



Vocabulary Instruction: Advice to New Teachers

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Finding optimal instructional strategies and materials for vocabulary teaching can be challenging for teachers. There are many questions elementary-school educators ponder regarding the inclusion of new vocabulary words in their daily lessons. “What is the optimal number of word on which to focus?” “What should be the source (s) of these words?” “Should I teach these terms in isolation or in context?” “How often should I conduct a vocabulary lesson?” “Which instructional strategies should I employ or not even consider?” In addition to these pedagogical ponderings, research regarding vocabulary instruction “has a long if somewhat sporadic history” (Graves & Watts-Taffe, 2002, p. 140). After more than 100 years of vocabulary instruction research, educators have concluded vocabulary knowledge positively influences students’ success with reading comprehension and reading fluency. Since vocabulary instruction is one of the tenets of the National Reading Panel Report (2000), varied information regarding optimal methods and materials for vocabulary teaching has been published in recent years (Brand, 2004; Cooper with Kiger, 2003; Ellery, 2005; Harp & Brewer, 2005; McLaughlin & Allen, 2002; Tompkins, 2003). Despite the strong research base concerning the important place for vocabulary instruction in literacy teaching and learning, teachers, especially novice instructors, still wonder about optimal techniques for helping to increase students’ vocabulary knowledge. In this article, I will focus on advice to new teachers regarding vocabulary teaching.

WIDE READING THROUGH INDEPENDENT READING AND READ-ALOUDS

Various literacy experts have written about the important place wide reading has to a student’s vocabulary development (Cooper with Kiger, 2003; Ellery, 2005; Graves, Juel, & Graves, 1998; Graves & Watts-Taffe, 2002; Harp & Brewer, 2005). Whether students participate in teacher read-alouds of different text genres or read extensively on their own, reading “is a natural way to increase vocabulary [knowledge]” (Ellery, p. 131). “Students need at least twenty minutes of daily reading to

help increase their vocabulary...by 1,000 words per year” (Nagy, Anderson, & Herman, 1987 as cited in Ellery, p. 131). Not only should a child read extensively, he/she should experience a variety of reading materials. Fiction; nonfiction; traditional literature such as fairy tales, fables, tall tales; periodicals; concept books such as alphabet books; newspapers; and letters aid students in discovering different text and sentence structures, literary language, and topics. The context in which the student is reading certainly helps to foster understanding of a word.

There are two valuable formats for students to increase their exposure to new words in authentic literature sources. First, there are teacher read-alouds. In the primary grades (kindergarten-grade two), this sharing of a text between the instructor and his/her students is often through the use of enlarged texts or big books as well as through songs, poems, chants, and rhymes, with the text inscribed on a large chart. The shared book experience was first developed by Don Holdaway in 1979 (as cited in Cooper with Kiger, 2003). Holdaway wanted to bring the bedtime story reading experience between a parent and a child into the classroom. In shared reading, teachers show students the text as it is being read, aiding in the development of various book and print concepts (title page, author, illustrator, front and back covers, directionality of print and reading, letter/sound associations, sentence punctuation) as well as the meaning of various words. By engaging in a conversation with the teacher as the text is being read, students’ reading comprehension also is fostered. In like manner, students in the intermediate grades (third-sixth grade) can greatly benefit from participation in teacher read-alouds. “This type of reading helps to activate already acquired knowledge and to develop background knowledge and vocabulary” (Cooper with Kiger, p. 36). Teacher read-alouds are particularly helpful when a text contains difficult concepts and words, which may pose problems for students to decode on their own. Readers recognize more words in listening and reading than they produce in speaking and writing (Harp & Brewer, 2005). Regardless of the age of the students, teacher read-alouds should take place at a specific time each day in order for the students to anticipate this reading experience as well as

to understand that teacher read-alouds have an important place in a classroom literacy program. "Listening to someone read aloud is an excellent way for students to become aware of words and expand their oral vocabulary, which is the foundation for all other vocabulary learning" (Cooper with Kiger, p. 193).

A second valuable way for students to take part in reading texts of various genres and types is through independent reading. Independent reading is also described as Readers Workshop, Sustained Silent Reading (SSR), Drop Everything and Read (DEAR), or Daily Independent Reading Time (DIRT) (Graves, Juel, & Graves, 1998). No matter what independent reading might be entitled, it involves students reading texts of their own interest, choosing, and appropriate reading level. Sometimes students bring books into the classroom from their homes. Other times, varied reading materials found in a classroom or school library are used. "When students read independently, they read silently by themselves, for their own purposes, and at their own pace" (Tompkins, 2003, p. 39). The length of time for independent reading varies by grade level. In kindergarten-grade two, students can independently explore books for about 15 minutes. Above the second grade, students can have independent interactions with books for 20-30 minutes or longer, depending on the school language arts schedule. In some classrooms, primary-grade children read together with intermediate-grade children as they participate in a reading buddies program (Tompkins). Like shared reading and teacher read-alouds, independent reading should take place at a prescribed time each day to foster an enjoyment of reading and to establish the habit of reading independently. Independent reading is a valuable way for students to read widely and to develop and increase their vocabularies and word knowledge (Graves, Juel, & Graves).

While wide reading is well supported as a means for extending students' vocabulary knowledge (Cooper with Kiger, 2003; Ellery, 2005; Graves, Juel, & Graves, 1998; Graves & Watts-Taffe, 2002; Harp & Brewer, 2005), not all educators believe wide reading alone is responsible for an increase in a reader's vocabulary. Delpit (1987) and Reyes (1991) "have argued ...learning words implicitly through reading...experiences assumes that students have existing literacy and language proficiencies, and that the same sort of instruction works equally well for everyone" (as cited in Tompkins, 2003, p. 199). Not all students have rich and varied reading experiences away from school, especially those from non-mainstream cultural and linguistic groups (Graves, Juel, & Graves; Tompkins). Varied opportunities for students to participate in reading different text genres through daily read-alouds and independent reading are effective ways to provide reading experiences that may be lacking in students' home environments and are an avenue for extending students' vocabulary knowledge.

INDIVIDUAL WORD SELECTION

Besides being offered wide reading opportunities, students also should be afforded time to self-select their own words for vocabulary study. In 1986, Haggard described the Vocabulary Self-Selection strategy, in which students, following a reading experience, select a word they feel the entire class should study as well as choose additional words for their own personal word exploration. This technique is similar to "word of the day," in which the teacher or a student presents a word for the entire class to ponder, learn, and employ in a variety of novel contexts (Graves & Watts-Taffe, 2002; Harp & Brewer, 2005). Sources for "word of the day" include "books, magazine articles, newspapers, [and] heard contexts such as appropriate television programs, discussions, and other teachers" (Graves & Watts-Taffe, p. 146).

Students in grades one through six can write these new words they are discovering in vocabulary notebooks or journals; on index cards; on post-it notes; or on portable and individual word walls, which are compiled on file folders. Kindergarten students and those pupils who are not independently proficient in writing can orally recite the new vocabulary words they have individually discovered as well as use each word in a sentence. The audience for this oral vocabulary word recitation can be the students' peers and/or the teacher.

Additionally, students can include these words in self-made booklets, alphabet books, sentences, illustrations, and original word inventions (Vacca et al., 2003, p. 207). When students and teachers are sharing newly discovered words with others, they also should include the definition and context of the term as well as their reason(s) for selecting the word. Self-selection of vocabulary words by teachers and students can help instill the importance of word consciousness, and the value of unique and interesting terms being found in a variety of environments. Furthermore, the word-conscious student knows a lot of words and enjoys including these words in his/her oral language and in various written pieces (Cooper with Kiger, 2003; Ellery, 2005; Graves, Juel, & Graves; Graves & Watts-Taffe).

WORD WALLS

The words students are acquiring from teacher read-alouds, independent reading, and individual word selection can be displayed in the kindergarten through intermediate-grade classrooms by means of word walls. Word walls are specific areas in which new words the students are learning are presented (Cooper with Kiger, 2003; Harp & Brewer, 2005; Pike & Mumper, 2004; Tompkins, 2003; Vacca et al., 2003). Unique, interesting, important, and/or confusing words students are discovering in texts (fiction, nonfiction, content area textbooks); in their environment; and during thematic units are written on butcher paper, sentence strips, newsprint, or chart paper; displayed on bulletin boards; or scribed on small cards and placed in

pocket charts or attached to classroom walls. Word wall words are organized in a variety of ways such as alphabetic order; by certain word patterns; by story grammar elements (setting, characters, problem, plot, resolution); or in specific categories related to a theme (such as Civil War battles, personalities, and causes). Terms for word walls can be chosen and scripted by the students, the teacher, or both.

Brand (2004) describes the following purposes for word walls:

- Support students' learning of high-frequency words
- Provide example words, highlighting difficult concepts...
- Support students' vocabulary development
- Demonstrate how to collect words found during reading
- Provide a space for students to display words that are important to them
- Provide a space for students to sort and categorize words and phrases. (p. 140)

Word walls have an important role in vocabulary learning. When specific words are posted in the classroom, these terms become visible to all students. Pupils can refer to these words when reading, writing, and during word-study activities (Tompkins, 2003, p. 236). Finally, words placed on word walls can remain there for the entire school year or only during a particular text reading or unit of study (Vacca et al., 2003, p. 194). "Word walls promote independence in vocabulary learning and motivate students to want to learn about words" (Pike & Mumper, 2004, p. 105).

BBEYOND DIRECT VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION

Participation in teacher read-alouds, independent reading, self-selected word investigation, and the viewing of classroom word walls, it is valuable for children to take part in direct vocabulary instruction. There is a link between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension. However, direct vocabulary instruction can increase reading comprehension only when "a few key words are thoroughly taught in meaningful context, words are related to students' prior knowledge...and students are given multiple exposures to the words" (Stahl & Fairbanks, 1986; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998 as cited in Cooper with Kiger, 2003, p. 191).

The traditional vocabulary instructional method of looking up a word's meaning in the dictionary, memorizing the definition, and writing the word in a sentence is not the only way to explicitly understand word meaning. Word learning is multidimensional. It "involves learning new concepts,...new labels for known concepts, and bringing words into students' productive vocabularies" (Graves, 1986 as cited in Harp & Brewer, 2005, p. 214). Additionally, readers certainly can understand a text without knowing every word in

it. However, when students are directly taught how to learn new words, the speed, quantity, and quality of their vocabulary development is enhanced (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).

There are various types of words that can be the focus of direct vocabulary instruction. First, there are words with multiple meanings, which need the context of the sentence to determine the exact derivation. "Dealing with multiple meanings of words becomes even more challenging when children encounter figurative language such as metaphors, idioms, and similes that have meanings different from the literal" (Harp & Brewer, 2005, p. 214). Second, structure words (am, is, are, was, the, and, of, for example) often need to be pointed out, since these words lack meaning and may look similar to other words. Calling attention to root words with prefixes and suffixes also can be helpful in unlocking the meaning of novel words. Likewise, key words, which come directly from the context being read and convey important ideas and concepts, should be included in direct vocabulary teaching. Additionally, words with unique origins and which "tickle the imagination and create enthusiasm, excitement, and interest" (Vacca et al., 2003, p. 288) are another focus for word study. Finally, knowing there are three levels of word knowledge: unknown, acquainted, and established (Beck, McKeown, & Omanson, 1987).

Three Levels of Word Knowledge (Box 1) depicts word level knowledge as a determining factor regarding specific terms to be included in explicit word study.

What is the most appropriate manner for explicit vocabulary instruction? First, the teacher should choose eight to ten words for focused word learning (Ambruster & Osborn, 2001, p. 41). The exact number of words for explicit vocabulary teaching should depend on the difficulty of the text as well as the students' background knowledge regarding the text content, genre, and structure. With primary-grade students, four to five words can be selected for vocabulary practice. However, with intermediate-grade students, eight-ten terms can be studied. Before introducing a new text, a teacher can ascertain the students' prior knowledge for the text content and genre by involving the class in an activity such as the completion of the first two columns of a KWL chart (Ogle, 1986). Also, individual children can predict the meaning of new vocabulary terms before reading a text and write the contextual meaning and dictionary definition once the reading task is completed (Box 2). After prior knowledge for the topic being studied as well as individual word meaning has been determined, explicit vocabulary teaching can begin. The instructor might consider teaching words in relation to other words; teaching words systematically and in depth (exploring the word's definition by "finding an antonym, fitting the word into a sentence blank, or classifying the word with other words") (Vacca et al., 2003, p. 291); encouraging students to identify apt and creative uses of language found in varied

Resource Box 1
Three Levels of Word Knowledge

(Beck, McKeown, & Omanson, 1987 as cited in Graves, Juel, & Graves, 1998, p. 186)

Activity: Before reading the book, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (Potter & McPhail [illustrator], 1986), a second-grade student displays his/her knowledge of key vocabulary words from the first eight pages of the book.

Unknown Level <i>(A word completely unfamiliar to the reader)</i>	Acquainted Level <i>(A word the reader recognizes the meaning of after giving the word some thought)</i>	Established Level <i>(A word the reader recognizes easily, quickly, and automatically)</i>
fir tree mischief current buns parsley	root fields blackberries squeezed	garden accident naughty

Vocabulary Words: fir tree root fields garden accident
 mischief currant buns blackberries naughty squeezed parsley

literature sources (Graves & Watts-Taffe, 2002, p. 151); asking students to apply this new word knowledge to future reading and writing contexts; inviting students to write their own definition for the novel term; and demonstrating how to use different text features (illustrations/diagrams, varied fonts, dialogue) to help determine word meaning. The context of the text being read should be paramount in explicit vocabulary instruction. Isolated vocabulary lists, that have no connection to content and texts being studied, should not be employed. The teacher should make “efficient use of vocabulary instruction – to identify the words and concepts that are likely to pose serious difficulties for the students, the types of difficulties, and the most appropriate instructional remedies” (Nagy, 1988, p. 32).

**VARIED VOCABULARY ACTIVITIES
TO HELP EXTEND WORD KNOWLEDGE**

“To be effective,...vocabulary instruction must provide both adequate definitions and illustrations of how words are used in natural sounding contexts” (Nagy, 1988, p. 9). There are a variety of activities teachers can employ to help inform and extend their students’ knowledge of new words and terms. Some of these activities are appropriate for students in kindergarten to grade six, while other vocabulary practices are useful with just primary or just intermediate-grade students. These different vocabulary building techniques can be implemented before, during, and after reading a text. Before the text reading commences, primary-grade students can look at a text’s illustrations and use these pictures to determine wording meaning, while intermediate-grade students can explore text features (chapter titles, illustrations, diagrams, maps, captions, headings) to predict word meaning. Next, instructors should show students, through the texts

they are reading, how the structure of the word and/or sentence can affect word meaning. This can be done in different ways. Intermediate-grade students can employ their morphemic knowledge of words to divide terms into prefixes, suffixes, and roots in order to unlock the meaning of a multisyllabic word (Box 3). Students in kindergarten-grade six can participate in a Cloze activity, by orally substituting a synonym for a word located in a text to prove how the syntax and semantics of a sentence are valuable in determining a single word’s meaning. Finally, primary and intermediate-grade students can practice recognition of figures of speech (similes and metaphors) and idiomatic expressions to aid recognition of sentence meaning (Box 4). “The most widely recommended and most useful [word learning] strategy is...using context” (Graves, 2000; Stahl, 1998; Sternberg, 1987 as cited in Graves & Watts-Taffe, 2002, p. 143). Teaching students how to use context to determine a word’s meaning should be an important component of a comprehensive vocabulary program (Graves & Watts-Taffe, p. 143-144).

Besides learning how to use a text’s context for understanding the meaning of new terms and concepts, students can engage in a variety of activities in order to further explore a word’s meaning. Kindergarten through grade-six students can participate in word play and have fun “exploring, manipulating, and celebrating words” (Harp & Brewer, 2005, p. 217). Primary-grade children can play games such as “Concentration” and “Bingo,” while third-grade through sixth-grade readers can create riddles, jokes, and puns in order to manipulate language and practice word meaning. Primary and intermediate-grade students also can participate in a Predict-O-Gram (Blachowicz, 1986) and use a teacher-prepared list of words and phrases to predict time, place, story plots, and character relationships before reading a narrative text

Resource Box 2
KWL Chart (Ogle, 1986)

Description: Before reading the text and/or studying a new topic, the students, under the teacher's direction, brainstorm information they know and would like to learn about a particular topic/word. After reading the text and/or studying the topic, new information is added to the KWL chart regarding what the students learned about this topic/word.

Example : Before beginning a unit of study regarding Massachusetts during the American Revolutionary War, a fourth-grade class completed this KWL Chart.

K	W	L
What We Know	What We Would Like to Learn	What We Learned
Boston Tea Party Patriots wanted their independence Paul Revere completed a famous ride A War With England	When did the Revolutionary War begin? What were the issues for beginning the war? Why were the citizens from Massachusetts so involved in the American Revolutionary War? Who were some of the American Revolutionary War heroes?	

Word Prediction Chart

Description: Before beginning to read a new fiction or nonfiction text, students will predict the meaning for selected, unfamiliar vocabulary words. During reading, the students will write the meaning of the word based on the text's context. After reading, the students will find and write the dictionary meaning for the word.

Example: Before reading "The Guest" from Arnold Lobel's (1982) *Owl at Home*, a first-grade Guided Reading group completed this Word Meaning Chart.

Vocabulary Word	Predicted Meaning	Meaning Based Upon Text Context	Dictionary Meaning
Pea Soup	A thick green soup		
Pounding	Hitting something very hard		
Thumping	Hitting your foot against the floor		
Whirled	Turned around very fast		
Whooshed	Moved very, very quickly		
Rushed	n a big hurry		

Vocabulary Words: pea soup pounding thumping whirled whooshed rushed

(Allen, 1999, p. 48) (Box 5). Third, kindergarten-sixth-grade students can display their word knowledge through the creative arts and draw illustrations of specific vocabulary words as well as dramatize a particular term through participation in a game such as "Charades." Intermediate-grade students can learn about the relationships between certain words and create oral and written word analogies (Table 2). Through interactions with analogies, learners "attempt various...procedures that involve articulation, problem solving, and thinking" (Ignoffo, 1980, p. 520). Finally, children's literature sources that focus on words, such as books with repetitive language patterns; rhymes; and alphabet, word study, and parts of speech themes, are

relevant additions to a classroom vocabulary development program (Box 6).

A third group of activities, in which kindergarten through sixth-grade students can participate in order to increase their word knowledge, are practices involving the sorting and categorizing of words (Box 7). "The process of sorting words is integrally involved in concept development" (Vacca et al., 2003, p. 297). Students can complete closed word sorts, in which they know the categories in advance, or open word sorts, in which "students must search for meanings and discover relationships among words" (Vacca et al., p. 296). Closed word sorts are more appropriate for primary-grade students, while open word sorts are

Resource Box 3
Vocabulary Building Activities Using Text Context

Morphonemic Analysis:

When to Use: After text reading.

Appropriate With: Grade-Three-Grade-Six Students.

Description: In small groups or during a learning center activity, students will separate multisyllable words into root word, prefix, and/or suffix. The source for these words will be texts the students are reading in class.

Resource Box 4
Vocabulary Building Activities Using Text Context

Cloze Procedure:

When to Use: Before or after reading a text.

Appropriate With: Kindergarten-Grade-Six Students.

Description: For a text the students are reading, the teacher will choose a passage for students to practice word meaning. The teacher will delete every fifth word, key words/concepts, different parts of speech, etc. The students will read the passage and, based upon the text's context, will write a word that will fit in the space where the text word is deleted. Students can complete a Cloze activity individually, with a partner, in a small group, or with the whole class. This Cloze Procedure also can be used when the text reading is completed.

Example: After reading Chapter 1 from Roald Dahl's (1970) *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, a small group of fourth-grade students completed this Cloze Procedure to show their contextual understanding of key vocabulary words from this chapter.

Cloze Procedure

Boggis, Bunce, and Bean were _____. They were _____ and _____ men. The children sang _____ about the _____. The three farmers had _____. They _____ in the valley.

Practice With Contextual Meaning of Words:

When to Use: During text reading.

Appropriate With: Kindergarten-Grade-Six Students.

Description: As students are reading, the teacher will point out certain types of words, whose meanings are dependent upon text context:

- ✓ Multiple Meaning Words.
- ✓ Figures of Speech (Similes, Metaphors).
- ✓ Idiomatic Expressions.

relevant for intermediate-grade students. Regardless of the exact type of classification practice in which the students interact, learners should “develop concepts, learn the meanings of new words, and make associations among words” (Tompkins, p. 239).

**GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS TO AID
VOCABULARY LEARNING**

In order to help students “to organize their thinking, so they can independently demonstrate their understanding of new concepts” (Brand, 2004, p. 119-120), graphic organizers can be employed. Graphic organizers are visual displays of information and, depending upon the

specific graphic display, can be used effectively before, during, and/or after text reading. There are various kinds of graphic organizers that are appropriate for extending a student's word knowledge (Boxes 8, 9, 10). Commonly used graphic organizers to show relationships among concepts are semantic maps (Heimlich & Pittleman, 1986), which are appropriate for use by students in kindergarten to grade six. Venn diagrams are employed by primary and intermediate-grade students to compare two (or more) concepts or subjects (Harp & Brewer, 2005), while the Semantic Feature Analysis technique (Pittleman, Heimlich, Berglund, & French, 1991) can be used to compare characteristics of items in a related group.

Resource Box 5

Vocabulary Activities Implemented to Explore a Word's Meaning

Predict-O-Gram (Blachowicz, 1986):

When to Use: Before Text Reading.

Appropriate For: Kindergarten-Grade-Six Students.

Description: Students are given a list of key words from a narrative text the students will be reading. Students predict how these words will be used in the text and place these words on a chart representing important narrative story grammar elements (time, place, story plot, character relationships). Working as a whole class or a small group and using the vocabulary words they classified on the chart, the students will write a summary statement they predict will be found in the text.

Example: Fifth-grade students used key vocabulary words from the Prologue and Chapter 1 of Natalie Babbitt's (1975) *Tuck Everlasting* to make predictions about the book's setting, plot, and characters.

Predict-O-Gram

Time	Place	Plot	Characters
August oppressive	Treegap cabin wood	Ferris wheel running away water Winnie touch-me-not	yellow suit Tucks Fosters

Vocabulary Words: August Treegap Ferris wheel yellow suit running away Tucks Fosters
Winnie water wood oppressive cabin touch-me-not

Summary: *It is an oppressive August day. The Tucks are bringing a yellow suit to the Fosters. They are to meet at the Ferris wheel. As they walk along the road, they meet Winnie who is carrying some touch-me-not flowers in a vase. The vase has water in it. Winnie tells them she lives in a cabin in the wood and is running away.*

To help grade-one through grade-six readers comprehend a particular concept, a concept of definition map (Cooper with Kiger, 2003, p. 202-207) can be employed. Graphic Organizers should be used judiciously, have relevance to the learning situation, be fully modeled by the teacher, and practiced by the entire class before being used independently by the students.

REFERENCE MATERIALS USED IN VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION

In classrooms today, especially in intermediate-grade classrooms, reference materials (dictionaries, glossaries, and thesauruses) are part of vocabulary instruction, not for isolated practice, but in relevance to the texts/content the students are reading and learning. "Instruction for students [employing reference materials] should focus on how these resources can aid in learning meanings of words in the appropriate context" (Ellery, 2005, p. 135). When reading nonfiction, grade-two through grade-six students can refer to the definitions in the book's glossary to ensure understanding of a particular term. During and after reading, intermediate-grade learners can use dictionaries to clarify word usage, to learn word pronunciations, to find out the etymology of words, to investigate parts of speech, and to learn varied definitions of terms (Ellery,

p. 138). Instructors in grades two-six can demonstrate how to use a thesaurus to identify synonyms and/or antonyms, which are related to a particular contextual word. Through employing a thesaurus, pupils should be able to understand the importance of word choice to an author. Glossaries, dictionaries, and thesauruses should motivate students to want to learn new words and should give students the necessary tools for independent word learning (Harp & Brewer, 2005, p. 233).

In order to efficiently use reference materials, students can be taught specific skills. Learning how to alphabetize words can begin in kindergarten and continue through the elementary grades and is an important first step in being able to quickly find a term in a glossary, dictionary, or thesaurus. Also, second-grade through sixth-grade students can discover the relevance of guide words in locating terms in reference books as well as understand the importance of diacritical marks, pronunciation keys, phonetic respellings of words, and different abbreviations in reading a word in a dictionary. Finally, grade-two through grade-six students can employ a text's context and a dictionary to identify the specific meaning of a multi-meaning word. "Teachers should provide structured opportunities for students to use reference books during mini-lessons and word study activities" (Tompkins, 2003, p. 223).

ASSESSMENT OF VOCABULARY LEARNING

In the past, teachers, especially in grades three–six, often administered weekly vocabulary tests to ascertain their students’ vocabulary knowledge. Today, individual word knowledge can be measured in different ways. Students in first grade through sixth grade can place words on a chart based upon three levels of word knowledge (Box 7) or create a word prediction chart (Box 2) to display

understanding of word meaning before and after reading. Additionally, students in the primary and intermediate grades can create “flash cards” (Reutzel & Cooter, 1999, p. 156) and write the vocabulary word on one side of an index card and a sentence and/or illustration, describing the term, on the opposite side. The words for flash cards are self-chosen by the learners and are derived from the texts the students are reading and/or listening to from

Resource Box 6

Vocabulary Activities Implemented to Explore a Word’s Meaning

Creative Arts Activities:

When To Use: After Text Reading.

Appropriate For: Kindergarten–Grade–Six Students.

Description: Students will extend their understanding of new words through participation in creative arts activities:

- ✓ **Art:** Students will create a word poster by illustrating a picture for the word and writing a sentence containing the word.
- ✓ **Drama:** Students will dramatize a word for the whole class or for a small group in a game format such as “Charades.”

Analogies (Vacca et al., 2003):

When to Use: After Text Reading.

Appropriate For: Grade–Three–Grade–Six Students.

Description: The students will create oral and written analogies which depict various relationships between words.

Example: Purpose Relationship: *hand:write::stove: _____*; *bicycle:ride::glass: _____*

Antonym Relationship: *day:night::small: _____*; *happy:sad::tall: _____*

Text Reading Which Focuses on Word Play:

When to Use: During Text Reading.

Appropriate For: Kindergarten–Grade–Six Students.

Description: Students will extend their knowledge of word meanings by participating in teacher Read-Alouds of books that play with language such as:

- Animalia* (Base, 1986).
- Double Trouble in Walla Walla* (Clements, 1997).
- The King Who Rained* (Gwynne, 1970).
- Miss Alaineus* (Frasier, 2000).

Resource Box 7

Sorting and Categorizing Words

Closed Word Sorts (Vacca et al., 2003):

When to Use: After Text Reading.

Appropriate For: Kindergarten–Grade–Two Students.

Description: The students will be given a list of words pertaining to a text the students read or a theme in which the students were interacting. The students will sort the words into categories that are given by the teacher. The *Closed Word Sort* can be completed as a whole class, small group, with partners, or individually.

Example: While studying a unit regarding fruits and vegetables, kindergarten students sorted these fruits and vegetables by colors.

Directions: Sort the following fruits and vegetables by color: *apple, orange, banana, lime, carrot, celery, plum.*

Red	Purple	Orange	Green	Yellow
apple	plum	orange carrot	lime celery	banana

Resource Box 7 continued
Sorting and Categorizing Words

Open Word Sorts (Vacca et al., 2003):

When to Use: After Text Reading.

Appropriate For: Grade-Three-Grade-Six Students.

Description: The students will be given a list of words pertaining to a text the students read or a theme in which the students were interacting. The students will create categories for the words and then classify words into the respective category. The *Open Word Sort* can be completed in a small cooperative group.

Example: Before beginning a unit of study regarding the United States Civil War, fifth-grade students will create categories and classify words relating to the United States Civil War.

Directions: Create categories for these words pertaining to the United States Civil War. Then classify the words into the respective category. Words: *Ulysses S. Grant, Bull Run, slavery, 1865, Abraham Lincoln, Atlanta, 1863, Robert E. Lee, emancipation, secession.*

Category Title: <i>Years of the War</i>	Category Title: <i>Issues Related to the War</i>	Category Title: <i>People Associated with the War</i>	Category Title: <i>Civil War Battles</i>
1865 1863	Emancipation Slavery secession	Abraham Lincoln Robert E. Lee Ulysses S. Grant	Bull Run Atlanta

Resource Box 8
Graphic Organizers to Aid Vocabulary Learning

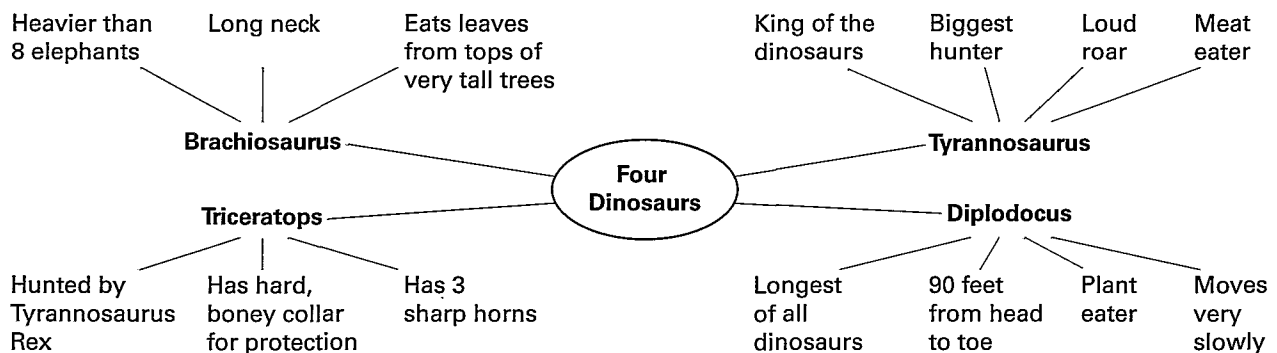
Semantic Map (Heimlich & Pittelman, 1986):

Purpose: To show relationships between various words and concepts.

Procedure: After reading a fiction or nonfiction text, a word will be drawn in the center of a paper. A key word relating to the text will be written inside the circle. Then with the whole class together or in small groups, students will brainstorm words that are related to the central word. Similar words and concepts are categorized and are connected to each other and to the central concept by lines. Intermediate-grade students should be able to completely a semantic map independently, while primary-grade students may need more teacher assistance.

Example: As second-grade students learned about different types of dinosaurs, they created this semantic map to categorize information regarding four different dinosaurs.

Literature Source: *Creatures of Long Ago: Dinosaurs* (National Geographic Society, 1988)



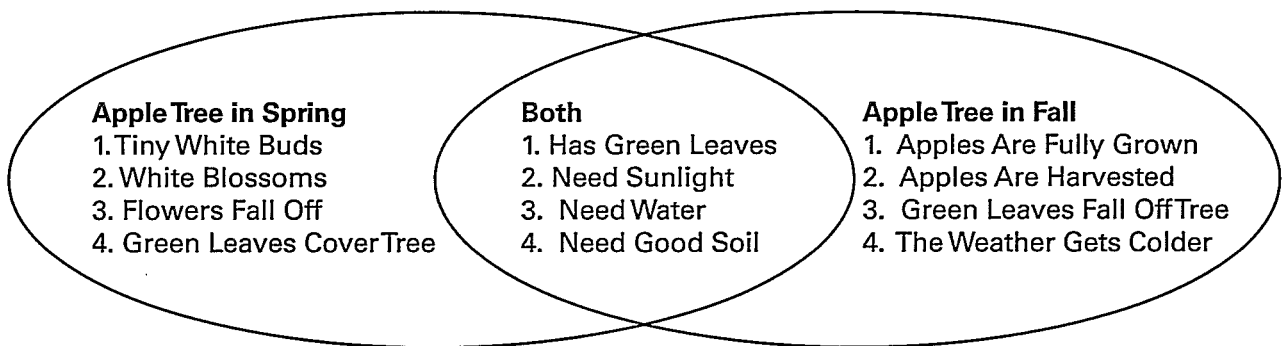
Resource Box 9
Graphic Organizers to Aid Vocabulary Learning

Venn Diagram:

Purpose: To compare two or more words or concepts.

Procedure: After reading a fiction or nonfiction text, a Venn Diagram (two or more overlapping circles) can be created. Students can work with a partner or in small groups to brainstorm information to be written on the Venn Diagram. With kindergarten-grade-two students, the teacher can be the scribe and guide the discussion as information is written on the Venn Diagram. Intermediate-grade students can independently fill in the information of the Venn Diagram. Following the completion of the Venn Diagram, students can use information from the Venn Diagram to write a paragraph, comparing the two terms or words.

Example: After completing a science/social studies theme regarding Apples and Johnny Appleseed, a whole class of second-grade students compare/contrasted an apple tree in the spring to an apple tree in the fall.



teacher read-alouds. Finally, pupils in grades two-six can present their word knowledge by completing a “Quick Write” (Ellery, p. 131) or “Rapid Write” (Brand, 2004, p. 137). This five-minute writing activity takes place after the students have read a text.

On-going vocabulary assessment in various forms is valuable for both students and their teachers. As students participate in various vocabulary practices, they demonstrate their ability to “recognize, utilize, and bring meaning to words” (Ellery, 2005, p. 139). Teachers can evaluate the results of vocabulary assessment activities to determine students’ word knowledge and to use this information to plan subsequent literacy instruction.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Teaching elementary-school students to read, understand, and successfully incorporate new vocabulary terms in their growing oral and written language is an important skill for all teachers, novice and experienced. Instructors must become aware of the manner in which wide reading helps to extend a learner’s expressive/receptive vocabulary development as well as know about optimal and relevant

instructional strategies/materials for aiding their students’ word learning. It is not too difficult for teachers to state what is effective and not effective in vocabulary instruction. “It [is] quite another matter to translate this knowledge into sound pedagogy” (Baumann & Kameenui, 1991 as cited in Allen, 1999, p. 12). Thus, it is necessary for teachers to include relevant vocabulary instruction into their daily literacy lessons in order for all students to become efficient and effective word learners.

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Resource Box 10
Graphic Organizers to Aid Vocabulary Learning

Semantic Feature Analysis Chart (Pittelman, Heimlich, Berglund, & French, 1991):

Purpose: To compare terms and various characteristics of the terms.

Procedure: After the reading of a narrative or an expository text, the teacher will create a grid with related terms written vertically and distinguishing characteristics of the words written horizontally. The teacher will lead a discussion regarding the comparison between the terms and different characteristics of the words. Kindergarten through grade-six students can participate in the discussion and creation of a Semantic Feature Analysis Chart.

Example: After reading the first chapter from Patricia MacLachlan's (1985) novel, *Sarah, Plain and Tall*, a third-grade class compares the book's four main characters, using a Semantic Feature Analysis Chart.

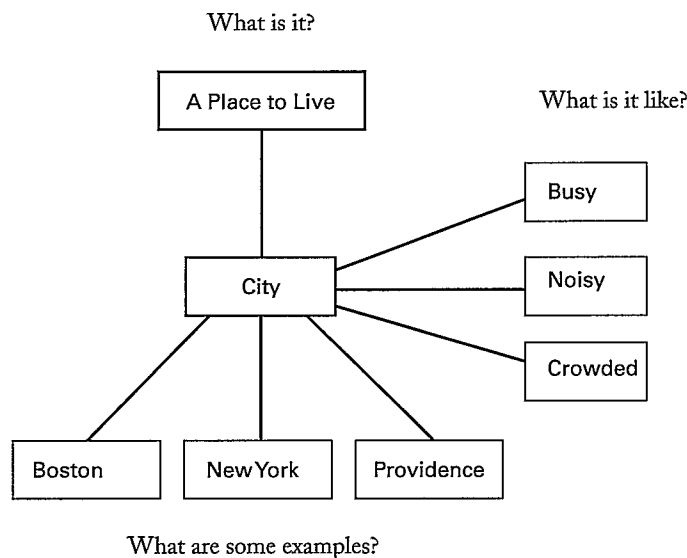
Character Traits				
Characters	Lonely	Excited	Strong	Adventurous
Papa	+	?	?	+
Sarah	?	?	+	+
Anna	+	+	+	+
Caleb	+	+	-	+

Concept of Definition Map (Cooper with Kiger, 2003):

Purpose: To define a concept and the characteristics of a concept.

Procedure: Following the reading of a fiction or nonfiction text, the teacher or a student will write a word in a box at the center of a paper. Lines are drawn to connect the word to other boxes, which contain the word's definition, characteristics, and concrete examples. Students in grades three-six can complete this concept of definition diagram independently, while kindergarten through grade-to students may require teacher assistance.

Example: Before beginning a unit regarding places to live, a kindergarten class completed a Concept of Definition Map regarding cities.



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