

Vocabulary Instruction and Development Resources

August, Diane, Maria Carolo, Cheryl Dressler, and Catherine Snow. 2008. "The Critical Role of Vocabulary Development for English Language Learners." *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice* 20 (1): 50–57. <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1540-5826.2005.00120.x>

"There has been very little experimental research in the past 25 years that investigates the development of vocabulary in language minority students acquiring English as a societal language." This article attempts to address this void by reviewing the salient research on vocabulary development of English language learners (ELL) and English only (EO) students, and identifying some lessons learned, as well as some continuing challenges.

Referring to work by prominent language researchers, including Isabelle Beck's work around tier vocabulary words, the article highlights three suggestions: take advantage of students' first language, ensure that ELL students know the meaning of basic words, and review and reinforce. It is also important to focus on words that students will encounter in text and oral language.

Challenges to vocabulary acquisition include the selection of the target words and the challenges relating to the large deficits in ELL students' second language vocabulary.

Given that the United States has experienced a sharp increase in the number of ELL students (more than 105%), this article is pertinent for all educators, across grade levels.

Baumann, James F., Donna Ware, and Elizabeth Carr Edwards. 2007. "'Bumping into Spicy, Tasty Words That Catch Your Tongue': A Formative Experiment on Vocabulary Instruction." *The Reading Teacher* 61 (2): 108–122.

Take one dedicated teacher, two enthusiastic graduate students, and one class of fifth-graders. Stir in five days of embedded vocabulary instruction. Sift juicy, rich vocabulary words with innovative acquisition techniques. Let simmer for 180 days. The result? A passionate discovery of "spicy, tasty words that catch your tongue."

This article reports the results of a yearlong teacher action research study that addressed the impact of a comprehensive vocabulary instructional program on students' word knowledge and appreciation. The program described in the article used Graves' four components of vocabulary instruction: providing rich and varied language experiences, teaching individual words, teaching word-learning strategies, and fostering word consciousness. The study gives a number of ideas for rich and varied language acquisition experiences. Though the benefits of this program were limited for above-average students, the results *did* indicate marked signs of improvement and growth for below-grade-level students. This article would be useful for teachers who are interested in integrating vocabulary development and instruction for both writing and reading enrichment.

Blachowicz, C.L.Z., Peter J.L. Fisher, Donna Ogle, and Susan Watts-Taffe. 2006. "Vocabulary: Questions from the Classroom." *Reading Research Quarterly* 41 (4): 524–539.
http://www.montebello.k12.ca.us/k8/ELP/Vocabulary_Development/Questions_from_the_Classroom.pdf

Using theory, research, and historical perspectives on vocabulary development and instruction, this article takes an in-depth look at eight overarching questions that classroom teachers ask about effective vocabulary instruction. It makes a strong case for the importance of effective vocabulary development while noting that there is no one "right" way to teach vocabulary.

While all eight questions are addressed, the majority of the piece guides teachers through research on what we have learned about good vocabulary instruction. Highlighted points are the importance of a language- and word-rich environment, incidental learning of vocabulary, intentional teaching of specific vocabulary, active learner engagement, and helping students develop personal word-learning strategies. The article also discusses word choice, approaches for bridging the early learning gap, effective strategies for English language learners, the use of technology in vocabulary instruction, and the usefulness of current assessment measures.

Classroom teachers will find this article thought provoking. While it succinctly sets out the theory and research, it also gives teachers food for thought and a wonderful bibliography for further reading.

Ebbers, Susan M., and Carolyn A. Denton. 2008. "A Root Awakening: Vocabulary Instruction for Older Students with Reading Difficulties." *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice* 23 (3): 90–102. <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1540-5826.2008.00267.x>

"The primary goal is not to become linguists, but to become more curious, to root around, so that networks may be unearthed and associations formed." This quote encompasses the authors' purpose. A research-based, yet practical rather than theoretical, view is presented for addressing the vocabulary development needs of older struggling readers. However, elementary school teachers may find the strategies and techniques helpful as well. Explicit instruction, cognitive engagement, and morphemic analysis of words are strategies presented to develop word consciousness. While each strategy could be addressed with more depth, the techniques could be used as case studies in the classroom, opening for teachers and instructional leaders a discussion on furthering vocabulary knowledge and comprehension among students.

Flanigan, Kevin, and Scott C. Greenwood. "Effective Content Vocabulary Instruction in the Middle: Matching Students, Purposes, Words, and Strategies." *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* 51 (3): 226–238.
http://www.reading.org/Library/Retrieve.cfm?D=10.1598/JAAL.51.3.3&F=JAAL-51-3_Flanigan.pdf

While Flanigan and Greenwood's title might lead some to assume this article is only for teachers in grades 6–8, their four-level framework planning tool would be useful to any secondary content area teacher. The framework is an extension of Beck, McKeon, and Kukan's three tiers, "taking into account the goals of the lesson, the amount of teaching time, and the depth of knowledge a word would require, and when in the lesson it would be most profitable to explore the words" (p. 229).

Written for readers who recognize the need to explicitly teach vocabulary but are finding it difficult to carve out instructional time, this article is practical and accessible, and offers teachers a tool they can use to plan the next lesson or unit. It includes a matrix that allows teachers to match purpose with strategy, planning time, and teaching time.

The article would be great for a study group, offering an opportunity to begin a potentially rich discussion about which words should have priority.

Flynt, Sutton E., and William G. Brozo. 2008. "Developing Academic Language: Got Words?" *The Reading Teacher* 61 (6): 500–502.

This short, two-page article looks at the importance of systematic vocabulary instruction and then provides recommendations for academic vocabulary development. The authors propose that effective development of content vocabulary will in turn increase student achievement.

The authors begin by defining academic vocabulary as "word knowledge" that enables students to interact with texts that are used in schools. They point out that there is a relationship between students' grasp of academic vocabulary and their reading comprehension. The assertion is made that specific attention should be paid to systematic vocabulary development.

The authors then provide teaching strategies that could be adapted to different grade levels as well as levels of language ability. The authors find that teachers must be selective about the words that will be taught, and provide opportunity for "multiple encounters." Teachers also need to help students develop the ability to infer meaning through contextual clues and extend content area vocabulary knowledge by developing basic word knowledge.

Harmon, Janis M. 2002. "Teaching Independent Word Learning Strategies to Struggling Readers." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 45 (7): 53–62.

Harmon explores the idea that, in order to become more aware of the strategies they use, students need to talk about what they do to make sense of unknown words in a passage. The article introduces teacher-facilitated peer dialogues that offer an opportunity for teachers to create strategy awareness and help students identify word learning strategies. In addition to offering ideas that can be used in a discussion with students about the importance of understanding word meanings, the article lists independent word learning strategies and gives suggestions for prompts teachers may choose that would cause students to discover their own word learning strategies. Harmon suggests that using this model helps struggling readers build confidence when

approaching unknown words during independent reading. Reading teachers, reading specialists, special education teachers, and co-teachers would find this article useful.

Harmon, Janis M., Wanda B. Hendrick, and Karen D. Wood. 2006. "Research on Vocabulary Instruction in the Content Areas: Implications for Struggling Readers." *Reading and Writing Quarterly* 21 (3): 261–280.
http://pdfserve.informaworld.com/46428_731197565_714036227.pdf

This article is a collection of studies that examine the types of vocabulary within math, science, and social studies content areas and the issues facing student learning in particular subject areas. The article categorizes subject area vocabulary into different levels, stressing that general usage and nontechnical words are as important for comprehension as subject-specific technical terms. This article does not present a compilation of detailed teaching strategies for content area teachers, but it does offer nine general suggestions for increasing student success with vocabulary. Content area teachers and teacher-consultants would find this a useful starting point for discussions about vocabulary teaching and ways to make it work better for students.

Nagy, William. 2006. "Why Vocabulary Instruction Needs to Be Long-Term and Comprehensive." Chap. 2 in *Teaching and Learning Vocabulary: Bringing Research to Practice*, edited by Elfrieda H. Hiebert and Michael L. Kamil, 27–44. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

This chapter first defines the terms "long-term" and "comprehensive." Nagy begins with the premises that vocabulary knowledge positively affects reading comprehension, and instruction needs to be multifaceted. He then explains some instructional practices of a comprehensive program: teaching individual words; exposure to rich language, both oral and written; and generative word building. The bulk of this article, however, covers the extensive research on what creates the "causal links," the "reciprocal links," and the "indirect causal links" underlying vocabulary-comprehension relationships. The reader begins to understand that because of these relationships, vocabulary and reading comprehension are indeed intertwined, and vocabulary instruction must be long-term and varied to affect this relationship. Nagy then examines each category of research to explain the implications for instruction.

Curriculum planners at all levels would benefit from this chapter. In particular, district coordinators would gain insights into how consistent and directed vocabulary instruction throughout the district would benefit students. In addition, this reading would assist teachers of all grade levels who wish to understand the relationships between vocabulary and comprehension.

Pearson, P. David, Elfrieda H. Hiebert, and Michael L. Kamil. "Vocabulary Assessment: What We Know and What We Need to Learn." *Reading Research Quarterly* 42 (2): 282–296.
<http://www.jstor.org/page/termsConfirm.jsp?redirectUri=/stable/pdfplus/4151794.pdf>

This article answers the question “What do vocabulary assessments measure?” with a brief history and review of current research. It provides the reader with a wealth of language for describing and evaluating vocabulary assessments, and helps the reader remember the complexities of word knowledge: word knowledge must be recognized as incremental, multidimensional, polysemous, interrelated, and heterogeneous. If vocabulary knowledge is so complicated, how then do we assess it? The article offers a brief history of vocabulary assessment beliefs and practices, and provides three continua for designing and evaluating vocabulary assessments: the discrete-embedded continuum, the selective-comprehensive continuum, and the contextualized-decontextualized continuum.

Finally, the article asks the reader to imagine what vocabulary assessments *could* measure and sets out a possible research agenda for the next decade. While the article seems to speak to vocabulary researchers, the questions about vocabulary assessment will also help teachers to think more deeply about vocabulary teaching and learning.

Snow, C.E., and Young-Suk Kim. 2007. “Large Problem Spaces: The Challenge of Vocabulary for English Language Learners.” Chap. 7 in *Vocabulary Acquisition: Implications for Reading Comprehension*, edited by Richard K. Wagner, Andrea E. Muse, and Kendra R. Tannenbaum, 123–131. New York: Guilford Press.

How hard is it for English language learners to learn vocabulary in their second language? What activities support second language vocabulary acquisition? How does vocabulary knowledge in a learner’s first language relate to vocabulary learning processes and achievement? As any teacher of English language learners might expect, the answers to these questions are complex and varied, depending, in part, on other aspects of the learner including age and facility in one’s first language. This article is meant to help teachers establish goals for English language learners’ vocabulary development, and to guide readers in making choices in how to allocate time and resources to ELL students’ vocabulary learning.

The article names activities that support vocabulary acquisition in a learner’s second language, including learning words in meaningful contexts, having multiple encounters, learning spelling, learning about words rather than learning lists of words, receiving instruction in multiple meanings, learning how to use context clues, and recognizing and learning cognates.