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Foreword

For many years we have known that vocabulary knowledge is a good predictor of academic success. We have also known that understanding the meanings of words in a passage is necessary for comprehension. It is surprising then that, until recently, not much attention was paid to vocabulary instruction in schools. Fortunately, more researchers and educators are now writing about the appropriate pedagogy for developing vocabulary knowledge. *Vocabulary Instruction for Academic Success* is a welcome addition to this topic.

Vocabulary knowledge can be thought of in many different ways: Is *knowing a word* the ability to provide a definition, use it in a sentence, recognize when it is being used inappropriately, know the connotations, know multiple meanings, know how to pronounce it, or all of the above? What is academic vocabulary? How does it differ from “everyday” vocabulary? How do we teach it effectively? Yopp, Yopp, and Bishop ask us to think about these issues and provide answers to these questions.

The authors give us a definition of academic vocabulary and stress the importance of emphasizing it in our classrooms. They argue that the words we choose and how we use them, help develop our students’ vocabularies—why talk about *the main character* when we can talk about *the protagonist*? They also go beyond simply teaching academic vocabulary, and offer various perspectives about vocabulary development.

Experts agree that we cannot formally teach all of the words that students need to know. Students must learn many words from oral language and from wide reading in order to be academically successful. Yopp, Yopp, and Bishop place these two sources of vocabulary knowledge firmly at the forefront of the book. They provide information about how to structure classrooms to include discourse that will encourage word learning, and they include excellent ideas for developing independent and oral reading.

The authors held my attention throughout this book through practical teaching suggestions and examples of students’ and teachers’ work. The authors also demonstrate their familiarity with classrooms, teachers, and students by drawing from different grade levels and subject areas, and offering a wealth of information and ideas. They provide answers to questions that teachers often ask, such as “What words should I teach?” “Are there some suffixes that are more important to teach than others?” “How can I teach my students to use context effectively?”

I happen to love words—their richness and complexity; the way they sound; the way they feel on my tongue. One of my favorite words is “sassafras” because of its “mouth feel.” Unfortunately many students do not feel this way, and it is one of our jobs as teachers to encourage a love of words. One way to do this is to develop word consciousness which is the subject of one of the chapters in *Vocabulary Instruction for Academic Success*. It talks about the importance of making students aware of words, and in doing so, providing opportunities for them to enjoy and revel in vocabulary. In this chapter, and throughout the book, the authors provide multiple ways to make this happen.

I direct a summer program for students with reading difficulties. When asked what they want to learn over the summer, many respond “more words.” They know that word

knowledge is a key to academic success. This book is a great resource for teachers to improve their vocabulary instruction so that all students can be confident in their word knowledge.

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First Words

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather 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

This is a text about vocabulary and the role it has in students’ academic success. More importantly, *Vocabulary Instruction for Academic Success* focuses on the critical role teachers have in actively teaching vocabulary and vocabulary skills to today’s students. Our first words are about two teachers and their impact on one student.

Teacher 1/Kindergarten: When Chad was four, during the summer before he began kindergarten, he and his dad made frequent trips to the library. At this early age, Chad already had favorite authors, his absolute favorite being Mercer Mayer. When his father asked him why he enjoyed Mayer’s books so much, Chad stated, “I like his pictures and the words he uses.” Imagine Chad’s disappointment when on one library visit, he found a Mayer book about one of his favorite topics, frogs, only to discover the book had no written story. Mayer’s wonderful illustrations were there, but the author had not written a single word.

Chad’s dad had a solution. They would purchase their own copy of *A Boy, a Dog, and a Frog* (Mayer 1967), and Chad would be the author. Chad thought this was a fine idea. After they looked through the book, they went back and examined each page. As they did so, Chad told the story and Chad’s dad wrote down, right below each illustration, the great words Chad used. When they were done, Chad’s dad wrote, right on the cover, “Story by Chad Bishop.”

Chad’s kindergarten year began and, in no time at all, Teacher 1 presented her students with their first show-and-tell responsibility. They were to bring to class something that was especially important to them and share it with the class. Chad’s choice was *A Boy, a Dog, and a Frog*, the book he had authored as summer came to an end. Chad, both nervous and proud, shared his book.

It was at this point that Teacher 1 did something that to this day, 30 years later, Chad has not forgotten. What did Teacher 1 do? She said to him, “Chad, what a great story and what grand words you used to tell it. You are quite an author. May I take your book home and show it to my husband?”

That afternoon, Chad came home with his chest out and head high. He was an author who used “grand” words and his teacher was showing his book to her husband! Chad has since earned his graduate degree in creative writing, completed

two novels, and teaches high school English. There is little doubt that Teacher 1 had a significant impact on the professional role Chad assumed in life.

Teacher 2/Late High School: Chad, now well into his high school years, was on the varsity swim team, dating a foreign exchange student from Sweden, and writing for the school newspaper. He was also a conscientious student. The Friday before his first formal dance—he had asked the Swedish foreign exchange student, Eva, and she had accepted—his biology teacher assigned 200 vocabulary words to be defined, and the definitions were to be turned in the following Monday.

Chad did not greet the assignment with enthusiasm. He hadn't picked up his tux, his car was a mess, he needed a haircut, and the swim team had an important meet. Sunday was not an option, as he had to head down the road with his family to celebrate a grandparent's birthday. The family rallied. Chad's mom picked up the tux, his sister washed his car, and his dad provided transportation to the swim meet. During and even after the meet, while Eva and the dance beckoned, Chad searched for the definitions to 200 biology terms. He finished, donned his tux and, looking exceptionally handsome, raced out the door for an "Enchanted Evening Under the Sea." His mom, dad, and sister breathed a sigh of relief and ordered pizza.

On the way to the birthday celebration the next day, Chad thanked his parents, both of whom are teachers, and his sister. He stated, rather empathically, that if he ever teaches, he will never give his students an assignment like the one he was given. He wondered aloud how many of those definitions he would remember in 10 years, or even 10 days!

On Monday, because so few students had completed the definitions, the teacher rescinded the assignment. Chad was not happy and asked whether those who had completed the assignment should receive extra credit. The teacher complied. Although the extra credit made this experience a bit more tolerable, it could not buy back the hours he and his family lost that weekend because of a meaningless assignment.

These stories depict two teachers—one who had a tremendously positive impact and another who, unintentionally, had a rather negative impact.

As you read *Vocabulary Instruction for Academic Success*, you will see that current researchers make it very clear that vocabulary growth is essential to academic success and that the teacher's role in this growth is critical. You will also be provided with an abundance of vocabulary strategies—unlike the one used by Chad's high school teacher—that lead students to make new words their own, words they will then be able to use to enhance their social, academic, and professional worlds. Every chapter begins with an opening activity to help you start thinking about what is in the chapter ahead. Take the time to complete these short activities and even jot down your answers. At the end of each chapter, you may wish to revisit the chapter opener and see if any of your responses have changed. Each chapter concludes with a section called "Think About It." This is your opportunity to reflect on what you have learned in the chapter and to apply your learning. You are encouraged to turn to the chapter of this book that most appeals to you at this

moment but hopefully you will visit the other chapters as well. Together, they provide you with important information that will support you as you develop a rich vocabulary program for your students. Best wishes.

Vocabulary Instruction

True or False?

Read the following statements and indicate whether you think each is true or false.

- _____ 1. Students' vocabulary knowledge relates strongly to their reading comprehension.
- _____ 2. Students' vocabulary knowledge relates strongly to their overall academic success.
- _____ 3. As word recognition becomes less resource demanding, more general language skills such as vocabulary become the limiting factors on reading ability.
- _____ 4. Inadequate vocabulary knowledge is a major factor in a child's failure in school.
- _____ 5. Vocabulary knowledge in kindergarten and first grade is a significant predictor of reading comprehension in the middle and secondary grades.
- _____ 6. Teaching vocabulary can improve reading

“The limits of my language are the limits of my mind. All I know is what I have words for.”

—Ludwig Wittgenstein

On a recent Monday afternoon, Eddie’s father took him to the Department of Motor Vehicles to take his permit test. Fifteen-year-old Eddie had told his friends at school that it was his big day and that the next time they saw him, he would have his learner’s permit. After completing the appropriate paperwork, Eddie was sent to the exam room and handed the test. He read and answered the questions carefully and submitted the test for scoring. Phew! He passed! Barely, but he passed. Eddie earned a score of 83 percent. One more wrong answer and he would have dipped below the cutoff of 80 percent. In the parking lot, Eddie’s father reviewed the incorrect answers with Eddie and expressed confusion about his response to number 2. The question asked what drivers should do if a peace officer signals them to drive through a red light. Eddie’s answer was to wait for a green light. When asked why he had not said to follow the police officer’s directions, Eddie looked startled and said, “Oh! Is that what a peace officer is? A police officer? I didn’t know that!” As soon as he understood the term *peace officer*, he knew the answer to the question. Of course you follow the police officer’s directions!

Eddie’s experience with his driving test illustrates how important words are to understanding and to success. Imagine if this question had been the one to tip the balance on Eddie’s test, resulting in failure. What would the consequences have been? Eddie would not have been awarded his permit and therefore would not be allowed to drive. He would have had to wait a certain period of time before retaking the test. He would have had to tell his friends that he did not pass the test, and he might have felt embarrassed to admit this. He might have felt bad about himself. Instead, Eddie walked away proud and confident, and text messaged his friends the good news before he even left the premises. Word knowledge is important!

The Importance of Vocabulary

Educators and educational researchers have known for years that vocabulary knowledge plays a significant role in reading comprehension. We saw that Eddie did not comprehend one of the test questions solely because he did not know one of the terms. Knowledge of words is essential to understanding text. Look at the brief passages below. Drawn from a variety of books ranging from those written for the very young to those written for adults, these examples reveal how important knowledge of words is to understanding text.

“On his way to town one day, the miller encountered the king.”
(*Rumpelstiltskin*, adapted by Paul O. Zelinsky, no page given)

“In the midst of this reverie, I heard a car pull into the driveway” (*Bunnacula* by Deborah and James Howe, p. 4)

“She wore her clothes so tight (hoping to look ethereal), she looked apoplectic.” (Johnny Tremain by Esther Forbes, p. 14)

“Autumn was blithely indifferent to the tumult in the land that year.” (Across Five Aprils by Irene Hunt, p. 42)

“At first Ekwefi accepted her, as she had accepted others—with listless resignation.” (Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe, p. 79)

“His gentleness was never tinged by dogmatism; and his instructions were given with an air of frankness and good nature that banished every idea of pedantry.” (Frankenstein by Mary Shelley, p. 29)

Each of these examples demonstrates that the reader must have a vocabulary rich enough to support understanding of the text. What is a *miller*, and what does it mean to *encounter* a king? What is a *reverie*? What does it mean to look *ethereal* or *apoplectic*? What is *blithe indifference*, and what does *tumult* mean? What is *listless resignation*? And what do many of the words in the final example mean? Reading involves making sense of written language. In order to read successfully, we need to understand the words the author has chosen to use. The less we understand the individual words, the less we are able to comprehend the passage.

A large body of research confirms that vocabulary knowledge is positively related to a student’s ability to comprehend text (Lehr, Osborn, and Hiebert 2004), and as the difficulty of words in a text increases, understanding of the text decreases. Although much remains to be learned, the relationship between word knowledge and comprehension is unequivocal. Further, there is evidence that instruction in vocabulary positively affects comprehension (Baumann, Kame’enui, and Ash 2003).

Vocabulary knowledge is clearly crucial for success in reading. Look at Eddie! However, its influence does not stop with reading. Vocabulary knowledge also plays a significant role in overall academic success (Lehr et al. 2004). For instance, notice the importance of understanding words in this hint provided in class one day by a Spanish teacher to his English-speaking students:

“The meaning of the Spanish word *detestar* is easy to remember because it is related to the English word *detest*.”

A student who does not know what *detest* means finds this hint useless. He cannot take advantage of the teacher’s comment (in fact, he may be frustrated by it) and thus must work harder than some of his peers to learn the Spanish word. If the teacher shares many of these types of hints, then the students with limited vocabularies are likely to be less efficient in learning the new content than their peers.

Here is another example of vocabulary’s impact on academic achievement: Think about a third-grade student’s prospect for successful learning when he or she does not know the words *decomposer* and *fungus*, and the teacher, addressing grade-level life science content, says the following:

“Decomposers recycle matter. A good example of a decomposer is fungus.”

Also think about how a narrow understanding of the word *recycle* might lead to

misunderstanding the term as used in this context.

Students' knowledge of words impacts their achievement in all areas of the curriculum because words are necessary for communicating the content. As classroom teachers know, students have difficulty understanding and expressing the concepts and principles of the content areas if they do not know the specialized vocabulary that represents those concepts and principles. It is nearly impossible for students to read about, talk about, write about, and understand information about volcanoes, for example, if they do not know the words *magma*, *lava*, *vent*, and *erupt*. Indeed, educational authorities advise us that "wide vocabulary and broad knowledge go together" (Hirsch 2003) and that "vocabulary knowledge is knowledge" (Stahl 2005).

The language demands of academic learning are significant. The richer the students' *academic language*, the more likely they will experience success with the content. Academic language is defined as "the language that is used by teachers and students for the purpose of acquiring new knowledge and skills ... imparting new information, describing abstract ideas, and developing students' conceptual understanding" (Chamot and O'Malley, as cited in Bailey 2007). Simply put, academic language is the language of schools and can be contrasted with everyday informal speech. Bailey identifies three features of academic language: lexical, grammatical, and discourse. *Lexical* refers to vocabulary and includes both general academic terms such as *analyze*, *infer*, and *conclusion*, and specialized terms such as *evaporate*, *civilization*, and *perimeter*. *Grammatical* refers to sentence structures, and *discourse* refers to larger organizational features of language. Although the focus of this book is the lexical level—words—you will find that many of the strategies we share stimulate language interactions that support the acquisition of the grammatical and discourse features of academic language as well.

Vocabulary knowledge impacts reading and academic success, and—as we saw in the case of Eddie—it is significant in our daily lives and can have practical as well as social and emotional consequences. Vocabulary is positively related to higher-status occupations (Marzano 2004), communicates to the world what we know, and contributes to people's judgments about how smart we are (Stahl 2005). Individuals who can express themselves precisely and with appropriate language are more likely to make a positive impression on their employers, colleagues, and clients. Vocabulary enables us to communicate our needs, increasing the likelihood that we get them met, and it enables us to understand the needs of others.

For good reason, then, vocabulary development is currently receiving considerable attention in professional literature. Indeed, it was the subject of an extensive study by the National Reading Panel (NICHD 2000), has been the focus of numerous books published in the past decade, is a popular topic of presentations at national and state educational conferences, and was recently identified as "hot" on the International Reading Association's list of what's hot and what's not in literacy (Cassidy and Cassidy 2008).

Unfortunately, there is evidence that vast differences exist in the vocabularies of children—even before they enter schools. Hart and Risley (2003), for example, found that some children had far more exposure to words, far larger vocabularies, and faster rates of word acquisition than others. The researchers described an ever-widening gap among children and estimated that by age three, there was a 30-million-word difference in terms

of number of words heard by children. Of great concern is that the rate of vocabulary growth measured at age three predicted performance on tests of vocabulary and language development at ages nine and ten among these children. Additionally, vocabulary use at age three was strongly associated with reading comprehension scores at ages nine and ten. White, Graves, and Slater (1990) also found large gaps among children, with some children learning an estimated 1,000 words per year between the first and fifth grades and others learning 5,000 words per year.

The large gap in vocabulary knowledge among students and the finding that these differences are highly related to future performance in reading, in schooling, and in life are alarming. Yet, as Beck, McKeown, and Kucan pointed out, historically there has not been much vocabulary instruction in schools—and this may be good news. Why good news? Because, as Beck et al. stated, “Perhaps it is not so much the case that those differences cannot be changed, but rather that little has been done to focus on making them change” (2000, 2). Thus, a concerted effort by teachers to provide a comprehensive vocabulary program may be what it takes to significantly impact students’ vocabulary development and narrow the language gap. Research does, in fact, indicate that instruction makes a difference.

What Teachers Should Know About Words and Word Learning

In this section, we share three fundamental understandings about words and word learning that we believe every teacher should know. The first is that word knowledge is complex. The second is that vocabulary instruction must be multifaceted. The third is that vocabulary instruction must be a curriculum-wide commitment.

Word knowledge is complex.

To know a word is not simply to know its definition. Nagy and others (Nagy 2006; Nagy and Scott 2000) describe multiple dimensions of word knowledge, including knowledge of the word’s phonological structure (i.e., What does it sound like?) and orthographic structure (i.e., How it is spelled?). For example, you may understand the word *solder* when you hear someone describe the process of joining two metallic pieces with a melted metal alloy, but do you recognize the word in print? If you saw the word in a list, would you be able to pronounce it (/sod/-/er/) and elicit its meaning? Or would you think it was a misprint of the word *soldier*? Word knowledge also includes information about the grammatical function of the word (i.e., How is it used in a sentence?) and its collocational behavior (i.e., What words usually appear with it?), as well as its stylistic uses. A student who is able to define a word is not necessarily also able to say the word, write the word, use the word in a sentence, and understand its connotative and metaphorical uses. In other words, there is much to know about words, and “knowing” them is not an all-or-none phenomenon.

In addition to being multidimensional, words often have multiple meanings, and the appropriate meaning for a word depends on the context in which it is used. The word *value*, for example, means something different in economics, mathematics, and art.

Consider the use of the word *flat* in each of these sentences:

You are welcome to stay in my *flat* when you visit London.

I need a *flat* table to work on my project.

The trumpeter's notes were *flat*.

Her girlfriends admired her new *flats*.

I am *flat* broke.

A student who only knows one meaning of the word *flat* will be confused when he or she encounters the word in an unexpected context.

We share below more polysemous words. (Polysemous—/pɒl/-/e/-/se/-/məʃ/, used as an adjective to describe words that have more than one meaning; *poly* is of Greek origin and means “many.”) Do you know more than one meaning for each of these words?

acute

bank

difference

factor

foot

function

attraction

balance

mole

plate

score

bridge

produce

fret

tense

A substantial number of words in the English language are polysemous. In fact, Nagy (2006) observed that polysemous words are the rule rather than the exception, and Bailey (2007) noted that 60 to 70 percent of English words have multiple meanings. This feature of our language adds to the complexity of word knowledge and can be especially problematic for English language learners who may know the more common use of a word but lack understanding of its usage in less common or content-specific contexts.

Words are also heterogeneous; they are different. They differ in terms of their frequency of use, conceptual difficulty, level of abstractness, part of speech, role in text, and relationship to the content and the instructional goals. These differences dictate whether and how the words should be taught.

Adding to the complexity of words is the fact that they are interrelated. It is difficult to understand the meaning of *perpendicular* without understanding *right angle*, and understanding *bland* and *tasty* support an understanding of the word *delicious*.

What are the implications of word complexity for teachers? One major implication is that word learning occurs incrementally. A single exposure to a word generally does not result in rich understanding of the word. Encountering it in multiple and varied contexts is necessary for deep knowledge. Teachers must, therefore, provide numerous opportunities for students to interact with words in many contexts.

Vocabulary instruction must be multifaceted.

Traditional vocabulary instruction involves asking students to learn the definitions of words, often by looking them up in the dictionary and recording them on paper. Remember Chad's high school biology teacher (in the "Introduction: First Words" section)? Based on what we know about the complexity of words and how words are learned, current thinking emphasizes a fourpronged approach to vocabulary instruction: providing extensive experiences with language, fostering word consciousness, teaching individual words, and teaching word-learning strategies.

- **Providing Extensive Experiences with Language**

Language learning cannot occur without exposure to language. Research shows that most vocabulary is not directly taught; huge numbers of words are learned incidentally—through experiences with language. Thus, it is crucial that teachers establish language-rich environments. This means that teachers must offer myriad opportunities for students to hear and engage with spoken language and to read, write, and engage with written language in multiple contexts. Indeed, Johnson (2001, 19) stated that "the best way to help school children expand their vocabularies ... is to provide plentiful, interactive oral language experiences throughout the elementary and middle grades." Nagy agreed that "experiences with rich oral language are critical for vocabulary growth" and noted that wide reading "is the primary engine that drives vocabulary growth" (2005, 29). Thus, one essential aspect of vocabulary instruction is exposure to plentiful language in the classroom.

- **Establishing a Word-Conscious Environment**

A second important component of vocabulary instruction is the promotion of students' interest in words and word learning. *Word consciousness* is the term used in professional literature to describe an awareness of and interest in words, and it involves both a cognitive and affective stance toward words. Students who are word-conscious think about and care about words and gain satisfaction and enjoyment from using them well (Graves and Watts-Taffe 2002). They are motivated to learn new words, and they seek out opportunities to experiment with words. Teachers can establish word-conscious environments by modeling and stimulating a curiosity about and enthusiasm for words. They can spark students' interest in words by exploring the etymology (history) and evolution of words. They can engage their students in word play and involve them in conducting investigations about words.

When they promote word consciousness, teachers ensure their students' sustained vocabulary growth (Scott and Nagy 2004).

• **Teaching Words**

In addition to providing rich exposure to words and establishing a word-conscious environment, teachers should provide direct instruction of some word meanings. It is more efficient to teach the words students need to know for particular purposes than to wait for the words to be learned through context. In our example of words related to the study of volcanoes, for example, it is beneficial for the teacher to teach students the meanings of the words *magma*, *lava*, *vent*, and *erupt* rather than hope that the students come to understand the words through oral or written encounters. In all content areas, there are words that are critical to understanding the topic under study. These words are known as *specialized content vocabulary*. They should be identified and taught. Similarly, when sharing a story with students, teachers should identify and teach words that are important to understanding the literature.

Research has revealed a number of principles that should guide teachers' efforts to effectively teach word meanings. They are the following:

- ✓ Instruction should provide more than definitional information about words. It must acknowledge the complexity of words and ensure that students are given ample contextual information about words (Stahl 1999; Tannenbaum, Torgesen, and Wagner 2006).
- ✓ Instruction should provide repeated exposure to words under study and multiple opportunities for students to use and practice the words (Blachowicz et al. 2006; NICHD 2000).
- ✓ Instruction should encourage students to think about relationships among word meanings (Blachowicz et al. 2006; NICHD 2000).
- ✓ Instruction should actively engage students in learning tasks (Beck et al. 2002; Kamil and Hiebert 2005; NICHD 2000).
- ✓ A variety of instructional practices should be employed (NICHD 2000).

• **Teaching Word-Learning Strategies**

An effective vocabulary program is incomplete if teachers do not develop students' word-learning strategies. One strategy that supports students' abilities to continue to acquire new words is the use of word parts to unlock meaning. Acquiring an understanding of the meaning of frequently used prefixes, roots, and suffixes will support students' abilities to induce word meanings. For example, if students know that *uni-* means "one," they should be able to conclude that a *unicycle* is a one-wheeled cycle. Similarly, understanding the prefix *uni-* will contribute to students' understanding of *unify*, *unilateral*, *unidirectional*, *unicellular*, and *uniform*.

A second word-learning strategy is the use of context. Students can be taught that sometimes text provides enough information to support understanding of an unknown word. For example, the use of the word *instead* in the following sentence signals to students that a contrast is being made between *abating* and *worsened*:

Instead of abating, the storm worsened. Students who do not know the word *abating* can be taught to use the context to infer that it means “lessening.”

A third word-learning strategy is the effective use of a dictionary. The dictionary can be a powerful tool, especially when students are motivated to understand the meaning of a word.

Vocabulary instruction must be a curriculum-wide commitment.

If teachers are to provide students with extensive language experiences, create word-conscious classrooms, and teach words and word-learning strategies, then vocabulary instruction cannot be relegated to a brief period of the day. It must permeate the day and extend through all areas of the curriculum. Teachers need to ensure that students have opportunities to talk and read throughout the day, they need to highlight words in every subject matter, and they need to teach words and word-learning strategies in many contexts. Language must be addressed in every subject we teach. As Heritage, Silva, and Pierce (2007, 183) asserted, “All teachers need to be both content teachers and language teachers.”

Vocabulary instruction is an obvious fit in our language arts programs. It is also a natural fit in the content areas because words are so important to learning subject matter. Words are expressions of concepts. We use the word *habitat*, for instance, to express the idea of a natural environment that provides food, shelter, water, and space for particular organisms. A *riparian habitat* is a particular type of habitat: a natural environment next to or affected by a water source such as a river that provides food, shelter, water, and space for particular organisms. The word *diameter* refers to the distance of a straight line that has endpoints on a circle’s circumference and passes through the center point of a circle. (Notice how helpful it is to understand the terms *circumference* and *endpoints* when learning the word *diameter*.) Our understanding of these terms continues to be elaborated on and refined as we learn more about the content. As Hirsch (2003, 28) argued, “A coherent and extended curriculum is the most effective vocabulary builder.”

Not only do the content areas provide rich, purposeful exposure to words in meaningful contexts, they also provide repeated exposure to words. Students hear the words used by their teachers and peers, they read the words in accompanying texts, they use the words as they discuss the content, and they incorporate the words into their own writing and presentations. The content areas can offer many opportunities to use new words, thus developing students’ content vocabularies. As students explore a topic in depth, they are exposed to key vocabulary again and again.

A Few Words About English Language Learners

Like all learners, English language learners need teachers who have a strong knowledge base and commitment to developing students’ language. It is crucial that teachers work carefully to develop English language learners’ academic vocabularies. Each of the strategies we suggest in this book can be used effectively with English language learners. In addition, we want to remind teachers of the following important

principles for supporting English language learners as they develop their vocabularies in a new language:

- Encourage native language development. It is easier for individuals to learn new labels for already-known concepts than to learn new concepts. For instance, the word *indifferent* is easier to learn in a new language if students already know the concept and its verbal representation in their native languages.
- Create a safe, comfortable, and nonthreatening atmosphere that encourages students to use their new language and ensure that they have authentic reasons to engage in language use with you and one another.
- Respect and draw on students' backgrounds and experiences and build connections between the known and the new.
- Know your students and capitalize on their interests. All of us are more likely to attend to and communicate about what we find fascinating.
- Model and scaffold language use.
- Take advantage of the cognates that exist between languages. For instance, many English and Spanish words, such as *family* and *familia*, have a common origin.
- Make use of realia, concrete materials, visuals, pantomime, and other nonlinguistic representations of concepts to make input comprehensible. Write new words on the board as they are shared or provide each student with a set of cards that contain the words. That way students can see the words as well as hear them.
- Introduce new words in rich contexts that support meaning.
- Ensure that students have ample opportunities for social interactions, especially in the context of content learning. English language learners need many occasions to practice the academic language they are learning.
- Provide wait time. Allowing students time to put their thoughts into words is important for all students, but it is especially so for students who are learning to communicate in a new language.
- Keep your expectations high for all students—and for yourself as their teacher. Work for depth and breadth of understanding of challenging content and promote critical thinking.

Conclusion

The primary purposes of this chapter are to convince you that vocabulary instruction is important and to provide you with the big picture of how to support vocabulary development in your classroom. Now explore the suggestions and strategies provided for enhancing your students' word knowledge. [Chapter 2](#) shares numerous suggestions for providing students with rich oral language experiences. [Chapter 3](#) presents information about the incidental word learning that occurs through exposure to text—as students engage in wide reading on their own and as they listen to books that are read aloud. [Chapter 4](#) provides ideas for promoting an enthusiasm for words through a word-conscious classroom. [Chapter 5](#) offers a wealth of suggestions for teaching individual

words, and [Chapter 6](#) describes independent word-learning strategies.

If you read this chapter from beginning to end, you may have by now forgotten the quiz that opened this chapter. Now would be a good time to revisit the statements. Do you have new insights? Have your answers changed? Although you may have been surprised as you began reading this chapter to learn that all six statements are true, we suspect that at this point, you are not surprised. Word learning is important, the consequences of not knowing words can be long-lasting and profound, and teachers can make a difference in students' vocabulary development.



Think About It!

Read the brief scenario below and identify at least four ways that Mrs. Sanchez promoted the vocabulary development of her third-grade students.

Mrs. Sanchez greeted her students with a cheerful “Salutations!” as they bustled into the classroom on a chilly Wednesday morning. The children looked at her quizzically, so after they settled into their desks, she explained that *salutations* is another word for “greetings” and is often used to say “hello and welcome” when you see someone. She said she likes the sound of the word as it rolls off her tongue and invited the students to say the word with her—“Salutations!”—and then to turn and greet each other with the word. She wrote it on the board and encouraged the students to use the word when they see their friends on the playground at recess and lunch. As she began her morning routine, she asked the students to turn to their neighbors and review yesterday’s science lesson by “expressing in sequential order” the steps of the experiment they conducted.

Mrs. Sanchez engaged in several vocabulary-building strategies in the first few minutes of her school day. Did you identify the following?

1. She expressed an interest in words, thus promoting word consciousness.
2. She used words that stretched the students’ vocabularies (e.g., *salutations*, *expressing*, *sequential*), thus creating a language-rich environment.
3. She provided an explanation of *salutations*, including when and how it is used, thus teaching a new word.
4. She asked the students to use the word now and at recess and lunchtime, thus encouraging students to apply the word in other settings.
5. She provided the students with an oral language experience focused on academic learning, thus creating a language-rich environment.
6. In addition, it is clear from this brief scenario that Mrs. Sanchez’s curriculum includes science. Students learn new words as they learn new content, and Mrs. Sanchez’s content-area instruction will contribute to her students’ world knowledge and word knowledge.



Promoting Oral Language

Possible Sentences

Read and think about each set of words or terms below. Do you know what the words mean? Have you seen or heard them before? How do they fit together? Write a sentence for each set of words, making sure to use all four words in the sentence. You might need to guess what some words mean in order to include them in your sentence.

Set 1: hothouse opportunity linguistic input vocabulary Sentence:

Set 2: output I-R-E expressive language Sentence:

“Language ... is the grandest triumph of the human intellect.”

—Walt Whitman

Opportunities to hear rich language and to use language in many settings are crucial for vocabulary development. Teachers must create classrooms that are *linguistic hothouses*—ones that nourish language by deliberately exposing students to high-quality, cognitively challenging verbal input across the curriculum and by intentionally stimulating students’ active use of language in diverse contexts. In this chapter, we discuss the importance of surrounding students with many models of complex language and ensuring that all students have many opportunities to use language themselves. Finally, we share strategies that stimulate oral language interactions.

Language Input

Students must have many opportunities to hear rich language. They must be provided with an environment in which there are models of precise and sophisticated vocabulary. You may recall from [Chapter 1](#) that there are striking differences in the oral vocabularies of children as young as three. What we want to point out here is that research reveals that these differences can be largely accounted for by the language in the children’s environment (Hart and Risley 1995). It probably will not surprise you to learn that the more words children hear and the greater variety of words they hear, the more words and greater variety of words they use. Likewise, students in classrooms with teachers who use syntactically-complex speech demonstrate more syntactically-complex speech at the end of the year than their counterparts in other classrooms (Huttenlocher et al. 2002). Language development does not happen without exposure, that is, without input. Four key sources of language input in the classroom are the teacher, the students, the text, and the curriculum.

The Teacher

We learn language through interactions with others who have more skills than ourselves. In the classroom, the more skilled language user is you, the teacher. Teachers are models of language when they make announcements, give directions, teach lessons, respond to questions, work with small groups, and engage in conversations with individuals. Every utterance is an opportunity to expand students’ language. Teachers who are conscious of their word choices during each of these interactions and who intentionally use a rich vocabulary offer a fertile setting for students to develop their vocabularies.

We don’t often think about the words we use, yet if we hope to support students’ vocabulary development, we must be mindful of our word choices. We need to raise our consciousness about the precision of our language. Notice the teachers’ word choices in the scenarios below.

- Mr. Watkins, a junior high school science teacher, moved through a room full of students engaged in a laboratory investigation. Stopping at one group’s table, he listened to their conversation about pouring a liquid from one container to another. He pointed to each container and reminded the students that one type is called a *flask*

and the other is called a *beaker*. He was deliberate in his use of the words and was pleased when he later read the group's written report of the investigation, noting that they had used the precise terminology.

- A third-grade classroom teacher guided her students to fold a piece of paper as they worked on a project. Rather than saying, "Fold the paper hot-dog style," Ms. Lan demonstrated to students how to hold their papers, then asked them to make a *horizontal* fold.
- Mrs. McMann complimented her kindergarteners, telling them she was pleased with how *conscientious* they were about cleaning the classroom after a messy activity. She continued by rephrasing her sentiments, indicating that she was delighted they were thorough, thoughtful, and careful in their efforts; they took the task of cleaning up seriously!
- A second-grade student was conversing with her teacher about a weekend soccer game during which the student had scored a goal. The enthusiastic student told Mrs. Kafka that for weeks she had been practicing kicking the ball at home. The teacher responded, "You must have found scoring a goal very *gratifying*! In other words, you were probably very pleased and satisfied to know your practice paid off! Good for you!"
- Sixth-grade teacher Miss Nguyen told her students she felt *ambivalent* about whether the class should accept another class's invitation to participate in an upcoming field trip. She then explained the pros and cons, from her perspective, of joining the other class.
- "I am *nonplussed*, completely perplexed, by your behavior," Mr. Archel told his normally responsive students one afternoon when they disregarded his requests to settle down.

These teachers were thoughtful in their use of rich vocabulary as they interacted with students. Aware of their influence as language models, they intentionally used words that would stretch their students' vocabularies, while providing ample support (e.g., through pointing to objects, modeling, and rephrasing) so that students understood. Unfortunately, there are many missed opportunities for vocabulary development in classrooms, as in these observations:

- A preschool teacher gestured and repeatedly told a student to bring her "that thing." "Get me that thing, Johnny. No, that thing. Over there. Hand me that thing, please." The child kept looking around until he finally realized what the teacher was referring to: a tambourine.
- A sixth-grade teacher ignored the morning announcement in which the principal noted that the school's Word of the Week was *assiduous* and encouraged all students to demonstrate that quality. At the conclusion of the principal's announcements, Ms. Devereaux, who had been preoccupied with shuffling through papers on her desk, promptly asked her students to prepare for the spelling pretest.
- Ms. Wilson did not respond to her fourth-grade students' quizzical expressions and mumbles of "What did he do?" when the custodian, walking through the classroom,

commented that he had *replenished* the paper towel dispenser during recess. She gave him a quick nod of thanks and directed the students' attention to the math problems she had written on the board.

- Introducing a new novel, Mr. Gallen indicated to his tenth graders that the main character is a brave leader. (Why not say that the *protagonist* is an *intrepid* leader? The students likely learned the terms *main character* and *brave* in early elementary school.)

We do not learn words to which we have never been exposed. The reason you don't speak Malagasy (assuming you don't) is that you aren't surrounded by Malagasy (the language spoken in Madagascar); you don't hear it, and you don't see it in print. Likewise, a child who is never exposed to the word *tambourine* will not learn the word. Words we never come into contact with cannot become a part of our lexicon.

Interestingly, research demonstrates that we can learn words from conversations in which we ourselves are not direct participants. Simply being in an environment where we hear others use rich vocabulary contributes to our vocabulary growth; even as bystanders, we learn (Akhtar, Jipson, and Callanan 2001).

Teachers who attend to vocabulary development not only purposefully use rich language, they also draw students' attention to the terminology they are using. "I'm going to use a word you may not know," they say. Or, "Did you notice that word?"

As one of the most influential sources of language input in the classroom, teachers must do the following:

- **Deliberately plan to use rich language in their interactions with students.** Mr. Watkins, the junior high science teacher who used the words *flask* and *beaker*, purposefully considered ahead of time what language would be useful for his students to own. Ms. Lan, too, planned to use the word *horizontal* when demonstrating to her second graders how to fold their papers. Their language use was intentional.
- **Remain alert for informal opportunities to use rich language.** Mrs. McMann, Mrs. Kafka, and Miss Nguyen used sophisticated language when responding to their students' actions and personal narratives. They listened to their students, displayed a genuine interest in what they had to say, and seized the opportunity to expose their students to new terminology in the course of authentic communicative interactions.
- **Intentionally draw attention to interesting words.** When the custodian used the word *replenished*, Ms. Wilson could have commented to her class on his word use, defining the term and asking her students to think about things they have replenished recently. Does anyone replenish the salt shaker at home? Who is responsible for replenishing the dog's water bowl in your home? Likewise, Ms. Devereaux missed the opportunity to discuss the Word of the Week after the principal's announcements. She could have commented on the word and told students to try to catch her using it in the hours and days ahead.

The Students

Students themselves are a source of language. When students listen to one another in the classroom, opportunities for language learning are increased—particularly when students have diverse backgrounds, experiences, and interests. A student whose family emigrated from Korea likely will offer more to his or her peers on topics related to Korean culture than a teacher who has limited knowledge of or few personal experiences with the culture. Likewise, the student who is an avid backpacker will enrich his or her peers’ knowledge, and related language, of backpacking. We see this clearly in classrooms where students have time to contribute to the classroom dialog. For example, one of us was working with a group of fourth graders who were studying desert animals when a student spontaneously told his peers about a tortoise that he once owned. He enthusiastically described the reptile’s habits, shared how he acquired the reptile, and talked about his feelings when the tortoise disappeared. He used words such as *enclosure*, *hibernate*, and *parasites*. His peers, genuinely interested in his experiences, asked questions that prompted extension and clarification.

A *sagacious* (wise) teacher ensures time for student discussion and capitalizes on students’ expertise. He or she makes an effort to learn about students’ experiences and interests and thoughtfully provides opportunities for them to share their knowledge with one another. Thus, students become sources of language input for each other.

The teacher who consciously supports vocabulary growth draws attention to students’ sophisticated or specialized language use, as in these instances:

- Eleventh grader Melissa was conversing with her friends before class one morning when she commented that she was feeling querulous. Her teacher, who overheard the conversation, chuckled and replied, “What a great word, Melissa! *Querulous*! Wow! Why are you feeling irritable today? Didn’t you get enough sleep?”
- Herman, a third grader, described a character in a novel as *impetuous*. “Great word choice, Herman,” said his teacher. “Class, did you notice that word? *Impetuous*. Everyone say, ‘Impetuous.’ *Impetuous* means ‘rash or impulsive.’ Someone who is impetuous acts without thinking. Where do we see the character in this book behaving impetuously?”
- A sixth grader returned to school after summer break wearing braces ... and using new terminology. She talked with others about her *malocclusion*, her *orthodontist*, and *fixed appliances*. Her teacher commented on the language that accompanied the student’s experience. He wrote *orthodontist* on the board and told his students that *ortho* and *odons* come from Greek, meaning “straight” and “tooth,” respectively. Thus, an *orthodontist* is someone who straightens teeth.

The Text

A third very important model of language is written text. Because we discuss the powerful influence of the written word on language development in [Chapter 3](#), we will only offer a brief preview here. In general, texts offer exposure to richer vocabulary than do oral language exchanges with adults. As conscious as we are of our word choices, speech is typically less sophisticated than the language of books. Thus, teachers must expose students to written materials and offer students ample time to read. In addition,

teachers must read aloud to students regularly, taking time to discuss, among other things, some of the words in the text selection.

The Curriculum

A fourth key source of language input is the curriculum. Learning specialized content vocabulary undergirds learning in every content area. How can students understand the Revolutionary War if they do not understand the terms *liberty*, *treason*, *taxation*, and *representation*? How can they understand fundamental life science concepts if they do not know *consumer*, *producer*, *decomposer*, *energy*, and *food chain*? How can they develop an aesthetic sense if they do not understand *texture*, *line*, *form*, *value*, and *space*? When teachers plan a content-area lesson, they should consider which specialized vocabulary words their students need to acquire as part of their learning. With new knowledge comes new language.

If the curriculum is shallow and offers no real learning opportunities, the vocabulary of the content becomes unnecessary; new words that might have become part of a student's linguistic repertoire do not. Think, for instance, about a primary-grade unit on pets. A superficial exploration of this topic may expose students to few, if any, new concepts or words. The students "learn" that many people own pets. Common pets include dogs, cats, hamsters, birds, and fish; some people have horses for pets. Students draw these animals and write simple sentences such as, "I wish I had a _____." or "My favorite pet is a _____. I like it because _____." This unit is hardly worthy of the instructional time.

On the other hand, imagine a primary-grade unit on organisms, specifically animals that have become domesticated and often are pets. Students learn that all organisms have basic needs, such as air, water, and food, and that they can only survive in a habitat where those needs are met. They learn about the characteristics of different animals that support their survival. For instance, they learn that mice have chisel-like teeth that allow them to eat seeds and nuts. They learn that horses have flat teeth that enable them to grind grass. They learn that dogs and cats have carnassials for killing and slicing. They learn terms like *herbivore*, *carnivore*, *omnivore*, and *specialized diet*. They hear the word *characteristics* multiple times over the course of the science unit, and they begin to use the word themselves. They examine photographs of familiar animals and look for specialized features. They use mirrors to look in their own mouths at the types of teeth they have. They use terms such as *canine teeth*, *incisors*, and *function*. They are exposed to the word *masticate*.

Unfortunately, even when the curriculum is rich, some teachers instill in their students the sense that the vocabulary is primarily to be learned (i.e., memorized) in order to pass a test rather than because it is central to the building of knowledge and to communicating that knowledge. In these classrooms, students may perform successfully at the moment—having temporarily memorized the terms—but they are not likely to own the words for long, if at all. Mrs. Jones, for example, treats social studies as a chore to be quickly accomplished. She points out the highlighted vocabulary in the text and asks students to read the chapter and answer the questions provided in the text. She quickly moves on to the next chapter. Her students see little value in the content and, although they may

temporarily learn the related vocabulary in order to pass a test, they have little need to truly acquire and retain the new vocabulary. The words contributed little to their knowledge because their learning was superficial and temporary.

In other classrooms, words come to life as students question, investigate, and engage deeply with content. For instance, Mrs. Smith, who teaches next door to Mrs. Jones, breathes life into United States history with her passion for the subject matter, and her students eagerly respond to the topics under study. The content is explored in depth and connections are made among topics; repeated exposure to and meaningful use of content-specific vocabulary is the result. Students contribute to classroom discussions, share ideas and reactions, and ponder ideas. It is through meaningful experiences with the content that specialized vocabulary is developed and a deeper understanding of the content is achieved.

In sum, students must be exposed to rich vocabulary if their own vocabularies are to expand. They must be provided with an environment in which there is substantial linguistic input through the discourse of the teacher, peers, text, and the curriculum itself. However, input is only a part of the story. We turn now to the other part: language output.

Language Output

Language output, or expressing oneself through language, is crucial for language development. Swain (1993) discussed this notion in relation to English language learners, but it is important for all students. Not only must students hear complex language and sophisticated vocabulary, they must also have opportunities to practice using it. As Blachowicz and Fisher (2005, 24) noted, “For students of all ages, ... having lots of time for classroom talk is an essential aspect of encouraging informal word learning.”

Think about your own experiences. You probably hear (and read) new words every day. Many of these words slip past you; that is, they do not become a part of your expressive vocabulary. However, when you have a need to use words—for example, as you summarize a news story for a friend or explain your son’s foot injury to concerned colleagues—your awareness of word choices is heightened and you become more thoughtful about selecting words that convey precise meanings. You try out words you remember hearing and think about whether you are using them accurately. The same is true in the classroom. Students need opportunities to explain, discuss, and share—to communicate ideas that require the use of precise language.

Unfortunately, research shows that teachers do most of the talking in classrooms and that students’ opportunities to talk are quite limited (National Center for Education Statistics 2003). When teachers do invite talk, they most typically engage in what has been identified as an I-R-E interchange. The teacher initiates (I) talk by asking a question, one student responds (R), and the teacher evaluates (E) the response (Cazden 1986). The I-R-E interchange is limited and limiting. In fact, notice that in this model, the teacher speaks two times for every one time a single student speaks. That particular student may not have the opportunity to speak again for some time. Thus, the teacher has far more opportunities to use language than any single student. Even worse, research suggests that as students move through the grade levels, their opportunities for talk decrease (Pinnell and Jaggar 2003).

Educators should provide many opportunities for students to engage in meaningful conversations with one another and with the teacher. Students who talk in pairs or small groups as they explore a topic in science, discuss their reactions to a shared educational experience, and converse to solve problems are exercising and developing their language. Teachers should ensure that students have opportunities to talk in a variety of settings and for a variety of purposes. Different settings and purposes elicit different language.

How can teachers encourage talk in the classroom? First, they must create a safe atmosphere for students to express themselves. Students must feel comfortable speaking with the teacher and with peers. They need to be confident that they will not be ridiculed if they misuse or mispronounce a word. The teacher has a responsibility to build a classroom community in which students respect and sincerely listen to one another. The relationships that the teacher forges with students and those established among the students will, in large measure, determine whether students are comfortable and willing to speak.

Second, teachers must create an environment that facilitates conversation. How you spatially arrange your classroom can facilitate or inhibit social interaction. Does the physical layout of the room allow for collaboration? For instance, are students' desks positioned in clusters or are they separated from one another? Do the desks face one another? Are there tables or other areas in the classroom where students can work together?

Third, teachers must give students time to talk. Is your day so jam-packed that there is no time for peer exploration and reflection on the content? Are you so busy filling the moments of students' school lives with listening to you and silently completing activity sheets that there are no opportunities for them to converse? Instead, students should be encouraged to work in table groups to solve problems and create projects and be prompted to turn to one another to review their learning. They should be invited to share reactions, questions, comments, and personal connections. As teachers prepare lessons, they should ensure that time for student talk is explicitly included in their plans and make sure that "student talk" doesn't mean that only the three or four most vocal students get to speak.

Fourth, teachers must provide students with reasons to talk. They must stimulate students' interest in the content, encourage students' questions, and provide them with experiences that are highly engaging and that arouse their curiosity. With genuine reasons to communicate, students will talk.

Strategies for Encouraging Classroom Discourse

The remainder of this chapter is devoted to sharing strategies that engage students in talk; that is, they provide opportunities for language input and language output. Some of the strategies are easy "drop-ins" to any lesson you teach. They will work with any content area and at nearly any step in the instructional sequence. Others require more time and planning. What they all have in common is that they encourage high levels of student engagement with peers. In these strategies, most or all students will express their understandings of the content or their perspectives about an issue. Most or all students will share their experiences or ideas. Most or all will use the language of the subject matter. Sometimes students will share their thinking with one partner, sometimes with a small group, and sometimes with larger groups. We hope you will test these strategies in your

own classroom and make thoughtful observations about the differences between the language experiences these strategies provide for students and the experiences provided by teachers who engage in the I-R-E classroom discussion pattern or who provide no opportunities for student talk at all.

1. **Think-Pair-Share**

Think-Pair-Share (Lyman 1981), a strategy that may be used in any content area, facilitates students' use of language as they first consider a question that the teacher has posed, briefly discuss their responses with partners, and then share their answers with the entire class. For example, when teaching about the Civil War, a teacher may stop and ask students to think of three important concepts from the lesson. Or the teacher may be more specific and ask students to state some of the causes of the war. After providing the students with a moment to think quietly, the teacher announces, "Pair," and students turn to their neighbors to talk about their responses. Finally, the teacher asks pairs to volunteer to share with the class some of the causes that they discussed. This strategy provides a break from teacher talk and allows students to articulate what they have learned. In their discussions, students use the language of the subject matter. In this example, words such as *abolition*, *confederacy*, and *secession*—ones they have heard from the teacher—begin to become part of their own repertoires because they have a chance to use them immediately. Note that this strategy contrasts with the I-R-E model in which the teacher initiates a response by posing a question, a single student responds, and the teacher evaluates or provides feedback. In Think-Pair-Share, all students talk.

In addition to providing a structure for students to respond to questions as a review of content, Think-Pair-Share may be used to facilitate students' thinking about connections between the content and students' lives or other content. For instance, if a teacher is about to begin a lesson or unit of study on animals' defenses, he or she may ask students to think about any self-protective behavior they have witnessed in their pets or in wild animals. Then students talk in pairs about their observations, and finally, they share with the class.

2. **10:2 Lecture**

A strategy similar to Think-Pair-Share is the 10:2 Lecture. This strategy is described by Brechtel (2001) as a means for providing English language learners with an opportunity to practice language, but we believe it is useful for all learners. The idea is that after approximately every 10 minutes of instruction, students should be provided with two minutes of oral processing time. In other words, students should turn to a partner and discuss what they have learned. This paired response time provides a risk-free environment for testing understanding of new ideas and information and prompts the students to use oral language to express and clarify their understandings. The 10:2 Lecture does not include the think time that is a step in Think-Pair-Share, but it can easily be modified to include think time prior to paired discussion. One advantage of this strategy is that it requires frequent pauses in instruction for student talk, and the name itself—10:2 Lecture—is a good reminder of the importance of providing students with frequent opportunities to talk about what they are learning.

3. Numbered Heads Together

Numbered Heads Together is a cooperative learning strategy that increases students' opportunities to talk. In this strategy, described by Kagan (1994), the teacher asks questions about the content and, rather than call on individuals to respond, he or she has the students meet in small groups of four to discuss the answer. Students are numbered off so there is a one, two, three, and four in each group. After allowing the students time to discuss the answer to the question, the teacher randomly selects a number from one to four (perhaps using an overhead spinner) and asks all the students with that number to raise their hands. Then the teacher calls on one of the students whose hand is raised.

This strategy promotes high levels of engagement because the students work together to generate a response to the question, and their task is to ensure that everyone in their group knows the answer. All students realize they may be selected to articulate the answer for their group and therefore are motivated to participate. Kagan contrasted Numbered Heads Together with the more typical classroom exchanges we described earlier and noted that the traditional approach can promote negative interdependence as students compete against one another for the opportunity to answer the question. Numbered Heads Together instead promotes positive interdependence while also promoting individual accountability. Furthermore, because students work in small groups to craft a response, we believe the strategy offers students who otherwise might not have volunteered to respond the opportunity to share their thoughts and practice using academic language.

Teacher questions may range from those that require a single brief response (e.g., "What is the capital of Wyoming?") to those that require an explanation (e.g., "Explain how to convert improper fractions to mixed numbers.") and those that invite diverse responses (e.g., "Give three examples of energy you saw on the way to school today."). Of course, the more open-ended the question, the more talk that will occur in the group.

As we noted before, providing students with brief think time before talking with peers allows them to gather their thoughts and thus increases the likelihood that they will have something to contribute to the conversation. Even if some students have less to say in their groups, the odds are one in four that their numbers will be selected and so they generally listen actively and rehearse the response so they can successfully represent their group if called upon.

4. Learning Circles

Based on the literature circles described by Daniels (1994), learning circles may be established to provide a vehicle for discussion of content. Learning circles are formed by small groups of students who meet periodically to share ideas about the content they have been studying. Each student has a different role in the circle, and so all students have something unique to contribute to the group conversation. Roles vary widely and may be determined by students or the teacher. For instance, one student may be a summarizer, reviewing for the group what has been taught. Another student may be a word catcher, reminding the group of the specialized

vocabulary that has been introduced. He or she may share a dictionary definition of each word and the contexts in which the teacher (or other source) used the words. A third student may be a questioner, bringing to the group several questions for discussion. A fourth member of the group may serve as an illustrator, drawing in response to the content and then sharing with group members the illustration and eliciting their reactions. Roles may also include a connector who thinks about and makes connections between the content and the students' lives, a text, or the world. Learning circles provide an authentic reason for students to use language in order to share with one another what they have learned and to further explore subject matter.

5. **Powerful Passages and Significant Sentences**

In *Literature-Based Reading Activities* (H. K. Yopp and Yopp 2006), we described a strategy that encourages talk after students have read a selection from a work of literature or a content-area textbook. The teacher prompts the students to identify a powerful passage (or, if the teacher prefers, a significant sentence) they wish to share with their peers. Students read their passages aloud to several partners, one at a time, and explain why they chose the passages. In other words, they share their passages with several peers in succession and provide the rationale for their selections. When we have used this strategy with students ranging from the elementary to university level, we have noticed that students at all levels become more fluent in their reading of the passage and more articulate and detailed in their explanations with each sharing.

This simple strategy may be used with groups as they read the same text (e.g., after reading a section in their social studies text) or as they read different texts (e.g., after a silent reading period during which they read self-selected books). When all students have read the same text, they are interested in comparing their passage selections with one another. Because there is no "correct" selection, students engage in authentic conversations about their choices; they demonstrate interest in the variety of passages and their understanding of the text deepens as they discuss their choices. When students have read different texts, they provide their partners with contextual information about the passages, perhaps summarizing the events in the story to this point or describing a character's personality prior to sharing their passages. Thus, the talk that surrounds the sharing of the passages is plentiful.

6. **Inquiry Lessons**

Inquiry lessons engage students in investigations to satisfy their own curiosities and answer their own questions. The lessons prompt exploration and discovery. Students have their hands on objects, materials, or resources; they seek information; and they generate and test hypotheses as they look for explanations and solutions. Because vocabulary acquisition occurs most easily in context when students care about the topics, inquiry lessons are ideal for promoting students' purposeful use of language and developing students' language.

Many teachers are skilled at designing lessons that spark students' active search for knowledge. In science, for example, they demonstrate startling events, such as a peeled hard-boiled egg being sucked into a small-mouthed bottle. Students are

surprised by the demonstration, ask questions of the teacher and each other, offer tentative explanations, request replications of the event, and look to expert sources to seek explanations for their observations—all the while engaged in purposeful discussion about the unexpected event. Other teachers supply a variety of materials related to the curriculum, such as seeds or magnets, and allow students to explore them with peers. In social studies, teachers invite students to view a range of print and nonprint resources, such as texts, images, and other artifacts related to their study of hunter-gatherer societies. As students interact with the resources, they generate questions and the teacher supports them in refining those questions and conducting investigations related to them.

Students often have strong affective responses when they observe discrepant events, handle materials, and view interesting images. These responses are usually accompanied by language, as students spontaneously express their thoughts and feelings or share their knowledge and personal experiences. Teachers can capitalize on student interest and further students' language development by creating environments that support inquiry and encouraging students to work together to pursue the answers to their questions.

7. **Wordless Picture Books**

You read about Chad's positive experience with a wordless picture book in our "Introduction: First Words" section. Wordless picture books are rich in images but contain very little or no text. They are typically narratives; that is, the illustrations convey a story. One of our favorite wordless picture books is Tomie dePaola's (1978) humorous *Pancakes for Breakfast*. This book tells the story of a woman who awakens early one morning craving pancakes. As viewers turn the pages, they see her futile efforts to obtain the necessary ingredients. The illustrations in wordless picture books such as *Pancakes for Breakfast* provide rich detail that supports comprehension, and they beg for students to use oral language to share what they see.

Wordless picture books may be used with any age group. With young children, teachers might begin by talking about the illustrations in detail and using precise and complex language to share the story the pictures tell (e.g., "On this page, we see the sun is rising. It casts a warm, red glow across the hills and through the woman's curtainless window. It looks like early morning in the countryside."). Then teachers invite the children to tell what they see as they work their way through the pages together (e.g., "Ah! What is happening on this page?"). If multiple copies of the book are available, they may be distributed to the students, who then revisit the book and tell the story to one another, changing it as they wish to reflect their views of the story.

Older students may be encouraged to work with partners to create a story based on the illustrations. All students should be prompted to provide details to foster oral language: What is the setting? What words might be used to describe the hills? What can we tell about the character by the expression on his or her face? What is he or she thinking and doing? Why is the character doing what he or she is doing?

A meaningful extension of sharing wordless picture books is to have students create original works and share them with one another.

Teachers can alter books with text to make wordless picture books. The books must have illustrations that convey the story sufficiently so that the words are not necessary. The teacher covers the text using strips of paper or sticky notes and shares the book as he or she would a wordless picture book.

Some of our favorite wordless picture books include the following:

- Aliko. *Tabby*. New York: HarperCollins, 1995.
- Baker, Jeannie. *Home*. New York: Greenwillow, 2004.
- Bang, Molly. *The Grey Lady and the Strawberry Snatcher*. New York: Four Winds Press, 1980.
- Carle, Eric. *Do You Want to Be My Friend?* New York: Philomel Books, 1988.
- Crews, Donald. *Freight Train*. New York: Greenwill Books, 1978.
- Day, Alexandra. *Good Dog, Carl*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986.
- Hutchins, Pat. *Rosie's Walk*. New York: Aladdin Paperbacks, 2005.
- Jenkins, Steve. *Looking Down*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997.
- Keats, Ezra Jack. *Clementina's Cactus*. New York: Viking, 1999.
- Lui, Jae-Soo. *Yellow Umbrella*. La Jolla, CA: Kane/ Miller Book Publishers, 2002.
- Mayer, Mercer, and Marianna Mayer. *A Boy, a Dog, a Frog, and a Friend*. New York: Dial Press, 1971.
- Rothman, Eric. *Time Flies*. New York: Dell Dragonfly, 2003.
- Spier, Peter. *Peter Spier's Rain*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982.
- Van Allsburg, Chris. *Mysteries of Harris Burdick*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984.
- Wiesner, David. *Tuesday*. New York: Clarion, 1991.

8. Photo Review

Photographs of students engaging in learning activities may also be used as prompts for oral language. The teacher takes photos of students during a lesson or unit of study and later distributes copies of the photos to the class. Students are then asked to closely examine the photos and talk with one another about what they see and remember about the lesson. The teacher encourages the students to be specific and use words that are important to the content. He or she may even identify particular words, writing them on the board or distributing word cards, that he or she hopes to hear the students use. In this way, the teacher promotes the students' use of academic vocabulary.

For instance, as part of a mathematics unit on graphing, a fifth-grade teacher might

have students work in small groups to gather data on how high a ball bounces when dropped from four feet. Students measure the height of the first bounce and the subsequent bounces and observe that the height of the bounce changes over time, decreasing with each bounce. Students record the data and then work in teams to display the data on graphs. The graphs are posted in the classroom. The teacher takes digital photos throughout the investigation and again as students record and post their data. The teacher selects representative photos and prints four of them on a single page, makes a copy for each group, and the next day, asks students to meet in their same groups. The teacher distributes the photo pages and gives each group a set of word cards. On each card is written one of the following words: *investigation*, *line graph*, *x-axis*, *y-axis*, and *scale*. The teacher tells the students that he or she will be listening for them to use these words as they discuss the lesson with one another. The photos and word cards serve to spark the students' memories and promote a high level of engagement because the students are likely to be eager to talk about what they see themselves and their classmates doing in the photos.

A primary-grade teacher might take photos of his or her students engaged in a music lesson in which they explore different types of instruments and learn a system for classification. Photos include students beating on drums and tambourines, examining a guitar, and experimenting with recorders. The teacher hands one of the students the camera and asks the student to take a photo of him or her playing the trumpet. After photos are printed and distributed, students talk with one another about what they learned. The teacher writes the terms *classification*, *string*, *wind*, *brass*, and *percussion* on the board and asks students to use them in their discussions. After a few moments of student talk, the teacher asks for volunteers to share with the entire class. The teacher applauds their use of the terminology.

A junior high school science teacher might share photos of equipment in his or her lab as a review at the end of the first month of school. The teacher provides sets of the photos to small groups of students and asks them to talk with one another about the names, purposes, and any experiences (including in-class activities) they had with each piece of equipment. The photos are then projected on a large screen and a brief whole-class discussion is held.

9. **Sketch to Stretch**

Adapted from Harste, Short, and Burke (1988), Sketch to Stretch is intended to stretch students' thinking and promote discussion as students sketch their understanding of the content after reading a text selection, hearing a lecture, or participating in a learning experience. Sketches, quickly rendered, may be literal or symbolic, narrowly or broadly focused, and elaborate or simple. After allowing a few minutes for sketching, the teacher prompts students to meet in small groups to share their work. Students talk about what they see in one another's sketches before they offer detailed explanations of their own drawings. The teacher may circulate throughout the room and record key words he or she hears in students' discussions, later commenting on their usage of important vocabulary.

Although Sketch to Stretch is typically used after students have engaged with content, it may be used before students engage with content as a means of activating

their background knowledge on a topic. For instance, just prior to studying the topic, a teacher might ask his or her students to sketch images that come to mind when they hear the word *erosion*. Thus, students' background knowledge (including relevant vocabulary) is activated. Again, the teacher may wish to comment on students' vocabularies or use their discussions as a springboard for introducing key vocabulary.

10. Capture the Content

The teachers in the science department at the high school that two of our children attend ask the students each week to tell a parent or other adult three concepts they learned during the week. The teachers provide a standard form on which the parent records what the student says, and then the parent signs the form. The student submits a form each Friday. We were pleased with the important attempt to facilitate school-home connections, and we have been struck by the amount of conversation that occurs as our children work to articulate their learning. We notice that they sometimes grope for the appropriate terminology, and they occasionally search for the right word in their notes or textbooks. We often request clarification and explanation so that we can put into writing what our children are communicating. Through this exercise, our children have to think about the content, consider the important concepts, and use language to express their learning.

Here is an example of a conversation Peter and his mother had about a concept from his ninth-grade biology class. Notice that his mother requested clarification and assistance from her son so she could clearly articulate a concept on the form.

Mom: Okay Peter, I'm ready. What's one of the concepts you discussed in class this week?

Peter: Fungi are cleaners of the planet.

Mom: I'm not sure what you mean.

Peter: Well, fungi break down dead animals, for one thing.

Mom: Oh, I get it. Interesting. How shall I write that?

Peter: Something like fungi are decomposers, that they break down dead organisms, that if they didn't, all the dead plants and animals would take up a lot of space on the earth.

Mom: Fascinating. Sounds like they serve a very useful purpose. Help me put all that you said in a sentence. You said a few things. "Fungi are decomposers ..."

Peter: Okay, you can write: "As decomposers, fungi clean the environment of dead organisms, breaking them down into useable nutrients for other life."

Mom: That's great. You even added a little more information!

Peter: Mom, can you imagine what would happen if there were no fungi? Think about all the dead leaves, animals, and other waste that would pile up on the planet.

Note how the science teachers' simple request that students talk to their family members about three concepts learned during the week sparked a great deal of language from the student. Peter thought about the concepts he had learned, used language to verbalize the concepts, and revised his language to help his mother understand and record his thoughts. This strategy can be implemented at any grade level and is a wonderful way to get students talking at home about what they are learning at school.

11. **Mystery Bags**

Mystery Bags can be used to spark conversations about a topic. The teacher prepares a bag by inserting objects that are related to the content of an upcoming lesson or unit. For instance, if kindergarteners are going to explore tools for measuring time, the teacher might include a stopwatch, wrist watch, alarm clock, calendar, metronome, pocket watch, hourglass, and small sundial. If third graders are going to explore principles of light, the teacher might place a flashlight, mirror, container of water, and glasses in the bag. If eighth graders are beginning a unit on work (i.e., the scientific meaning of this word), the teacher might place a nutcracker, wheel, screw, and scissors in the bag. Small groups of students are each given a bag (which may or may not contain identical items) and either at the teacher's signal or on their own, students remove one object at a time from the bag. As each object is removed, the students' task is to identify and talk about the object. They are encouraged to draw on their experiences with or knowledge about the object. If a wheel is pulled from the bag, for instance, students share what they know about its use. Then another item is taken from the bag. Students again identify it and discuss it. They also talk about how it might be related to the first item. Why would both items be in the same bag? The mystery surrounding the bag, the opportunity to handle objects, and the time to talk informally generally facilitates interest and conversation.

12. **Response Cards**

This strategy engages students in talking about content from a variety of perspectives. The teacher prepares for the activity by gathering colored index cards, making decisions about the tasks he or she wants the students to perform, and recording those tasks on the cards. For example, the teacher might write "Question" on all of the yellow cards, "Connect" on all of the blue cards, and "Summarize" on all of the green cards. Then he or she randomly distributes the cards to the students, one card per student.

As the teacher reads, lectures, shows a video, or provides some other instructional input, he or she invites the students to think about the content from the perspective of a questioner, connector, or summarizer, depending on the card they received.

Those with yellow cards think about questions they have about the content, those with blue cards think about connections they can make between the content and their lives or other material they have learned, and those with green cards think about how they would summarize the information being presented.

The teacher pauses in his or her instruction after several minutes and asks the students with the yellow cards to meet with one or two other students with a yellow card and, as a team, generate questions. Likewise, he or she asks the students with the blue cards to gather in small groups and those with green cards to meet with one or two others. After giving students a few minutes of talk time, the teacher asks the students to share their questions, connections, and summaries with the whole group. Then the teacher continues with his or her instruction and, at an appropriate point, stops and again asks the students to meet with partners and engage in their assigned tasks.

After several opportunities to question, connect, or summarize, the teacher tells the students to trade their cards for one of a different color. The students engage in the new tasks and meet with different classmates as they talk about the content of the lesson.

The response cards strategy is generally a highly motivating experience that stimulates considerable discussion about the topic and provides students with an opportunity to think—and talk—about the content from more than one perspective.

13. **Jigsaw**

The Jigsaw strategy has a long history and numerous variations (Kagan 1994). It is an approach to instruction that involves the students becoming experts in some portion of the learning material. Students form groups and each member is assigned or selects one section of the material to be learned. The students gather information about their portions of the material, often using text resources, and then teach the information to their groupmates. Jigsaw provides an outstanding opportunity for students to deeply process content and use specialized content vocabulary to teach their peers.

14. **Four Corners**

Four Corners gets students out of their seats and talking with classmates about important content or ideas. The teacher asks a question or makes a statement and then sends the students to the four corners of the classroom to respond to the prompt. For example, the teacher might ask students to think about whether they agree with the following statement after reading *A Single Shard* by Linda Sue Park (2001): “Tree-ear was foolish to carry the potter’s vases to the royal court.” After giving the students a few moments to think about this statement, the teacher asks them to go to the corner of the room that reflects their reaction to the statement. The corners are designated *Strongly Agree*, *Agree*, *Disagree*, and *Strongly Disagree*. In their corners, the students discuss their ideas about the statement. Then the teacher invites students in each corner to share the group’s thinking about the statement. Sometimes teachers prepare and ask for responses to several statements before students begin moving to corners so that after discussing the first statement, students can travel to the next

corner—at a signal—to discuss their responses to the next statement.

A variation of this strategy is to assign the students to corners. After the students have learned about changes to the earth's surface, for example, the teacher might randomly assign students to corners labeled *Earthquake*, *Erosion and Weathering*, *Landslides*, and *Volcanic Eruptions*. Students talk about what they know about each of these change processes and then summarize the group's discussion for the class.

Conclusion

Language learning cannot occur without exposure to language, and it is enhanced by opportunities to use language. In this chapter, we discussed the importance of providing students with plentiful opportunities for both language input and language output. Students need to be exposed to language through rich and meaningful interactions with their teacher, peers, text, and the curriculum. Teachers need to be intentional and deliberate about providing these sources of input. Similarly, teachers must carefully plan for many daily opportunities for students to engage in discussion with others in order to give them experiences with the words they are learning as well as reasons to learn new words.

We opened this chapter with a strategy that we describe in [Chapter 5](#). This strategy, called Possible Sentences, asked you to think about what you already know about several terms and the relationships among them and to take an educated guess at how the terms might be used in a sentence. We hope the strategy stretched your thinking and also sparked your curiosity about the words. We encourage you to revisit the sentences you generated and think about how you would revise them now that you have read the chapter. You might also locate the terms in this chapter and see how we used them.



Think About It!

1. Think about the vocabulary that your students encounter in your classroom. Audiotape yourself for 10 minutes one day. Listen to the recording and jot down the sophisticated or specialized terminology you used. Later, record yourself again with the goal of using even more of these words. Listen to the recording, jot down the rich words, and compare the number with your first recording.
2. List each of the ways you ensure that students have time to talk. Share the most successful way with a colleague.
3. As noted in this chapter, students need a safe atmosphere in which to express themselves. How do you establish a safe atmosphere for your English language learners?



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