Introduction

The *Vocabulary-Enriched Classroom* examines vocabulary development from in-depth and wide-ranging perspectives. As such, there are many ways to read it, including

- focusing on a certain aspect of vocabulary instruction, such as research-based strategies. The book offers numerous research-based strategies that can produce significant increases in vocabulary performance, and you may decide to study and use them all, without delving into other aspects.

- learning about vocabulary acquisition and retention in a more comprehensive fashion. You could read to gain an understanding of why some students possess inadequate reading vocabularies, how words can be effectively acquired and retained, and many other topics related to this complex facet of literacy.

- combining these approaches. By doing that, you will gain an in-depth understanding of both vocabulary development and high-quality vocabulary instruction.

Regardless of the approach you choose, we hope the book is instrumental in helping you carry out successful vocabulary instruction.

We present topics in a sequence that will enable you to understand basic vocabulary principles before teaching them to students with diverse needs. However, you need not read the book from cover to cover. Depending on what *you* wish to derive from it, you may want to read the chapters in a sequence that *you* establish and that will best suit *your* objectives.

You have another decision to make: whether to read the book on your own, with another professional, or as part of a professional book club. While the first two options should be self-explanatory, the following may help you better understand the third.

In *Literacy and the Youngest Learner* (2005), Susan Bennett-Armistead, Nell Duke, and Annie Moses offer excellent ideas on the planning and implementation of book clubs:

1. **Think carefully about the size of the club**—Groups of four to five members make participation (and scheduling) manageable.

2. **Create a diverse group**—The club should include professionals who teach different grade levels. This will ensure an examination of the topic through a developmental lens.

3. **Set shared goals early on**—By asking and answering questions such as What do we want to get out of this club? What contribution will each of us make? and What can be expected from others?, you will set a strong direction for the club and provide guidelines on how it should operate.

4. **Hear from everyone**—Since everyone has a response to share, do what you can to encourage full participation at each session.

5. **Make connections to practice**—Implement in your classroom what you are learning. Think about what others in the club have said about the book's content. Use or adapt their ideas into your teaching practices.

Whether you decide to read our book alone, with a colleague, or as part of a book club, we urge you to use its content as a framework from which to reexamine your literacy-instruction practices. Many effective strategies are contained in its pages. There's a great deal of research-based information about today's elementary and middle school students and the manner in which they learn. Using some or all of the book's material can significantly improve the quality of your vocabulary instruction and the performance of your students.

To help you make the transition from reading the book to implementing its content, at the end of each chapter we pose discussion questions and provide teaching activities to guide your thinking. These are not intended to test your comprehension of the material, nor do they represent all that could be asked or carried out. Rather, as we stated previously, they are designed to help you take the next step. We also hope that they will be starting points for enhancing your thinking about the book's content.

If you are reading this book with another person or as part of a professional book club, we urge you not only to engage in the activities at the end of each chapter but also to share the actions you take and/or the conclusions you reach, to get multiple perspectives about vocabulary instruction. This will help others to learn from you and for you to do likewise. Interactions like these are important for becoming a more effective teacher of vocabulary.

CHAPTER ONE

Vocabulary Instruction: The New Look of Research-Based Best Practices

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Vocabulary plays a significant role in students' reading success. Without an understanding of the words in a sentence, paragraph, or passage, comprehension cannot occur, and without comprehension, one is not truly literate. Despite its importance, vocabulary does not receive the same amount of attention in many elementary school classrooms as other components of literacy (Beck & McKeown, 1991; Torgeson, 2004). The teaching of vocabulary isn't examined as often as it should be and what is happening in classrooms today is at odds with what research tells us about best practices (Block & Mangieri, 2003). As a consequence, our teaching often does not address the needs of all students. Instead, only the most able students retain an understanding of the words we teach and only they have the advantage of applying that understanding to their reading.

In this chapter, we present "the state of the union" of vocabulary instruction by addressing two critical questions:

- What does research tell us about vocabulary development?
- What word-learning beliefs should we embrace in our teaching?

Alice Cedillo performs a Think Aloud to show students how to use word-meaning clues and vocabulary-building strategies to learn many new words.

What Does Research Tell Us About Vocabulary Development?

For decades research has shown that the knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and practices of teachers are crucial factors in determining students' literacy growth. (See Dykstra & Bond, 1966–1967; Block & Mangieri, 2003.) Students learn to read better when they receive exemplary literacy instruction. Here are some interesting findings:

- According to the National Reading Panel (2001), which reviewed research about vocabulary development, both vocabulary instruction and assessment are crucial to students' literacy success.

- A lack of vocabulary is a key component underlying failure for many students, especially for those who are economically disadvantaged (Biemiller, 2001; Biemiller & Slonium, 2001; Hart & Risley, 1995; Hirsch, 2001).

- Both wide reading and explicit instruction help to build new vocabulary. To be most effective, teachers should teach the most useful words (i.e., high-utility words), and students should have the opportunity to apply their knowledge of these words in multiple subject areas and fictional texts (Beck, Perfetti, & McKeown, 1982; Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002).

- Consistent and daily attention to words builds students' literacy growth (Brabham & Lynch-Brown, 2002; Dickinson & Tabors, 2001). The repeated teaching of high-utility words and the application of these words in multiple contexts significantly increase students' comprehension on standardized literacy tests (Block & Mangieri, 2005b; Gough, Alford, & Holly-Wilcox, 1981; Fry, 2004).

Recently, in cooperation with the Institute for Literacy Enhancement (Block & Mangieri, 2005c), we conducted a study that analyzed the vocabulary practices of 409 exemplary teachers from Colorado, Maryland, New Jersey, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Texas. An exemplary teacher was defined as one whose students attained significantly higher levels of literacy success than did students who were taught by other teachers in the same building and who came from the same neighborhoods. Many of them had large classes, not enough materials, and students with diverse learning needs. Here are the ten major findings from this study. In the classrooms of exemplary literacy teachers:

1. **Students understood that vocabulary is important.** Teachers provided direct, meaningful instruction on a daily basis. They worked cooperatively with students to help them learn, understand, and retain words and apply vocabulary-building strategies while they read. Their commitment to high-quality vocabulary instruction was unflinching, as illustrated in the words of Lynn, a fourth-grade teacher from Maryland: "Words are the essence of what I do. Teaching students how to say them, use them in their speaking and writing, and understand them while reading is what literacy teaching should be all about."

2. **Students learned important, relevant words.** These words came from research-based lists developed by literacy experts such as Dolch, Fry, Kucera-Francis, and Harris-Jacobson and appeared in multiple contexts. Teachers thought deeply about these words before spending valuable instructional time on them. They chose words that they knew students would encounter over and over and that represented a larger family of similar-meaning words. For example, Maria, a fifth-grade teacher in Texas, used a "ten-year test" to decide whether or not to teach a word. She asked herself, "Ten years from now, will my students need to understand this word in a book that they are reading in college or in a document that they must read and sign?" Because of careful thinking like that, students were exposed to important words that they would frequently encounter in print. They had many opportunities to apply their word knowledge while reading. As a consequence, their reading skills improved, as did their attitudes toward reading.

3. **Students learned high-utility words.** The National Reading Panel (2001) reports that the more thoroughly students learn high-utility words (such as *forever*, *generate*, *summary,* and *please*), the better they will be able to comprehend text that contains those words or similar ones. The students in our study were exposed to many, many high-utility words selected from widely referenced lists such as those described in finding number 2.

   Such words are important for another reason. Since they are typically at the core of a family of words, learning one such word unlocks the meaning of many others. For example, when students learn the meaning of the word *generate*, they can more rapidly learn related words such as *generation*, *regenerate*, and *general*.

4. **Students learned and retained words more quickly—and had fun doing it.** Teachers used a wide array of instructional activities, such as word walls, games, crossword puzzles, plays, and word-building lessons. Vocabulary instruction was fun. They also taught students to think about their thinking as they read. For instance, in Paul's sixth-grade classroom in Colorado, students enjoyed trying to discover his "mystery word of the week." Paul gave his students one sentence every day with one word—the mystery word—omitted. The students' challenge was to figure out the one word that would make sense in all the sentences. By the end of the week, students would have five clues. In the week that we observed, students were trying to use these sentence context clues to discover the mystery word *correspondent*.

5. **Students learned vocabulary through their preferred learning style.** Students had numerous opportunities to learn words in meaningful, multimodal ways. Students read (visual), listened (auditory), spoke (oral), wrote (tactile), enacted (kinesthetic), and illustrated (spatial) word meanings. For example, on Monday, students would read aloud new vocabulary words in context, employing visual and auditory learning modalities. On Tuesday, students would write and discuss these new words (oral and tactile learning modalities). On the next day, students would create graphics, such as semantic maps and time lines, and stage plays using these words (kinesthetic and spatial learning modalities). No two days of instruction were the same. All students, regardless of their dominant learning modality, benefited. Rashad, a third-grade teacher in North Carolina, summarized it this way: "I am a tactile learner, and when I was a student, many of my teachers did little to offer instruction in the way I best learned. So that none of my students will be put at such a disadvantage, I teach lessons that use each type of learning style. In that way, I know I have given each student the best opportunity to learn what I am teaching."

6. **Students received multiple exposures to words and their meanings.** Lessons in word meanings were taught incrementally and repeatedly so that students were given the opportunity to learn and apply each new word at least six consecutive times (Block & Mangieri, 2005b). Many English-language learners and struggling readers require and were given even more exposures (Dickinson & Smith, 1994; National Reading

Panel [NRP], 2001). This practice is consistent with the findings of studies that show that most students must experience rich, effective instruction in a word before they can understand its meaning (Beck et al., 2002; Block, 2004; Block & Mangieri, 2005a); such instruction is demonstrated in the multimodal activities described on the previous page. When students understand a newly taught word completely, including all its denotations and connotations, they are more likely to retain it.

7. **Students received context-based vocabulary instruction.** Teachers presented every word in context so that vocabulary and comprehension were built simultaneously. As we mentioned, comprehension cannot occur if a student cannot recognize the words in the text. The benefits of intertwining vocabulary instruction and comprehension instruction (i.e., teaching words in context) is supported by research (Block & Mangieri, 2005b; Stahl, 1998). Further, context-based vocabulary instruction not only improves reading comprehension but also fosters a positive attitude toward reading (Block & Reed, 2004). A cycle of success occurs when students understand a text's words and comprehend its message. This cycle accelerates as students learn more words, comprehend more difficult text, and advance to higher levels of reading ability.

8. **Students were assessed using measures that went beyond asking them merely to give the definition of a word.** Tests required students to use inferential thinking and/or apply the word's meaning to their lives. To do so, most test questions included the word *you*. For example, instead of asking students to give the definition of the word *apartment*, teachers would ask students: "What do you think are the benefits of living in an apartment?" Since students would have to apply the definition of the word *apartment* to their lives in order to answer, this question and similar ones show whether students have truly grasped a word's meaning and can use it in new settings.

9. **Students learned the process of building their vocabulary through lessons that combined instruction in word-meaning clues and vocabulary-building strategies.** High-quality vocabulary instruction includes both word-meaning clues and vocabulary-building strategies in every lesson. (See Figures 1.1 and 1.2 below.) With such instruction, students learn that word meanings can be derived by selecting the appropriate clues an unknown word contains and coupling that word with the most useful vocabulary-building strategy.

Word-Meaning Clues

1. A word's part of speech serves as a clue to its meaning, especially when the word is a high-utility word (coupled with vocabulary-building strategy number 1 below).
2. A word's prefix, root, and suffix serve as clues to its meaning (coupled with vocabulary-building strategy number 2 below).
3. Many long words or words that occur infrequently have a meaning that describes a specific person, place, or thing relative to a particular content area (coupled with vocabulary-building strategy number 3 below).
4. Unusual letter or sound combinations signal that a word may have come from another language and its spelling or sound patterns retained, so that the word's meaning has to be memorized (coupled with vocabulary-building strategy number 4 below).

Figure 1.1

Vocabulary-Building Strategies

1. Use context clues to determine the meaning of unknown high-utility words.
2. Add the meanings of a word's prefixes and suffixes to the meaning of the root word or base word.
3. Connect the meaning of long, content-specific words to the text's topic.
4. Create mnemonic devices to learn unusual-looking words or words with unusual sounds that are likely to have retained the spelling or sound patterns from their original language.

Figure 1.2

Every word contains a word-meaning clue. This clue helps readers determine what type of word it is, such as a high-utility word, an affixed word, a content-specific word, or an unusual English word. For example, if students recognize that they have seen an unknown word several times before in different types of books, most likely the word is a high-utility word, and the position that word holds in the sentence provides a valuable clue to its meaning. The word's part of speech can also help them deduce its meaning. Then, chances are, when students couple this knowledge with the vocabulary-building strategy of using all the meanings of the other known words in the sentence (context clues), they will be able to determine rapidly the meaning of the unknown word (Block & Mangieri, 1995/1996). This example shows how students can be taught to combine word-meaning clue number 1 with the most useful vocabulary-building strategy for high-utility words (vocabulary-building strategy number 1) to determine a word's meaning.

10. **Students listened to and engaged in Think Alouds.** Teachers used Think Alouds in every vocabulary lesson they taught. Thinking aloud consists of saying the thoughts you have as you are reading a text. It encourages students to think about their own thinking. When it comes to vocabulary instruction, this means thinking about what they are thinking as they try to figure out the meaning of an unknown word, which leads to a deeper understanding and a better retention of vocabulary words (Block & Israel, 2004). By using Think Alouds, teachers model for students how to unlock the meaning of an unknown word.

What can we conclude from the research presented in this section? First, a strong vocabulary is essential to literacy success. Second, important words must be taught explicitly on a repeated basis. Third, these words should be presented to students using a variety of multimodal instructional strategies that will engage higher-level thinking. Fourth, students must learn that words contain clues to their meaning, and that when these clues are coupled with important vocabulary-building strategies, they can independently determine word meanings. Finally, when vocabulary is properly taught, most students will learn and understand words and also improve their comprehension and their attitude toward reading.

In this book, we and other authors describe what exemplary educators do to ensure that all students increase their vocabularies and experience success. If you follow these research-based practices, we're confident that your students will significantly improve not only their vocabulary, but also their comprehension, spelling, and attitude toward reading (Block & Mangieri, 2005b).

What Word-Learning Beliefs Should We Embrace in Our Teaching?

To become proficient readers, students must be able to know how to say words correctly and instantaneously recognize them in print. They must also know the meanings associated with these words in context and develop word consciousness. Exemplary literacy teachers embrace these truths, and their instruction helps students gain competence in *all* of these dimensions of vocabulary development.

So, given what our research and the research of others have shown, what beliefs should guide our vocabulary instruction in order to foster students' acquisition and retention of important words in particular, and word consciousness, positive attitudes toward reading, and reading comprehension in general?

Belief 1: All words are not of equal importance.

The words taught to students should not be selected as the basis of instruction because they are "interesting" or "challenging" or were recommended by a colleague. Rather, students should be taught words that they will encounter frequently in print (Beck et al., 2002; NRP, 2001). Their initial acquisition of these words will be reinforced through subsequent exposures.

Belief 2: Students will retain newly taught words that they truly understand and can use when they speak, listen, read, and write.

High gains in vocabulary growth are not the result of superficial instruction. Instead, they are the result of research-based lessons that help students discern the meaning of important words through a series of structured learning opportunities (Mangieri, 1972). This finding challenges instruction that simply encourages students to pronounce words and give a definition.

Belief 3: Students increase their vocabulary more rapidly when they learn how to use one word-meaning clue with one vocabulary-building strategy each week.

This coupling is crucial to literacy success because students can learn to employ the two strategies together when they confront an unknown word while reading silently alone (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001). Students learn to acquire the words being taught and also independently initiate the thinking processes they'll need to unlock the meaning of unfamiliar terms they'll encounter in the future.

Belief 4: When students understand words frequently used in texts, they develop a positive attitude toward reading (Block & Mangieri, 2005a, 2005b).

A cycle of success is established: students can independently understand important words in a text, which in turn enables comprehension. When students are successful at reading tasks, rather than frustrated by them, they develop a positive attitude toward literacy lessons. Knowledge of important words also increases students' comprehension of the materials that they read each day in all of their content subjects (Block & Mangieri, 2003).

Belief 5: Expert readers know a large number of important words that encompass all parts of speech.

These competencies enable such students to understand not only the words in grade-level texts but also those contained in other material that they may wish to read independently or that they are required to read in content subjects. As our research demonstrates, students taught by teachers who hold this belief were able to determine significantly greater numbers of words in a text with a readability ranking that was one grade level above their own (Block & Mangieri, 2005b).

Summary

In this chapter, we presented "the state of the union" of vocabulary instruction, addressing what research tells us about vocabulary development and what beliefs we should embrace based on that research. In Chapters 2 to 5, you'll find numerous clearly described lessons that will help you put these research findings and beliefs into action.

Discussion Questions and Teaching Activities

1. What instructional behaviors and actions does an exemplary teacher of vocabulary consistently exhibit? How would you rate your present level of performance in terms of them? What factors led you to this conclusion?

2. Design and teach a lesson using one of this chapter's word-meaning clues coupled with its vocabulary-building strategy. Then, teach a lesson in which you utilize a different word-meaning clue and vocabulary-building strategy. Compare the effects of these lessons to those of past ones you have taught.