary Website. vocabulary.com

53

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