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Robust Vocabulary Instruction

by Dr. David W. Moore

Instruction that helps students develop the kind of broad and deep vocabulary knowledge they must have to achieve reading and academic success is important for all middle school students. For striving readers and for students who are learning English, it is essential (Carlo et al., 2004; Cummins, 2003; Cunningham & Moore, 1993).

Analyses of more than two decades of research (Blachowicz & Fisher, 2000; Baumann & Kame'enui, 2004; Graves, 2006; Nation, 1990; National Reading Panel, 2000; Torgesen et al., 2007) indicate that to be most effective in promoting students' vocabulary growth, instruction must include four key components.

1. Rich and Varied Language Experiences

Most word learning occurs incidentally through experiences with rich oral language and wide reading of varied materials (National Reading Panel, 2000).

For young children, quite naturally, the oral language that they hear and participate in at home is the major source of word learning. Once children begin school, the teacher talk they hear and the ways in which they are encouraged to use language to interact with teachers and classmates throughout the day become especially important contributors to vocabulary growth (e.g., Dickinson & Smith, 1994). When teachers use oral language that includes academic language structures and content-related words to talk with students, they contribute to this growth (e.g., Graves, Juel, & Graves, 2004).

Rich oral language experiences are essential to students' vocabulary growth. However, as students move through school, it is reading that becomes the principal source of vocabulary knowledge (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998). Indeed, some researchers consider the amount of reading

that students do to be the most powerful influence on their vocabulary development (e.g., Anderson & Nagy, 1992; Stahl, 1999). When students read a range of print materials—trade books, textbooks, reference sources, periodicals, web sites, and multimedia presentations—they gain access both to the meanings of unfamiliar words and information about how familiar words are used in different ways in different contexts.

To make new words “their own,” students benefit greatly from frequent and varied activities that allow them to use the words as they speak, read, and write (Marzano, 2004). Engaging students in collaborative content-rich tasks, regularly prompting them to elaborate their ideas, and supporting their efforts are all rich language experiences that are associated with vocabulary growth.

Inside Language, Literacy, and Content provides informative nonfiction and fiction selections that present key vocabulary through a range of oral and written language experiences. The selections shed light on many fascinating topics and are grouped in topical units so that students encounter ideas and information that relate to and build on each other. The selections also grow in difficulty, which allows students to encounter words in a logical sequence. Instructive videos introduce the selections, embedding the new words and concepts in stunning displays. Instruction related to the selections and videos leads students to interact with the teacher and the materials meaningfully and repeatedly throughout each unit.

A wide range of vocabulary activities and routines that involve students in content-rich collaborative tasks are included in **Inside Language, Literacy, and Content**. Routines encourage students to elaborate ideas and extend their use of words in ways that lead to consistent vocabulary growth.

*“A wide range
of vocabulary
activities and
routines . . .
involve students
in content-rich
collaborative
tasks.”*

2. Direct Teaching of Specific Words

Although instruction that includes rich and varied language experiences leads to vocabulary growth for many students, it is not the most effective way to teach meanings of specific key words that students need to gain full comprehension of a selection or concept. Direct teaching helps students to develop in-depth knowledge of these words (e.g., Beck, McKeown & Kucan, 2002). Such instruction is especially valuable for students who do not read or understand English well enough to acquire words through reading and listening alone.







To teach specific words directly requires carefully choosing the words for instruction, then bringing them to life in ways that allow students to gain permanent ownership of them. It means explaining word meanings so that students form connections with what they already know, detecting relationships as well as distinctions among known words. It means providing models of the correct usage of the words and repeated practice with variety that allows students to see and use new words across multiple contexts.

Key Vocabulary *Inside Language, Literacy, and Content* directly teaches specific words in its reading selections. Key Vocabulary, words that are essential to understanding a unit concept, appear before each reading selection. Key Vocabulary words are central to comprehension of the selection; they are also words that have personal value for students in classroom discussions and have high utility for future academic growth. Direct teaching of these words helps students to unlock meanings of both the words and of related words they will encounter in upcoming selections. Student friendly definitions and corresponding photographs accompany every key word.

Introductions to the words follow a consistent routine that calls for students to assess their knowledge of a word, pronounce and spell it, study its meaning, and connect the word to known words.

Academic Vocabulary Along with key words, the program also focuses on the direct teaching of **academic vocabulary**, words such as *sequence* and *transform*, that make up the distinctive language of school (Hyland & Tse, 2007).

Vocabulary Routines Throughout the units, instructional routines lead students to gain control of specific words through actions such as graphically organizing them, comparing them with synonyms and antonyms, and using them orally and in writing. Students connect the words to their lives and to the selections' and units' topics. Twelve vocabulary routines are featured in the Teacher Editions and are used repetitively throughout the levels. Repetitive use of these routines helps students internalize the habits of thinking about, exploring, and connecting words. Students' mastery of Key Vocabulary and Academic Vocabulary is also assessed regularly throughout the program.

Key Words		
cell (sel) noun page 273  A cell is the smallest working part of a living thing. People are made up of millions of cells . Related Word: cellular	circulate (sur-kū-lāt) verb page 279  When something circulates , it moves along a path that returns to the place it started. Blood circulates throughout your body. Related Words: circle, circuit	examine (ig-zam-un) verb page 273  When you examine something, you look at it very closely. A doctor examines you to make sure you are healthy. Related Words: examination, exam
involve (in-vahiv) verb page 276  To be involved means to be part of something. A team involves people working together. Related Words: include, involve	organ (or-gun) noun page 273  An organ is a body part that has a certain job to do. Your heart and lungs are important organs .	oxygen (ahk-si-jun) noun page 276  Oxygen is the air we breathe. We use extra oxygen to exercise.

Striking photographs, student friendly definitions, and links between each photograph and definition accompany every key word.

3. Instruction in Independent Word-Learning Strategies

Proficient readers know many more words than the ones they are taught directly (Anderson & Nagy, 1992). They learn these words independently by applying strategies that help them to figure out the meaning of the unfamiliar words they encounter as they engage in rich and varied language experiences. *Contextual analysis* and *morphemic analysis* are two powerful independent word-learning strategies that proficient readers use (Harmon, 2000; Lubliner & Smetana, 2005; Nagy, Berninger, & Abbott, 2006).

Contextual Analysis Analyzing the context of an unfamiliar word to clarify its meaning involves the active use of the text and illustrations that surround the word (Edwards, Font, Baumann & Boland, 2004; Stahl & Nagy, 2006). Proficient readers begin to use contextual analysis when they determine that they do not know a word (e.g., "I don't understand *hitched* in 'They got hitched.'"). They then look back in the selection, rereading for clues to the word's meaning that they might have missed, and they look forward, reading on for new information that might help. They search the context for particular types of clues, such as definitions, examples, and restatements that clarify word meanings. They adjust their rates of reading, slowing down or speeding up, to find the information that they need.

Morphemic Analysis Morphemes are meaningful word parts, such as prefixes, bases, roots, and suffixes. Knowledge of morphemes plays a valuable role in word learning because it provides readers with information they can use to examine unfamiliar words and figure out their meanings (Edwards, Font, Baumann & Boland, 2004; Stahl & Nagy, 2006).

Proficient readers use morphemic analysis in several ways. They begin by noting a word's use in context ("Distances



among the stars are just incredible!”). They break the word into parts (*in* + *cred* + *ible*) and assign meaning to each part (*in* = not, *cred* = believe, *ible* = can be done). Then they use the word-part meanings to put the word together again (“cannot be believed”) to see if this meaning makes sense in the selection. Proficient readers also use morphemic analysis to identify words that are derived from a common base word (e.g., *night* as in *midnight*, *nightly*, *nightshirt*) or root (e.g., *cred* as in *credo*, *credential*, *incredible*) to determine word meanings. Second-language learners who are proficient readers in their first language use morphemic analysis to identify morphemes in words that have first-language cognates (e.g., English-Spanish pairs: *continent/continente*, *history/historia*) (August & Shanahan, 2006).

Direct Instruction in Word-Learning Strategies

Inside Language, Literacy, and Content teaches a wide range of independent word-learning strategies, including contextual and morphemic analysis. Each unit begins with a Focus on Vocabulary that explicitly teaches a word-learning strategy and how to use it. This strategy is then carried through the unit in a scaffolded instructional plan. In each selection the teacher first models the strategy explicitly, guides the students in using it, and then provides opportunities for students to apply the strategy on their own. Strategies developed in the program include Using Word Parts, Relating Words, Using Context Clues, Using Context for Multiple Meaning Words, Going Beyond the Literal Meaning, Using Word Origins, and others.

4. Opportunities to Promote Word Consciousness

Word consciousness is an awareness of and interest in words, their meanings, and their various uses (Graves & Watts-Taffe, 2002; Scott & Nagy, 2004). Students who are conscious of words regularly note them in different settings and grasp their individualities. They enjoy and play with words and eagerly learn new ones. Helping students to develop an interest in words goes far in promoting both their vocabulary growth and their lifelong reading success.

Inside Language, Literacy, and Content promotes word consciousness in many ways. It regularly calls attention to interesting word origins. It presents homographs and homophones as well as borrowed, blended, and clipped words. It highlights the multiple meanings of many words, focusing often on the ways figurative language and idioms go beyond words’ literal meanings. Dictionary use is encouraged, but is presented in authentic situations. Students are encouraged throughout the program to explore and become excited about words and to use them with increasing skill. They are also encouraged to respect and value the word knowledge they bring with them from the world outside of school. Literature selections include many examples of young people valuing their diverse linguistic heritages. Instructional activities include many opportunities for students to talk and write about what they know, to produce personal dictionaries, and to relate their personal experience to academic work. All of these features support striving readers in connecting with the vocabulary they learn in school and developing the habit of exploring and enjoying words.

The image shows a spiral-bound notebook with two pages from a 'Focus on Vocabulary' unit. The left page is titled 'Unit 3 FOCUS ON VOCABULARY' and contains sections for 'Objectives', 'Connect', 'Teach/Model', and 'Practice'. The right page is titled 'Focus on Vocabulary' and contains sections for 'Use Word Parts', 'Academic Vocabulary', and 'Multi-Level Strategies'. The notebook has a spiral binding in the center.

Unit 3 FOCUS ON VOCABULARY

OBJECTIVES

- Use Academic Vocabulary: *define*
- Strategy: Use Word Parts (Compound Words and Suffixes)

CONNECT

Tag Prior Knowledge Ask: What are the parts of a *leaflet*? How do they work together? Explain that longer words have parts that work together.

Focus Tell students that in this unit they will learn to use word parts to *define* words.

TEACH/MODEL

Use Word Parts Introduce Read aloud the introduction. Show how word parts make up a longer word.

- Write *helpful* and say: Look at the base word *help*. *Help* is a verb that means to make things easier for someone.
- Add the suffix *-ful* and say: The suffix *-ful* changes the *definition* of *help* to “to be of help.” The new word *helpful* is an adjective that describes a person. For example, *A helpful person makes a job easier*.

Work through the examples on p. 128 in the same way.

How the Strategy Works Model and Sum Up Read the directions aloud and work through the steps. Then read the passage aloud. Reread the first sentence. Use the terms *sum* and *up* to work through the *Strategy in Action*.

For the other underlined words, have students:

- say the base word in isolation, or in the case of a compound word, say the two smaller words in isolation.
- listen as you model combining the meanings of the word parts to *define* the underlined word.

REMEMBER Read the statement and ask: How can you use the meanings of word parts? Lead a choral response (PDS) to figure out the meaning of an unknown word.

Focus on Vocabulary

Use Word Parts

Some English words are made up of meaningful parts, including *base words* and *suffixes*. A base word makes sense alone, with no other parts attached to it. A suffix is a word part that comes at the end of a word. It changes the meaning of a word or how the word is used.

Sometimes you can put two or more smaller words together to form a *compound word*.

The suffix *-ly* means “in a certain way.” Everything is a compound word.

base word + suffix = compound word

time + ly = timely

study + ing = studying

study means “to try to learn.” Studying means “to try to learn in a certain way.”

How the Strategy Works

When you read, you may come to a word that you don’t know. Look for word parts that help you *define* the word.

1. Look at words nearby for clues to the word’s meaning.
2. Break down the word into meaningful parts.
3. Think about the meaning of each part.
4. Put the meanings together to *define* the whole word.
5. See if the meaning makes sense.

Follow the strategy to *define* each underlined word.

REMEMBER Sometimes you can use word part clues to figure out the meaning of a whole word.

Academic Vocabulary

- *define* (to tell what something is)
- *sum up* (to tell what a person thinks)

Academic Vocabulary

Use the Make Words Your Own routine (PDS).

1. Pronounce *define* and have students repeat it.
2. Study Examples—Read the student-friendly definition aloud. Provide additional examples:
 - *define* You can use a dictionary to *define* an unfamiliar word.
3. Encourage Elaboration—Use a prompt:
 - *define* How do you *define* kindness?
4. Practice the Words—Create an Idea Web.

Multi-Level Strategies

Vocabulary Strategy Supports

Intermediate

To help students explain using word parts to *define*, have them point to a compound word and complete these frames:

The base word is _____

I know that this word means _____

Together these words mean _____

Advanced

Have students look up words in dictionaries to verify base words and whole word *definitions*.

To help students explain how they used word parts, display an Academic Language Frame.

The base word is _____

The word part _____ means _____

Together these words mean _____

On Your Own

When answers indicate understanding, assign the independent practice.

Practice Book, p. 57

Each unit begins with a Focus on Vocabulary that explicitly teaches how to use a word-learning strategy.