Introducing New Vocabulary

(adapted from Jan Richardson, *The Next Step in Guided Reading*)

There are times when reading aloud or working a guided reading group that pre-teaching new vocabulary is essential to comprehension. Jan Richardson's introduction is simple and clear.

1. Decide which words MUST be pre-taught. Words that are not crucial to comprehension, or can be figured out from morphology or context should not be pre-taught.
2. Define the word. Do not ask how many students already know the word – it wastes time and encourages incorrect guessing.
3. Use the word in an example the students can connect to their own lives.
4. Explain how the word will be used in the text the students are about to hear or read.
5. Ask the students to turn to a partner and define the word.

Developing Effective Practices in Vocabulary Instruction

Teachers Should Increase

- Time for reading
- Use of varied, rich text
- Opportunities for students to hear or use words in natural sentence contexts
- Use of concrete contexts when possible (pictures, artifacts)
- Opportunities for students to use words in meaningful ways
- Opportunities for students to connect new words/concepts to those already known
- Study of concepts rather than single, unrelated words
- Explicit instruction of concepts and incidental encounters with words
- Teaching strategies leading to independent word learning
- Study of words or concepts that will have the biggest impact on comprehension rather than "covering" many words superficially
- Opportunities for making or drawing inferences

Teachers Should Decrease

- Looking up definitions as a single source of word knowledge
- Asking students to write sentences for new words before they've studied the word in depth
- Notion that all words in a text need to be defined for comprehension
- Using context as a highly reliable tool for increasing comprehension
- Assessments that ask students for single definitions

Janet Allen
Words, Words, Words: Teaching Vocabulary in Grades 4-12.
Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 1999, 107.
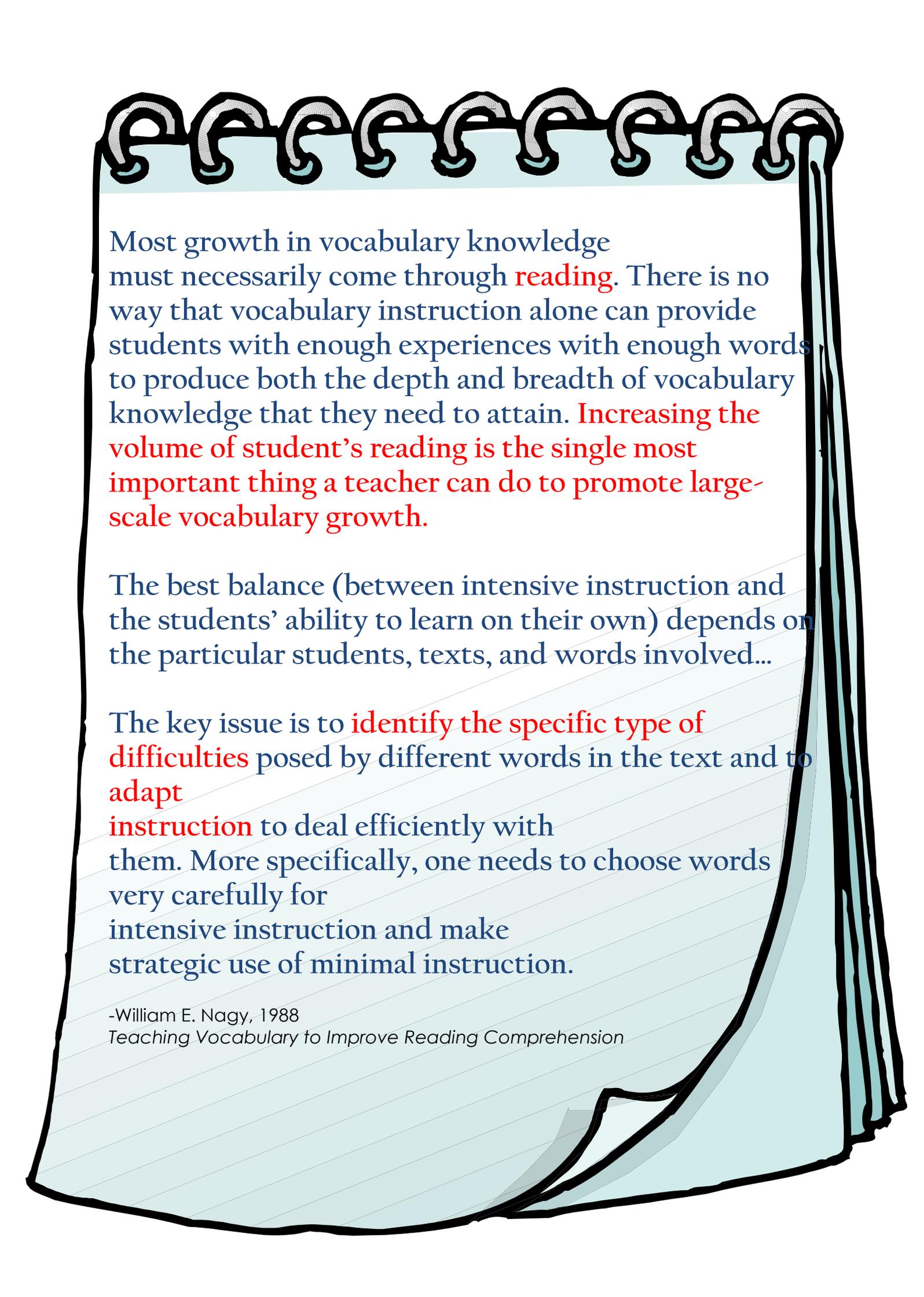
Most growth in vocabulary knowledge must necessarily come through reading. There is no way that vocabulary instruction alone can provide students with enough experiences with enough words to produce both the depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge that they need to attain. Increasing the volume of student's reading is the single most important thing a teacher can do to promote large-scale vocabulary growth.

The best balance (between intensive instruction and the students' ability to learn on their own) depends on the particular students, texts, and words involved...

The key issue is to identify the specific type of difficulties posed by different words in the text and to adapt instruction to deal efficiently with them. More specifically, one needs to choose words very carefully for intensive instruction and make strategic use of minimal instruction.

-William E. Nagy, 1988
Teaching Vocabulary to Improve Reading Comprehension

Instructional vocabulary practices focus on contextual and conceptual strategies.

1. Contextual information strategies use clues imbedded in the text to determine the meaning of unknown words.
2. Concept-based strategies utilize the way words are created and the concepts behind them as links to their meanings.

Although both strategies are important, a few basic findings regarding contextual clues are noted below (Baumann and Kame'enui 1991):

1. Context clues are relatively ineffective for inferring the meaning of specific words.
2. Students learn vocabulary more easily when definitions are combined with context clues than when context clues are used in isolation.
3. Research on teaching context clues as a general strategy for word learning is promising, but limited.

The three points above suggest that while context clues help students with basic information about words, teachers must directly teach the meanings of vocabulary words utilizing specific types of clues. These clues are described below. <u>Note that the dictionary should be the last tool students use to determine the meaning of an unknown word.</u>

ACTIVITIES FOR CONTEXTUAL STRATEGIES
Boldfaced Words

1. Using a science or social studies text, have students find boldfaced words.
2. Allow students to share what they already know about the words as you record their responses on chart paper.
3. Read a sentence or passage in which one boldfaced word is located and then walk students through your thinking as you attempt to determine the word's meaning.
4. Compare your thinking to the definition on the chart and make changes as needed.
5. Have students work with partners or in small groups to repeat the process with other boldfaced words, then share their findings with the class.

Poster Models

Create one large or several small posters for the different types of semantic/syntactic and typographical clues. As students find examples, ask them to write the clues on the appropriate poster.

Definitions

Clue words, such as *is called*, *are called*, *this means*, and *which means*, indicate direct definitions. Typographical clues include commas, parentheses, and dashes. Consider the following examples:

- Animals that eat meat *are called* carnivores.
- Frank is absent, *which means* he won't be here for the field trip.
- The cowboy wore chaps, a type of protective leg covering.
- The au pair (*nanny*) was from the Dominican Republic.
- These letters are anonymous—not one of them is signed.

Linked Synonyms

A synonym is often indicated by the clue words *a* and *or*. For example, consider the following sentence: The deer was very frail, *or* weak.

Descriptions

Meanings are also revealed through embedded clues. For example:
The deer was very *frail. He could not raise his head*, and *his eyes were half-closed*. Without food and water, *he would die.*

Contrasts

Contrast clue words include *instead, but, on the other hand, however, though, yet*, and *not*. For example: The deer was frail. *However*, he chewed on tree bark to try to regain his strength. This made him feel better, *but* he was not yet fully revived.

Cause and Effect

Clue words for cause and effect include *because, so, since, therefore, then, consequently, if*, and *as a result*. For example: *Because* the deer had been shot, he was bleeding and had run a great distance. *As a result*, the animal would soon die.

Sequence

Sequence clue words include *while, when, during, as, meanwhile, now, then, next, after, finally, before, soon, at last*, and *first*. For example: *While* the forest was burning, the animals searched for shelter. *During* their flight to the other side of the forest, a young deer broke his leg trying to jump a small creek. *Finally*, the frail deer dragged himself through the water to safety.

Mood and Tone

The author's language evokes feelings that give clues to the meanings of words. For example: *The woods were silent except for the chirping of birds. The old, frail deer lay helpless on the mossy ground, knowing his time had come. He closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and died.*

ACTIVITIES FOR CONCEPT-BASED STRATEGIES
Analogies

With analogies, students have to do more than simply determine definitions—they also have to find the relationship between words. This challenge adds a higher level of thinking to the vocabulary process. Relationships between words include:

> synonyms (boy/lad)
> antonyms (midday/midnight)
> order (prepare/eat)
> degree (walk/trot)
> parts (band/watch)
> commonalities (scalpel/doctor)

Categorizing

Categorizing requires students to see what words have in common and how they fit together. Use the following activity, called List-Group-Label (Taba, 1967), before reading a book or beginning a new unit of study in social studies, science, or math.
  1. List words related to the major concept or theme.
  2. Group common words.
  3. Label each group.

While studying safety, for example, have pairs or small groups of students generate lists of words pertaining to safety. After the lists are complete, ask students to group the words into categories and label each group with a title, such as "At Home" and "First Aid."

Graphic Organizers

Graphic organizers help readers deconstruct and synthesize information. Below are step-by-step instructions for leading two graphic organizer activities. The first activity uses the Pedestal Word graphic organizer; the second uses the Concept Map graphic organizer.

Pedestal Word Graphic Organizer

Use this activity prior to beginning a new unit of study:
  1. Choose a concept, theme, or word to be studied.
  2. Place the word in the top box of the organizer.
  3. List three examples of the word in the boxes underneath the top box.
  4. Underneath the examples, identify three characteristics of each.

For example, the Pedestal Word Graphic Organizer below utilizes a text about ants.
  1. Write "Insects" in the top box. Have students tell what they know about insects. Ask students to provide a synonym for insects (bugs), and write it in the box in parentheses under "Insects."
  2. Have the students brainstorm different kinds of insects. As a group, choose three to include, and write them in the boxes under insects. Be sure to include the subject of your unit — "Ants" — in one of your three boxes.
  3. Complete the chart with students by writing at least three things they know about each of the three insects. Teachers can choose to provide books on insects for students to use to gather information.
  4. Emphasize the relationships as demonstrated by the graphic organizer.

Vocabulary Instruction Using the SIOP Model

Echevarria, J. (2008). *Making content comprehensible for English language learners; The SIOP model. Boston: Pearson, 63-68.*

Blachowicz and Fisher (2000):
1. *Students should be active in developing their understanding of words and ways to learn them.* Such ways include use of semantic mapping, word sorts, concept definition maps, and developing strategies for independent word learning.
2. *Students should personalize word learning through* such practices as Vocabulary Self Collection Strategy (Ruddell, 2005), mnemonic strategies, and personal dictionaries.
3. *Students should be immersed in words* by rich language environments that focus on words and draw students' attention to the learning of words. Word walls, personal word study notebooks and dictionaries, and comparing/contrasting words with the same morphemic element (e.g., photograph, photosynthesis, photogenic) aid students in recognizing and using words around them.
4. *Students should build on multiple sources of information to learn words through repeated exposures.* Letting students see and hear new words more than once and drawing on multiple source of meaning are important for vocabulary development.

Activities taken from *Making Content Comprehensible for English Language Learners.*

1. Word Sorts – Students categorize words or phrases that have been previously introduced into groups predetermined by the teacher.
2. Contextualizing Key Vocabulary – Teachers select several key terms at the outset of the lesson, systematically, defining and demonstrating each and showing how that term is used within the context of the lesson.
3. Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy (VSS; Ruddell, 2005) – Following the reading of a content text, students self-select several words that are essential to understanding the content concepts. A class list is mutually agreed upon by students and teacher, and these are reviewed and studied throughout.
4. Personalized Dictionaries – Students create personal dictionaries as an individual vocabulary and spelling resource; generally these are used with students who have intermediate and advanced English proficiency.
5. Word Wall – Key vocabulary is reviewed with a word wall where relevant content vocabulary words are listed alphabetically, usually on a large poster, sheet of butcher paper, or pocket chart. Words are revisited frequently

throughout the lesson or unit, and students are encouraged to use the words in their writing and discussions.

6. Concept Definition Map – A simple graphic design, the map allows for organization of content concepts for discussion, to clarify meaning, and for a prewriting activity for summarizing.

7. Cloze Sentences – Teach and review content vocabulary by having students read a sentence where the vocabulary word has been omitted from the sentence; the sentence must have strong contextual support for the omitted word(s).

8. List-Group-Label – Students brainstorm words related to a topic, determine possible categories, and then develop labels for those categories.

9. Word Generation – Students learn and review new content vocabulary through analogy. Invite students to brainstorm all the words they can think of that contains a posted root, suffix, and prefix. Analyze the meaning of each brainstormed word and ask students to figure out the meaning of the word or word-part posted.

10. Vocabulary Games – Playing games like Pictionary and Scrabble help students recall vocabulary terms. Word searches for beginning students and crosswords for more proficient students are useful vocabulary tools.

11. Self-Assessment of Levels of Word Knowledge – Use a "knowledge rating scale" that describes the extent of a person's understanding of words.

Vocabulary Strategies to Recycle

- ✓ Vocabulary learning takes place when students are immersed in words.
- ✓ Vocabulary learning takes place when students are active in discovering ways in which words are related to experiences and to one another.
- ✓ Vocabulary learning takes place when students personalize word learning.
- ✓ Vocabulary learning builds on multiple sources of information.
- ✓ Vocabulary learning takes place when students gain control over their own learning.
- ✓ Vocabulary learning takes place when students are aided in developing independent strategies
- ✓ Vocabulary learning is long lasting when students use words in meaningful ways.

Vocabulary Strategies To Move to the *Rubbish Heap*

- ⊙ Copying definitions from the dictionary.
- ⊙ Writing sentences which include the new word <u>before </u>studying the word's meaning is of little value; writing sentences is only effective AFTER gaining some understanding of the word.
- ⊙ Telling students to "use context" to determine meaning: research shows that students have about a one in twenty chance of learning a word's meaning through context.
- ⊙ Memorizing a list of definitions is ineffective for new learning; once students understand a new word, review is very helpful.

Blachowicz, C. "Best Practices in Vocabulary Instruction." Scott-Foresman.