VARIOUS METHODS USED IN TEACHING VOCABULARY

GABRIELA POPA
„Valahia" University of Targoviste
gabriela_valahia@yahoo.com

*Abstract***:** Just as with any skill, those who wish to enhance their vocabulary will need to learn how to read, speak, and write properly. Generally, when it comes to teaching vocabulary, there are typically presented two options, and these are spelling or phonics. The method to use is dependent on the students' age and skills. If the students are beginners, the teacher should start with phonics. Starting with phonics will help the teacher to build a strong foundation. The students will gain a deep understanding of phonics, and will be provided the skills they need to start working on spelling. For advanced students, improving the vocabulary is easier, because most would have already gone through a formal education. For them, it is a matter of reading more, and learning new words. They should also learn how to use these new words in the proper way. To teach vocabulary properly, a foundation is needed first. The most basic foundation for vocabulary can be called a root. The students will have to learn all the basic roots and once they have done this, the teacher can move on to more advanced concepts.

*Key-words***:** teaching, vocabulary, students, methods of teaching

1. Introduction

Vocabulary learning has been a topic of discussion for the teachers all over the world for many years (Hittleman, 1985; Gillet & Wallace, 1990; Author and McManus, 2002). It is a common belief that nurturing word consciousness in teachers will lead them to engender the love for words in their students.

Theories positing explanations of how a reader comprehends text emphasize the role of the reader in constructing meaning (Baker & Brown, 1984: Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Angelina, 1989; Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 1996). The reader interacts with the text and the situation by calling on his prior knowledge of the concept, text structure, and language. All elements work in synergy to arrive at meaning. Successful negotiation of meaning rests on the richness of a reader's prior knowledge. This is dependent, not only on the experiences of the senses, but also on the exposure to words in multiple contexts. A weakness in the acquisition of multiple meaning words can, therefore, be a barricade to comprehension in both narrative and expository text reading.

Research has shown that having a small vocabulary portends poor school performance, and conversely, that having a large vocabulary is associated with school success (Anderson & Nagy, 1993).

Conventional vocabulary instruction features the introduction of new words before reading, looking up definitions in a dictionary and writing the new words in sentences. This is essentially a skill/drill, isolated task approach.

Superior vocabulary instruction promotes a consciousness and curiosity about words, an appreciation for subtle differences in meaning, independence in word analysis, and wide, regular reading. To garner a broad, spontaneous resource of words and their meanings (estimated 40,000 words for high school seniors), elementary and high school students would have to learn 2,000-3,000 words a year. That is a formidable task, certainly not accomplished by conventional instruction methods. Rather, instruction must engage the reader in experimenting with language and exposure to multiple

BDD-A20430 © 2011 Valahia University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:51:05 UTC)

contexts. It is then that vocabulary building takes on a dynamic that is impossible to achieve through dictating lists of words and memorizing definitions. In short, significant vocabulary growth comes about through a combination of instruction, incidental encounters with words, and sheer volume of reading (Nagy, 1988).

Vocabulary study is not new. Strategies for teaching vocabulary are constantly being posed, be they retoolings of time-tested strategies or innovative approaches for targeted audiences.

2. How to build on the roots

Once the students have gained an advanced knowledge of various roots, they can enhance their vocabulary study. If they don't master the roots early on, they will have a difficult time with improving their vocabulary. As they are learning the roots, they will want to touch on the vocabulary a bit. It is basically an issue of phonics combined with spelling. When these two factors are developed in conjunction with each other, they have got the structure that will allow their vocabulary to become much more impressive. They have also probably heard people talk about the importance of reading.

Reading is the best way to improve the students' vocabulary, and it is also fun. They will have to be selective in the books they choose to read. While many people enjoy reading fiction books, non-fiction books are much more effective when it comes to enhancing the vocabulary. There are a number of reasons for this. Fiction books will generally be written for the purpose of entertainment. While they can allow a person to increase their vocabulary much more than someone who doesn't read, they will not help you as much as non-fiction books. Non-fiction books tend to be written on concepts that are chellenging, and their tone is more formal.

At the same time, a number of teachers have said that they are not impressed with the efficiency of workbooks. The best way for someone to improve their vocabulary is by reading words and using them daily on a regular basis. The student has to be exposed to these words multiple times. There is not guarantee that workbooks can guarantee retention.

It should mentined that studying vocabulary independently will not guarantee success. However, improving the vocabulary from the things the students read is very important. For example, if they are reading a book that deals with a scientific subject, the definition of various terms should be noted in that book. If they are reading a fiction book, and an uncommon term is used, a definition of that term should be listed. Many authors are now doing this in both fiction and non-fiction books. Placing words within the text increases the chances that the word will be retained.

3. Presenting vocabulary in a context whenever possible

Presenting vocabulary in a context can be seen as important for two basic reasons. Firstly, the context itself can present an association for the learner that may help to trigger the recall of lexical items linked with this context. There is considerable evidence that many language learners are able to recall vocabulary by making mental associations with situational or contextual images. Reaserch into memory has also shown that many people are able to recall lexical items more easily by association with a topic area.

A second point in favour to contextualizing vocabulary is that it presents learners with a means of physically storing vocabulary items under a topic category, rather in random or alphabetic lists.

Whenever possible, present words with their collocations. This makes it more likely that the students will use the words correctly. This will very much depend on the word. When words have restrictive meanings they are only in conjunction with the words they actually do collocate with. There is a case for teaching the more common collocations of certain words, particularly the nouns that go with certain adjectives, as well as the adverbial particles that go with particular verbs to form phrasal

BDD-A20430 © 2011 Valahia University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:51:05 UTC)

verbs and the prepositions that go with particular adjectives or nouns, e.g. *talented actor, note down, interested in* etc.

Affixes are very important and as a consequence, English is rich in affixes and knowledge of their meaning and function can be of great benefit to teachers and students alike. Such knowledge can help students to generalize about the meaning of previously unknown words. For example, if a student, a learner knows that the prefix *mis-* indicates wrongly or incorrectly and learns the word misunderstand on that basis, then he or she is in the position to deduce correctly the meaning of verbs such as *misspell, mishear, misinterpret, misinform.*

Exploiting vocabulary is an excellent way for introducing and recycling vocabulary. However, this may be a matter of learner perceptions. Learners will often see the text as a vehicle for the teaching of linguistic items – words, structures, functional exponents. It is also possible that they may see the text as a means of acquiring factual information (rather than linguistic information) and nothing else. It is also possible that they may see the text as a means of practising their own reading skills and strategies to the exclusion of any linguistic input.

4. Encourage the students to become more independent

Students may be encouraged to become more independent by making them guess the meaning of unknown words. The students may "get" to the meaning of a word by working it out through contextual clues, morphological clues and any other means at his/her disposal. This may be either a valid or a frustrating process. It may produce either the wrong answer or no answer at all. That is why it is necessary to use the dictionary as much as possible, because it really helps in vocabulary development and it can also make the students much more autonomous in their learning.

Monolingual dictionaries clearly have an important role in illustrating meaning clearly and carefully. Actually, anything that can help students learn in his/her way is surely an asset.

Some students may keep lists of words with the translations noted down beside each other. Others use words pools, mind maps, labelled pictures, random notes, word cards, dictionaries, mnemonics, charts, diagrams, vocabulary exercises, word tables and so on. The teacher can easily incorporate these into a vocabulary lesson and encourage students to experiment and find the ones that suit them best, bearing in mind that they might continue to use word lists with translations.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In its simplest terms vocabulary means ***words***. One's vocabulary represents the words "luggage" he/she knows and can use. While students often have extensive oral vocabularies (words they use in speech) translating these to print often poses challenges. Vocabulary, as it applies to reading, is not only a person's knowledge of words, but also his/her ability to recognize these words in print. Learning new vocabulary involves connecting the oral and print versions of the words and integrating them into the vocabulary "knowledge base".

Vocabulary is complex and multifaceted. Each new word a student learns has denotations and connotations. The word's denotation is its literal definition. Connotation, on the other hand, is the implied meaning of words.

Vocabulary is inextricably linked to comprehension. Simply put: one cannot comprehend a text if the words used in it are not understood! Vocabulary knowledge is the greatest single predictor of a reader's ability to comprehend a text. When a reader comes to a text with knowledge of its vocabulary or is able to use strategies to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words while reading he is very likely to be able to understand what the piece is saying. This is why vocabulary is often used to determine the difficulty of a text. The proportion of challenging words in a piece of writing is the standard measure for determining a text's difficulty.

BDD-A20430 © 2011 Valahia University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:51:05 UTC)