Teaching 50,000 Words, and Erasing a 30 Million Word Gap

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placid
undignified
tiny
antidisestablishmentarian
FLAGRANT
umunguous
mommy
scowl
timid
annoy

anxiety
unreal
reluctant
Five Facts about Vocabulary

• Vocabulary is a hugely important factor influencing success in and out of school. It is central to reading, writing, communicating, and probably thinking.

• The vocabulary learning task is huge. The average high school graduate probably knows 50,000 words.

• Many students of poverty, students who struggle with reading, and English-language learners have very small vocabularies. Hart and Risley (1995, 2003) estimate that by age 3, many less advantaged students have heard 30 million fewer words than their more advantaged peers.

• A vocabulary program likely to make a significant difference in the vocabularies of students must be a long term, multifaceted, and very powerful one.

• Listening plays a special role in fostering vocabulary development in primary grade children, and building less advantaged students listening vocabularies is crucial.
A Four–Pronged Vocabulary Program

• Frequent, varied, and extensive language experiences
• Teaching individual words
• Teaching word learning strategies
• Fostering word consciousness
Frequent, Varied, and Extensive Language Experiences

- Reading, writing, discussion, and listening

- The emphasis on these four modalities and the teaching/learning approaches used will vary over time.

- With younger and less proficient readers, there is more discussion and listening and more teacher-led work.

- With older and more proficient readers, there is more reading and writing and more independent work.
Frequent, Varied, and Extensive Language Experiences

• With younger and less proficient readers, it is important to realize that vocabulary growth must come largely through listening and discussion and not through reading.

• Shared book reading/interactive oral reading is currently the most widely suggested strategy for building students oral vocabularies. Dialogic Reading (Zevenbergen & Whitehurst, 2003), Direct and Intensive Instruction, Biemiller, 2004, 2005a), Text Talk (Beck & McKeown, 2001, 2004), and Anchored Instruction (Juel & Deffe (2004) are four theoretically sound and empirically tested approaches
Some Characteristics of Effective Read Alouds for Building Vocabulary

- Both the readers and children are active participants.
- Involves several readings
- Focuses attention on words
- The reading is fluent, engaging, and lively.
- Deliberately stretches students and scaffolds their efforts
- Employs carefully selected words and books
Whitehurst’s Dialogic Reading

• An interactive picture book reading technique designed to build vocabulary and language skills more generally in preschool children (Zevenbergen & Whitehurst, 2003).

• May be particularly useful for parents. A video for teaching parents to use dialogic reading is commercially available (Read Together, Talk Together Parent Video, 2002).

• Some of the steps include: (1) Prompting the child to name a picture or talk about the story, (2) Evaluating the child’s response and giving the correct answer if needed, (3) Expanding what the child said, and (4) Guiding the child to repeat the expanded response.
Biemiller’s Direct and Systematic Instruction

• A vocabulary teaching technique involving interactive book reading for kindergarten through 2nd grade children (Biemiller, 2004, 2005a)

• Focuses on teaching the most frequent/useful words that students do not already have in their listening vocabularies

• Particularly sensitive to what words to teach, to how many words need to be and can be taught, and to the months and years of instruction that are needed to make a real difference

• The steps include: (1) Reading the book through once, (2) Rereading it three times on three days teaching about 8 words each time, (3) Stopping and rereading sentences containing target words, (4) Briefly defining the words, (5) Reviewing the words at the end of each day, and (6) Reviewing all the words at the end of the week.
Beck & McKeown’s Text Talk and Rich Instruction


- Focuses particularly on teaching fairly sophisticated “Tier Two” words

- The most recent study I have seen compares “Rich” and “More Rich” instruction and finds “More Rich” instruction stronger.

- Some of the steps include: (1) Explaining the role of the word in the story, (2) Defining the word, (3) Having children say the word, (4) Suggesting other contexts for the word, (5) Having students make judgments about possible uses of the word, (6) Having students provide examples and non examples of possible uses of the word, and (7) Reinforcing initial learning with follow-up activities on subsequent days and weeks.
Juel & Deffee’s Anchored Instruction

• A vocabulary teaching technique to use with read alouds for kindergarten and 1st grade children (Juel & Deffee, 2004)

• The anchored approach gives attention to decoding, spelling, and meaning when teaching new words.

• One major premise behind the procedure is that all three of these factors deserve attention and often do not get it. Another major premise is that we should not assume knowledge of word meanings when teaching decoding.

• Very usefully, Juel and Deffee contrast anchored instruction to more typical but less effective instruction.
Teaching Individual Words: Some Preliminaries

• There are many more words that might be taught than you can possibly teach, so you need to decide which words to teach.

• Sources of words to teach include word lists, students, and upcoming reading selections.

• Realize that there are various word learning tasks students face and that different word learning tasks often require very different instruction.

• Realize too that there are various levels of word knowledge and that some sorts of instruction promote deep and rich knowledge and others promote much more shallow knowledge.
Word Lists

- Fry’s 1,000 Instant Words (Fry, 2004)

- Hiebert's Word Zones™ for 5,586/3,913 Words grouped into set of 310, 620, 1676, and 2980 words (http://www.textproject.org/library/resources/)

- *The Living Word Vocabulary* (Dale & O’Rourke, 1981)

Current Research on Identifying Vocabulary To Teach

- Hiebert (2005)

Criteria for Selecting Words to Teach

Give first priority to Tier 2 words, “words that are of high frequency for mature language users and found across a variety of domains” (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002).

Consider the answers to four questions (Graves, in press).

• Is understanding the word important to understanding the selection in which it occurs?
• Are students able to use context or structural-analysis to discover the word’s meaning?
• Can working with the word further students’ context, structural analysis, or dictionary skills?
• How useful is the word outside the reading selection currently being taught?
Some Word Learning Tasks and Some Words That Might Exemplify Those Tasks

• learning to read known words *surprise* for a second grader

• learning new labels for known concepts *goulash* for a third grader

• learning words representing new concepts *enzyme* for a high school student

• clarifying and enriching the meanings of known word *brief* and *concise* for a middle school student

• learning new meanings for known words *lace* meaning “to thrash” for a high school student
Considerations When Teaching Individual Words

• One thing to consider as you choose vocabulary instruction is that you and your students get just about what you pay for. Activities that take more time and mental effort, activities that force students to think, and activities that focus on meaning will produce stronger results.

• Another thing to consider as you choose vocabulary instruction is that activities that involve both definitional information and contextual information are stronger than activities that involve only one of these.

• And still another thing to consider is that in vocabulary learning, as in virtually all learning, active teaching and active learning are generally called for.
Some Approaches To Teaching Individual Words

The following six approaches are a sample of the fifteen or so approaches described in Graves (in press).

• Learning to read known words
• Context/dictionary/discussion (learning new labels)
• Context/relationship (learning new labels)
• Rich instruction (learning new labels and new concepts)
• Semantic mapping (clarifying and enriching meaning)
• Frayer method (teaching new concepts)
Context/Dictionary/Discussion Procedure

Give students the word in context.

For example, *admire* “We *admire* the paintings of great artists at the museum.”

Ask them to look it up in the dictionary.

Discuss the definitions they come up with.
Context–Relationship Procedure

Create a brief paragraph which uses the target word three or four times. Follow the paragraph with a multiple-choice item which checks students’ understanding of the word.

1. Explain the purpose of the procedure.
2. Pronounce the word to be taught.
3. Read the paragraph in which the word appears.
4. Read the possible definitions, and ask students to choose the best one.
5. Pause to give students time to check a definition, give them the correct answer, and answer any questions students have.
6. Read the word and its definition a final time.
Context–Relationship Procedure

Gathered

The children *gathered* eggs from the henhouse. Then they put the eggs in a basket. *Gathering* eggs was something they did every day when they visited their grandmother’s farm. *Gathered* means that a person picks up and collects something.

*Gathered* means

A. dropping things.
B. picking up things.
C. sharing ideas.
Rich Instruction

Begin with a student-friendly definition

Have students work with the word more than once.

Provide the word in more than one context.

Engage students in activities in which they deal with various facets of the target word’s meaning and with investigating relationships between the target word and other words.

Have students create uses for the word.

Encourage students to use the word outside of class.

Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002
Some Inappropriate Techniques

• Merely mentioning word meanings and assuming that you have therefore taught them

• Giving students words out of context and asking them to look up the words in the dictionary

• Asking students to use context before teaching them how to do so

• Doing speeded trials with individual words

• Teaching spelling when you mean to be teaching reading
Teaching Students Word-Learning Strategies

• Using context

• Learning and using word parts

• Using glossaries and the dictionary
Using Context

• This is definitely the most important word learning strategy to teach.

• The approach suggested in Graves (in press) is my best effort at a robust procedure that could be used beginning in grade 3 or grade 4. If students have not had solid instruction in using context clues, it could be used in later grades.

• Whatever specific approach is used, doing this right is going to take weeks, not days.

• Whatever specific approach is used, it should include the basic elements of Direct Explanation, which are listed on slide 25.
Learning and Using Word Parts

- Prefixes are the most useful word part to teach, at least for native English speakers.

- Teaching the meanings of suffixes to native English speakers is problematic because they usually have either grammatical meanings that students have a tacit understanding of or rather fuzzy lexical meanings. English-language learners are likely to need instruction in inflectional suffixes.

- Learning to lop off suffixes as part of decoding a word is a different matter and something all students need to learn to do.

- Teaching roots is problematic because few are highly generative, making it difficult to know which to teach, and making the payoff questionable.
Teaching Prefixes

Beginning in grade 4, teaching prefixes makes excellent sense. The procedure described in Graves (2004) is my best effort, and is a detailed example of explicit instruction. Equally importantly, I strongly recommend explicit instruction, the procedure outlined below, for many other teaching tasks.

- An explicit description of the strategy and when and how it should be used.
- Teacher and/or student modeling of the strategy in action.
- Collaborative use of the strategy in action.
- Guided practice using the strategy with gradual release of responsibility.
- Independent use of the strategy. (Duke & Pearson, 2002)
Using Glossaries and the Dictionary

Students should be introduced to these very useful tools, taught to use them, and encouraged to use them.

- If the books your students are using include glossaries, students should be taught to use them.

- All students need to work with appropriate dictionaries, but having appropriate dictionaries is particularly crucial for younger students.

- I would use explicit instruction to teach them.
Fostering Word Consciousness

The term “word consciousness” refers to an awareness of and interest in words and their meanings (Graves & Watts, 2002). Word consciousness integrates metacognition about words, motivation to learn words, and deep and lasting interest in words.

• Although fostering word consciousness differs from grade to grade, doing so is vital at all grade levels.

• There are some time consuming word consciousness activities, but for the most part fostering word consciousness does not take a lot of your time or your students’ time.
Some Types of Word Consciousness Activities

- Prominently recognizing, promoting, and displaying vocabulary on a daily basis
- Modeling, recognizing, and encouraging adept diction
- Promoting word play
- Providing intensive and expressive instruction
- Involving students in original investigations
- Teaching students about words
A Wonderful Word Wall

- A year long activity developed by Janice Hadley, a third/fourth grade teacher from the Washington DC area, and described by Peter Dewitz, a Virginia reading consultant.
- Students selected their own words, introduced them to the class, and put them 3 x 5 cards on the wall weekly.
- Other students could attach sentences or definitions to the cards.
- The words eventually became a chain the circled the room twice and contained over 200 words by December and over 400 by the end of the year.
- Students paired up and “walked the wall” twice a week, quizzing each other on words, defining them, and talking about them.
Walking the Wall in December
Results of the Wonderful Word Wall

• The students showed increased interest in the dictionary and during the year graduated from *The Thorndike–Barnhardt Children’s Dictionary* to *The American Heritage Dictionary*.

• Ms. Hadley noted that students showed greater interest in words, dealt with them more effectively when reading, and used them in more interesting and effective ways in their writing.

• A text given in May showed that students knew 87% of the words on the wall.
An Original Investigation by Two High School Students

- Completed by Scott Rasmussen and Derek Oosterman in an AP psychology class.
- Their goal was “To determine the best means of vocabulary acquisition in high school students”
- They reviewed the literature and hypothesized that learning would be stronger when instruction was (1) continuous and frequent, (2) explicit and active, and (3) incorporated several senses.
- In all, they tested twelve classes and several different conditions. In one experiment in which they tested instruction involving 0, 1, 2, 2, and 3 senses, those groups scored 42%, 77%, 74%, and 86% respectively.
- In a note to me, Scott wrote “Before the study I never gave vocabulary much thought. In regular conversations and in school classes now, I am increasingly cognizant of how words influence perception and meaning.”
The Four-Pronged Program

- Frequent, varied, and extensive language experiences
- Teaching individual words
- Teaching word learning strategies
- Fostering word consciousness

The Time Needed To Accomplish It

- For students with typical vocabularies
- For students with very small vocabularies
Some Recent and Upcoming Vocabulary Books


References


References


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