

Effective Vocabulary Instruction

I. Vocabulary Knowledge

Learning, as a language based activity, is fundamentally and profoundly dependent on vocabulary knowledge. Learners must have access to the meanings of words that teachers, or their surrogates (e.g., other adults, books, films, etc.), use to guide them into contemplating known concepts in novel ways (i.e., to learn something new). Baker, Simmons, & Kame'enui, (1998)

There are roughly 88,700 word families used in books up to 12th grade. About half the words we read are the 107 words of highest frequency. Another 5,000 words account for the next 45%, so that 95% of the text we read consists of about 5,100 different words (Adams, 1990) as found in (Stahl, 1999). 300-500 words per year can reasonably be taught through direct instruction (8-10 words per week, 50 weeks per year). Most of these new words learned must come from context (Sternberg, 1987). ELL students rely more heavily on direct instruction.

Research-based Conclusions Undergirding Vocabulary Instruction

- Effective vocabulary instruction has to start early, in preschool, and continue throughout the school years (Nagy, 2005).
- Teaching vocabulary helps develop phonological awareness (Nagy, 2005) and reading comprehension (Beck, Perfetti, & McKeown, 1982).
- Vocabulary instruction needs to be long-term and comprehensive (Nagy, 2005) for ELLs (Carlo, August, & Snow, 2005; Calderón et al., 2005).
- Command of a large vocabulary frequently sets high-achieving students apart from less successful ones (Montgomery, 2000).
- The average 6-year-old has a vocabulary of approximately 8000 words, and learns 3000-5000 more per year (Senechal & Cornell, 1993).
- Vocabulary in kindergarten and first grade is a significant predictor of reading comprehension in the middle and secondary grades (Cunningham, 2005; Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997; Chall & Dale, 1995; Denton et al. 2011)

II. Effective Vocabulary Instruction

Efficacy of Direct Vocabulary Instruction

Vocabulary knowledge is said to be “probably the best single indicator of a person’s overall level of intelligence,” and, similarly, “intelligence is, quite simply, the ability to learn from context” (Sternberg, 1987). Acquiring vocabulary by inferring word meaning from context is not simply “knowledge,” but is a strategy that people apply on a daily basis in a world of boundless contexts that lack both definitions and explanations. It is well established that encountering new words through reading—prodigious reading—is the most common form of word acquisition, accounting for “half of annual vocabulary growth” (St. Clair Otten, 2003; Graves, 2006). Effectiveness, however, must be weighed against the time involved. Students must spend a large amount of time reading or listening in order to encounter new words often enough to understand their meanings. In “Teaching Vocabulary to Improve Reading Comprehension,” William Nagy cites a study that finds that uninstructed students have a one in-twenty chance of incidentally learning a new word only from context (1988). Students reading a ten-page short

story that contains twenty new words, therefore, will be fortunate to fully retain one vocabulary word from the text.

However, students read much more than short stories when they leave the classroom and are swept up in a data-rich world of text messages, email, web pages, television, and countless other contexts replete with new words they can add to the estimated 3,000 words students acquire annually (Nagy, 1988). More words being recognized does yield more retained words, but classroom time is necessarily limited to teaching only the words students need to know—not what they happen to acquire through reading. Class time must be reserved and used for the teaching of specific sets of high frequency, “added value” words based on their relevance to specific subjects or their occurrence on standardized assessment tests (Bates, 2008). Natural vocabulary learning is a perpetual, extracurricular process that requires time. Used alone, incidental context learning is not a realistic tool for primary vocabulary instruction, especially since few students are willing to study vocabulary outside the classroom; however, augmenting natural learning with direct instruction increases both the speed and accuracy of natural acquisition (St. Clair Otten, 2003; Nagy, 1988; Beck, McKeown & Omanson, 1987). Researchers who prize reading tend to agree that direct vocabulary instruction is essential to any good curriculum (Nelson, 2008; Kail, 2008 ; Marzano & Pickering, 2005; Marzano, 2010). Bromley holds that direct instruction is the most important influence to comprehension, while Marzano calls systematic instruction one of the “most crucial services that teachers can provide.”

Nagy simplifies instruction to a three-part approach based on integration, repetition, and meaningful use (1988):

1. Each word should be visited multiple times—(i.e. 5-10)--throughout the introduction, discussions, exercises, reviews, tests, etc. in each lesson; Instructional practice should strive to significantly exceed the recommended bare minimum frequency of three occurrences per new word (Beck, McKeown & Omanson, 1987).
2. In addition multiple exposure opportunities connected to individual and group instructional activities, student psychology and brain research dictates “short but frequent vocabulary activities” where the words are instructed (2003; 2008).
3. “Meaningful use,” is the third element of Nagy’s approach; it is a quality concern to ensure that word meanings will be retained and recalled easily—the essence of converting vocabulary knowledge into reading comprehension (Nagy, 1988). Students should be prompted to think about meanings of words in items such as: peer and class discussions, in-context exercises, open-ended sentence completions, and inference exercises. Writing prompts in close proximity to each lesson can also provide effective opportunities for meaningful use, further ensuring that students develop not just word knowledge, but also a strategy for “figuring out something about words” (Kameenui, Dixon & Carnine, 1987).

Key ingredients of successful vocabulary development involves the teaching of specific words AND providing direct instruction in word learning strategies.

Students should be provided extensive opportunities for reading wide and reading volume with accountability. Teachers should Pre-view texts to determine which words to teach; Pre-teach meaningful words and phrases; and Provide direct instruction and multiple exposures of the vocabulary in reading, writing, listening and speaking.

With effective vocabulary instruction, students:

- Learn words directly
- Receive explicit vocabulary instruction

- Construct definitions
- Analyze word structure
- Explore word relationships
- Receive multiple exposures and examples of words
- Engage high reading volume and are exposed to a high volume of language

Additionally, students learn indirectly through

- Listening to stories
- Teacher language
- Independent reading
- Listening to adult talk

Vocabulary instruction is NOT just:

- Teaching Dolch sight words
- Teaching decoding
- Having students guess the meaning of a word in a sentence on a quiz or test

Effective Vocabulary Instruction Encompasses

A. Word-Learning Strategies, such as

- Word Structure
- Context Clues
- Word Consciousness
- Independent Reading Strategies
- Structural Analysis

Explicit Strategy Instruction should include:

- Direct explanation
- Modeled Instruction
- Guided practice
- Feedback
- Application

B. Specific, Direct Word Instruction-Methods of teaching include:

- Direct Definitions
- Analogies
- Mapping
- Categorizing and Classifying
- Synonyms, Antonyms, & Homonyms
- Multiple Meaning Words
- Peer and group discussion

Direct Word Instruct should include:

- Modeling of decoding strategies

- Teaching of student friendly definitions
- Use of sentence stems and critical thinking questions
- Facilitation of students making personal connections
- Modeling of context clues in text
- Integration of multiple exposures to word
- Progress monitoring and feedback

III. Components of Effective Vocabulary Instruction

- Wide reading
- High level and quality oral language
- Word consciousness
- Direct teaching of specific words
- Teaching and modeling independent vocabulary strategies

Least Effective Vocabulary Instructional Strategies, include

- copying definitions
- writing sentences
- memorizing definitions from a vocabulary study sheet
- asking students to use context for unknown words when there is little contextual support

Most Effective Vocabulary Instructional Strategies, include

- direct, explicit instruction of words in context
- using simple conceptual maps
- teaching specific context clues
- selecting meaningful words to teach
- increasing independent reading
- directly teaching word learning strategies
- connecting new concepts/meanings to existing knowledge base

Beck, McKeown, & Kucan (2002)

In *Building Academic Vocabulary*, Marzano and Pickering (2005) advocate for a six-step process for vocabulary development:

Step 1: Teacher presents the term in "student-friendly" language (including descriptions, examples, and nonlinguistic representations of the term).

Step 2: Students restate the term in their own words (linking the new word to known experiences and background knowledge).

Step 3: Students represent the term in graphic form (reinforcing and deepening understanding through processing in a second modality).

Step 4: Students use the term in other contexts (deepening meaning by applying the term in new situations, through writing or conversation).

Step 5: Students discuss the term with peers (building understanding as a class, and augmenting this knowledge with new discoveries about the word).

Step 6: Vocabulary games give students more exposure to the term (serving as continued review in ways that engage multiple modalities for learning).

IV. Tiers of Vocabulary

Tier 1 – (Basic and General)-These are known, very common words

E.g., clock, baby, stop, run, the, happy, talk, cold

- Sight words, such as: Dolch Sight Words
- Clearly important- especially for ELLs and very naïve learners
- Easy, decodable and already familiar
- Connected with prior knowledge

Tier 2-(Abstract, Descriptive, & Academic) Words to Teach that are High Frequency, High Utility, and Often have Multiple Meanings

E.g., vary, relative, innovation, accumulate, surface, layer, avoid, fortunate, industrious

- Play a large role in verbal functioning across a variety of domains
- Necessary to understanding...GENERALIZABLE
- Goal for instruction – aim to teach 300-500 words per year

Tier 3-(Precision) Low Frequency Words; Context Specific; Technical Words-highly specialized and subject-specific; low occurrences in texts; lacking generalization

E.g., lava, aorta, legislature, circumference, isotope

- Low frequency
- Often specific to domains
- Instruct when need arises

Academic Vocabulary

Academic vocabulary is “not unique to a particular discipline, and, as a result, is not the clear responsibility of a particular content area teacher. What is more, many Tier Two words are far less well defined by contextual clues in the texts in which they appear and are far less likely to be defined explicitly within a text than are Tier Three words. Yet, Tier Two words are frequently encountered in complex written texts and are particularly powerful because of their wide applicability to many sorts of reading. Teachers thus need to be alert to the presence of Tier Two words and determine which ones need careful attention” (Common Core State Standards (English Language Arts, Appendix A).

Why are Academic Vocabulary Words of Particular Importance

- They are critical to understanding academic texts.
- They appear in all sorts of texts.
- They require deliberate effort to learn, unlike Tier 1 words.
- They are far more likely to appear in written texts than in speech.
- They often represent subtle or precise ways to say otherwise relatively simple things.
- They are seldom heavily scaffolded by authors or teachers, unlike Tier 3 words.

CCGPS Vocabulary Standards

Kindergarten-Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

ELACCKL4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on kindergarten reading and content.

- a. Identify new meanings for familiar words and apply them accurately (e.g., knowing duck as a bird and learning the verb to duck).
- b. Use the most frequently occurring inflections and affixes (e.g., -ed, -s, re-, un-, pre-, -ful, -less) as a clue to the meaning of an unknown word.

ELACCKL5: With guidance and support from adults, explore word relationships and nuances in word meanings.

- a. Sort common objects into categories (e.g., shapes, foods) to gain a sense of the concepts the categories represent.
- b. Demonstrate understanding of frequently occurring verbs and adjectives by relating them to their opposites (antonyms).
- c. Identify real-life connections between words and their use (e.g., note places at school that are colorful).
- d. Distinguish shades of meaning among verbs describing the same general action (e.g., walk, march, strut, prance) by acting out the meanings.

ELACCKL6: Use words and phrases acquired through conversations, reading and being read to, and responding to texts.

1st Grade-Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

ELACC1L4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 1 reading and content, choosing flexibly from an array of strategies.

- a. Use sentence-level context as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.
- b. Use frequently occurring affixes as a clue to the meaning of a word.
- c. Identify frequently occurring root words (e.g., look) and their inflectional forms (e.g., looks, looked, looking).

ELACC1L5: With guidance and support from adults, demonstrate understanding of word relationships and nuances in word meanings.

- a. Sort words into categories (e.g., colors, clothing) to gain a sense of the concepts the categories represent.
- b. Define words by category and by one or more key attributes (e.g., a duck is a bird that swims; a tiger is a large cat with stripes).
- c. Identify real-life connections between words and their use (e.g., note places at home that are cozy).
- d. Distinguish shades of meaning among verbs differing in manner (e.g., look, peek, glance, stare, glare, scowl) and adjectives differing in intensity (e.g., large, gigantic) by defining or choosing them or by acting out the meanings.

ELACC1L6: Use words and phrases acquired through conversations, reading and being read to, and responding to texts, including using frequently occurring conjunctions to signal simple relationships (e.g., I named my hamster Nibblem because she nibbles too much because she likes that)

2nd Grade-Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

ELACC2L4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 2 reading and content, choosing flexibly from an array of strategies.

- a. Use sentence-level context as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.
- b. Determine the meaning of the new word formed when a known prefix is added to a known word (e.g., happy/unhappy, tell/retell).
- c. Use a known root word as a clue to the meaning of an unknown word with the same root (e.g., addition, additional).
- d. Use knowledge of the meaning of individual words to predict the meaning of compound words (e.g., birdhouse, lighthouse, housefly; bookshelf, notebook, bookmark).
- e. Use glossaries and beginning dictionaries, both print and digital, to determine or clarify the meaning of words and phrases.

ELACC2L5: Demonstrate understanding of word relationships and nuances in word meanings.

- a. Identify real-life connections between words and their use (e.g., describe foods that are spicy or juicy).
- b. Distinguish shades of meaning among closely related verbs (e.g., toss, throw, hurl) and closely related adjectives (e.g., thin, slender, skinny, scrawny).

ELACC2L6: Use words and phrases acquired through conversations, reading and being read to, and responding to texts, including using adjectives and adverbs to describe (e.g., When other kids are happy that makes me happy).

3rd Grade-Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

ELACC3L4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning word and phrases based on grade 3 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

- a. Use sentence-level context as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.
- b. Determine the meaning of the new word formed when a known affix is added to a known word (e.g., agreeable/disagreeable, comfortable/uncomfortable, care/careless, heat/preheat).
- c. Use a known root word as a clue to the meaning of an unknown word with the same root (e.g., company, companion).
- d. Use glossaries or beginning dictionaries, both print and digital, to determine or clarify the precise meaning of key words and phrases.

ELACC3L5: With guidance and support from adults, demonstrate understanding of word relationships and nuances in word meanings.

- a. Distinguish the literal and non-literal meanings of words and phrases in context (e.g., take steps).
- b. Identify real-life connections between words and their use (e.g., describe people who are friendly or helpful).
- c. Distinguish shades of meaning among related words that describe states of mind or degrees of certainty (e.g., knew, believed, suspected, heard, wondered).

ELACC3L6: Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate conversational, general academic, and domain-specific vocabulary, including words and phrases that signal spatial and temporal relationships (e.g., After dinner that night we went looking for them).

4th Grade-Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

ELACC4L4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 4 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

- a. Use context (e.g., definitions, examples, or restatements in text) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.
- b. Use common, grade-appropriate Greek and Latin affixes and roots as clues to the meaning of a word (e.g., telegraph, photograph, autograph).
- c. Consult reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation and determine or clarify the precise meaning of key words and phrases.

ELACC4L5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

- a. Explain the meaning of simple similes and metaphors (e.g., as pretty as a picture) in context.
- b. Recognize and explain the meaning of common idioms, adages, and proverbs.
- c. Demonstrate understanding of words by relating them to their opposites (antonyms) and to words with similar but not identical meanings (synonyms).

ELACC4L6: Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific vocabulary, including words and phrases that signal precise actions, emotions, or states of being (e.g., quizzed, whined, stammered) and words and phrases basic to a particular topic (e.g., wildlife, conservation, and endangered when discussing animal preservation).

5th Grade-Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

ELACC5L4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 5 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

- a. Use context (e.g., cause/effect relationships and comparisons in text) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.
- b. Use common, grade-appropriate Greek and Latin affixes and roots as clues to the meaning of a word (e.g., photograph, photosynthesis).
- c. Consult reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation and determine or clarify the precise meaning of key words and phrases.

ELACC5L5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

- a. Interpret figurative language, including similes and metaphors, in context.
- b. Recognize and explain the meaning of common idioms, adages, and proverbs.
- c. Use the relationship between particular words (e.g., synonyms, antonyms, homographs) to better understand each of the words.

ELACC5L6: Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific vocabulary, including words and phrases that signal contrast, addition, and other logical relationships (e.g., however, although, nevertheless, similarly, moreover, in addition).

6th Grade-Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

ELACC6L4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 6 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

- a. Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence or paragraph; a word's position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.
- b. Use common, grade-appropriate Greek or Latin affixes and roots as clues to the meaning of a word (e.g., audience, auditory, audible).
- c. Consult reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation of a word or determine or clarify its precise meaning or its part of speech.
- d. Verify the preliminary determination of the meaning of a word or phrase (e.g., by checking the inferred meaning in context or in a dictionary).

ELACC6L5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

- a. Interpret figures of speech (e.g., personification) in context.
- b. Use the relationship between particular words (e.g., cause/effect, part/whole, item/category) to better understand each of the words.
- c. Distinguish among the connotations (associations) of words with similar denotations (definitions) (e.g., stingy, scrimping, economical, un wasteful, thrifty).

ELACC6L6: Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; gather vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

7th Grade-Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

ELACC7L4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 7 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

- a. Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence or paragraph; a word's position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.
- b. Use common, grade-appropriate Greek or Latin affixes and roots as clues to the meaning of a word (e.g., belligerent, bellicose, rebel).
- c. Consult general and specialized reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation of a word or determine or clarify its precise meaning or its part of speech.
- d. Verify the preliminary determination of the meaning of a word or phrase (e.g., by checking the inferred meaning in context or in a dictionary).

ELACC7L5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

- a. Interpret figures of speech (e.g., literary, biblical, and mythological allusions) in context.
- b. Use the relationship between particular words (e.g., synonym/antonym, analogy) to better understand each of the words.
- c. Distinguish among the connotations (associations) of words with similar denotations (definitions) (e.g., refined, respectful, polite, diplomatic, condescending).

ELACC7L6: Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; gather vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

8th Grade-Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

ELACC8L4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words or phrases based on grade 8 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

- a. Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence or paragraph; a word's position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.
- b. Use common, grade-appropriate Greek or Latin affixes and roots as clues to the meaning of a word (e.g., precede, recede, secede).
- c. Consult general and specialized reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation of a word or determine or clarify its precise meaning or its part of speech.

- d. Verify the preliminary determination of the meaning of a word or phrase (e.g., by checking the inferred meaning in context or in a dictionary).

ELACC8L5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

- a. Interpret figures of speech (e.g. verbal irony, puns) in context.
- b. Use the relationship between particular words to better understand each of the words.
- c. Distinguish among the connotations (associations) of words with similar denotations (definitions) (e.g., bullheaded, willful, firm, persistent, resolute).

ELACC8L6: Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; gather vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

9th & 10th Grade-Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

ELACC9-10L4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grades 9–10 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

- a. Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence, paragraph, or text; a word’s position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.
- b. Identify and correctly use patterns of word changes that indicate different meanings or parts of speech (e.g., analyze, analysis, analytical; advocate, advocacy).
- c. Consult general and specialized reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation of a word or determine or clarify its precise meaning, its part of speech, or its etymology.
- d. Verify the preliminary determination of the meaning of a word or phrase (e.g., by checking the inferred meaning in context or in a dictionary).

ELACC9-10L5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

- a. Interpret figures of speech (e.g., euphemism, oxymoron) in context and analyze their role in the text.
- b. Analyze nuances in the meaning of words with similar denotations.

ELACC9-10L6: Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

11th & 12th Grade-Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

ELACC11-12L4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grades 11-12 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

- a. Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence, paragraph, or text; a word's position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.
- b. Identify and correctly use patterns of word changes that indicate different meanings or parts of speech (e.g., conceive, conception, conceivable).
- c. Consult general and specialized reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation of a word or determine or clarify its precise meaning, its part of speech, or its etymology, or its standard usage.
- d. Verify the preliminary determination of the meaning of a word or phrase (e.g., by checking the inferred meaning in context or in a dictionary).

ELACC11-12L5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

- a. Interpret figures of speech (e.g., hyperbole, paradox) in context and analyze their role in the text.
- b. Analyze nuances in the meaning of words with similar denotations.

ELACC11-12L6: Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

