Teaching 10,000 Words: Breakout Session
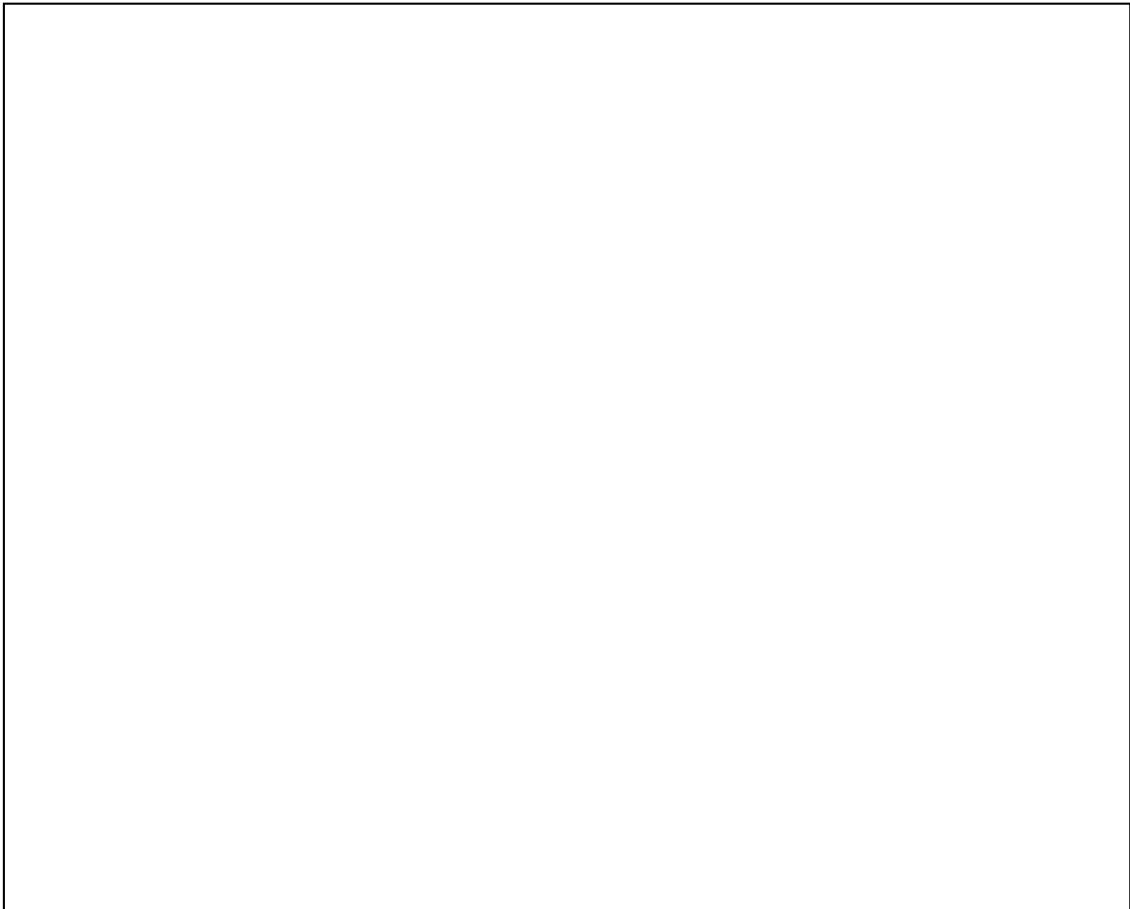
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Michael F. Graves
University of Minnesota, Emeritus
mgraves@umn.edu

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CREATE Conference, Orlando Florida

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Frequent, Varied, and Extensive Language Experiences

Immersion in a word-rich environment

Rich and varied experiences in listening, discussion, reading, and writing

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When I first developed the four-part program, this first part was called Wide Reading. But is now clear that children need listening and discussion experiences as well.

Teaching Individual Words

Introductory Instruction

Rich and Powerful Instruction

Repetition and Review

- Identifying Words to Teach

- Creating Multiple-Choice Items

- Creating Student-Friendly Definitions

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Some Word Lists To Consider

Over the past century, scores of word lists have been created. Here, I will discuss only those I think will be the most helpful to you in selecting words to teach.

Upper Elementary Word List from *Words Worth Teaching* (Biemiller, 2009)

Content Vocabulary Terms from *Building Academic Vocabulary* (Marzano, 2004)

The Academic Word List (Coxhead, 2000). Available at nottingham.ac.uk/%7Ealzsh3/acvocab/wordlists.htm

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Biemiller's *Words Worth Teaching*

A partly empirical and partly intuitive unsequenced list

Contains about 3,000 words for grades 3-6

Typical words include:

accommodate, acid, network, niece, stock, strain

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Marzano's Content Vocabulary Terms

Empirically and conceptually derived lists of terms taken from national standards documents

There are 7,923 terms representing 11 subject areas (math, science, language arts, history, geography, civics, economics, health, physical education, the arts, and technology).

These are further classified into four grade-level ranges (K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12).

Examples include *alphabet* and *parts of a book* from K-2 language art, *migrant* and *World War II* from 3-5 history, *tetrahedron* and *supplementary angle* from the 6-8 math, and *postulate* and *Monte Carlo simulation* from the 9-12 math.

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Coxhead's Academic Word List-1

Empirically derived list of 570 word families that are not among the 2,000 most frequent words, that are not content-specific words, and that appear frequently in content area texts but infrequently in fiction texts

It is important to recognize that these not content-specific words, not the sort of words on Marzano' lists. They occur across a variety of content area materials.

These words make up 10 % of the words in academic tests but only 1.4 % of the words in fiction texts.

The words are listed in ten sublists of about 50 words each.

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If I were teaching in the middle or secondary grades, I would absolutely look at these lists.

Coxhead's Academic Word List-2

Words from List 1 include: *analysis, evidence, indicate, method, process,* and *specific.*

Words from List 5 include: *amendment, discretion, liberal, marginal*, and *transition.*

Words from List 10 include: *adjacent, convinced, intrinsic, nonetheless, persistent,* and *straightforward.*

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If I were teaching in the middle or secondary grades, I would absolutely look at these lists.

Identifying Words To Teach-Graves

Once students have mastered the basic 4,000-4,000 words, I would select the vast majority of words from the texts children are reading, considering five questions:

- Is understanding the word important to understanding the   selection?

- Does this word represent a specific concept students definitely need to know?

- Are students able to use context or structural-analysis skills to discover the word's meaning?

- Can working with this word be useful in furthering students' context, structural analysis, or dictionary skills?

- How useful is this word outside of the reading selection currently being taught?

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Identifying Words To Teach-Biemiller

Teach the 3,000 Words Worth Teaching in Grades Three to Six to students with small reading vocabularies trying to teach as many as possible by the end of the 6th grade.

Additionally, you can sometimes simply identify words that students should know in an upcoming selection and ask them to be sure they know them

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Identifying Words To Teach: Marzano

Estimate how many words you can teach during a year. (In his examples, he gives relatively small numbers like 100-150.)

Select words from the appropriate list or lists in Content Vocabulary Terms using as your main criterion the question, "Is this term critically important to the content I will teach this year?"

I would add that teachers should verify that the words are important in their school or district and add or subtract words as appropriate.

Another way to use the list would be to select words from your content area texts, check how many of them are on Marzano's list, and the decide on a next step if not many are.

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Identifying Words To Teach: Coxhead

Coxhead simply presents the Academic Word List and says almost nothing about how to use it in selecting vocabulary to teach.

However, the list is presently used as the primary source of words to teach in at least two middle-school programs: the *Word Generation Program* (Snow, Lawrence, & White, 2009 and the *Academic Language Instruction for all Students* (Leseau, Kieffer, Faller, & Kelly, 2010) program.

Both programs teach a small number of words (4-5) per week, and they teach them in depth. Word Generation teaches 120 words and runs for 24 weeks. Academic Language teaches about 90 words and runs for 18 weeks.

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Some Possible Tests

- Reading Vocabulary Test

- Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests

- Three-Option, Multiple-Choice Tests

- "Yes"/"No" Tests

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Reading Vocabulary Test

Tests students' knowledge of the most frequent 4,000 words.

These words appear time and time again in any material students are reading.

If students don't have most of these words in their reading vocabularies, they need to learn them.

The test is group administered.

On the test, the student sees a picture and select a word that matches it from four choices.

Ordering information is available by email at thefirst4000words.com.

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Gates-MacGinitie Vocabulary Test

A group administered, norm referenced test of reading vocabulary

Available at a variety of grade levels, including grades 4, 5, 6, 7-9, and 10-12.

Students read a target word in a short phrase and select one of four definitions.

Testing time is about 15 minutes.

On drawback of this test, like all standardized vocabulary tests, is that you learn where the child ranks compared to other children but noting about which specific body of words he or she knows.

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Teacher-Made, Three-Option, Multiple-Choice Items

- Keep things simple and uncomplicated for yourself and your students.

- Make the correct answer a clear and concise definition, doing everything you can to keep the words in the answer simpler than the word you are testing.

- Make the two distractors distinctly wrong.

- While the distractors should be distinctly wrong, they should not be obviously wrong. All three alternatives should be about the same length and use the same syntax. Avoid alternatives that are silly or otherwise blatantly incorrect.

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Sample Three-Option, Multiple-Choice Items

Grade 2

ache
   a. a type of soup
   b. a steady pain
   c. a small boat

Grade 5

fanatic
   a. very unreasonable
   b. most acceptable
   c. sometimes unhealthy

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"Yes"/"No" Tests

- Create, duplicate, and hand out a list of words.

- Give students the list, and explain what they are to do and the purpose of the exercise.

- What they are to do is put a check mark beside the words they know.

- The purpose of their doing so—and it's really important to stress this—is for them to indicate whether they know each word so that you can teach those they don't know.

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Testing Your Knowledge of Students' Word Knowledge

- On any commercial vocabulary test you give, identify those words you think most students will know, those you think most students will not know, and those you are not sure about.

- On any vocabulary test you create, deliberately make 1/3 of the words ones you think most students will know, 1/3 of them words you think most students will not know, and 1/3 of them words you are not sure about.

- When you score the test, tally results on each of these groups separately. If students know the words you think they know, don't know the ones you think they don't, and know some of the ones you are not sure about, you perceptions are pretty good.

- If this is not the case, you need to continue to work to sharpen your perceptions of your students' word knowledge.

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Providing Student-Friendly Definitions: A Key to Effective Instruction

Providing student-friendly definitions—definitions that are accurate and that students will understand—is no mean task. Below are a definition of *dazzling* from the dictionary on my computer and a student-friendly definition from Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2003).

"bright enough to deprive someone of sight temporarily"

"If something is *dazzling*, that means that it's so bright that you can hardly look at it."

The *Collins COBUILD New Student's Dictionary* (Harper-Collins, 2006) provides many excellent examples of student-friendly definitions.

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beach   visit   climate   pleasant   ensure   adobe   applicable

Teaching Word Learning Strategies: A Combined Strategy for Dealing with Unknown Words Met in Context

Recognize that an unknown word has occurred

Decide whether you need to understand it to understand the passage.

Attempt to sound it out using your phonics skills.

(Consider that it might be a cognate.)

Attempt to infer its meaning using context.

Attempt to infer its meaning using word parts.

Ask someone or consult a dictionary.

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Some Lessons We Learned from Our Work with the Teaching Word Learning Strategies Project

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Motivate Students

Students seldom come to school all excited about learning to use context or word parts to figure out the meanings of unknown words. Thus some motivation is in order.

Sometimes we resort to extrinsic motivation.

At other times, we use more intrinsic approaches.

We begin a unit on teaching context with these slides illustrating how contest, in this case visual context, supports inferences.

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Explain and Discuss the Value of Strategies with Students

Let's not keep kids in the dark!

You can use word learning strategies to build a rich and powerful vocabulary!

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Make Certain Students Can Read the Texts Used in the Instruction

We can't present students with a text like this and expect them to learn to use word learning strategies.

The goal of this _____ was to _____ the _____ of an _____ on second grade English-_____ learners' _____of high _____ content _____ and _____.

The alternatives include.

1. Finding texts that convey understandable content using largely words that students can read

2. Writing such texts

3. Finding the most appropriate texts you can, but recognizing that they are still too difficult for your ELLs and scaffolding their reading with techniques like instructional conversations

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Model the Strategy and Work with Students in Using the Strategy on a Text the Class Can Share

Project the following paragraph, and model or work through it with the class as you indentify cognates one by one.

On their way to the moon, Apollo 8 astronauts looked back and saw a bright blue globe. At that instant, they became the first people ever to see earth as a planet. Their photographs demonstrate something we know but is hard to believe. We are all moving through space. Our spaceship is the earth; it moves around the sun at 67,000 miles an hour.

As you or your Spanish-speaking students identify the cognates, display them along with their Spanish equivalents. Here are three of them:

astronauts/astronautas

instant/instante

photograph/fotografía

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Gradually Give Students Increased Responsibility for Using the Strategy on Their Own

Model the strategy.

Work with the class and have students you call on or volunteers do some of the work.

Have students work with the strategy in pairs.

Have students work with the strategy individually, but then let them confer with a classmate before they turn in their work or share it with the class.

Have students work with the strategy individually, and have them turn in their work or share it with the class without first sharing it with a classmate.

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Gradually Increase the Complexity of the Task

With word parts, you might move from

Inflections $\Rightarrow$ Prefixes $\Rightarrow$ Derivational Suffixes $\Rightarrow$ Non-English Roots

With cognates, you might move from

English and Spanish words spelled identically: animal/animal

Spanish word differs by adding a single letter: experiment/experimento

Spanish word differs in that more than one letter is changed: activity/actividad

Spanish word differs at both the beginning and the end: student/estudiante

With texts, you might move from

Word Parts $\Rightarrow$ Words $\Rightarrow$ Sentences $\Rightarrow$ Paragraphs $\Rightarrow$ Complete Texts

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Fostering Word Consciousness Through Writing

Make vocabulary work a significant part of the writing process.

Writing is an extremely powerful context for fostering word consciousness because:

1. Writing is relatively permanent, not fleeting like speech.

2. When students revise their writing, they have an excellent and authentic opportunity to consider word choices.

For example, in describing something that is not small, intermediate 5th graders might consider the options *big, large, huge, hefty, gigantic,* and *colossal* and discuss why they might use one of these over the others.

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Make Vocabulary Work a Significant Part of the Writing Process
Focus on Vocabulary During Revising

Is this the best word to get across my meaning?

Is the word precise enough?

Is it appropriately formal or informal?

Is it a word my reader will know?

Is it a word my reader will find interesting?

Have I used it too much? Should I use a synonym?

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Create Writing Activities Focusing on Vocabulary

Teaching Vocabulary as a Writing Prompt: A procedure based on the work of Duin (Duin & Graves, 1987, 1988) and Beck (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan 2002):

Select a set of ten or so words that lend themselves to writing about a particular topic.

Involve students in rich and robust activities over several days: Define the words, compare them to other words, examine the contexts in which they do and do not apply, play games with them, etc.

Have students write an essay in which they use as many of the words as possible.

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A Writing Sample from a Student in Duin's Program

"I think the space program would be more *feasible* if we sent
more than just astronauts and satellites into space. We
need to send tourists and change the whole *configuration* of
the space shuttle so that it can *accommodate* more people.
When the tourists are in space, they could fly some of the
manned-maneuvering units and *retrieve* stuff from space.
They could maybe even see if other planets are *habitable.*
When the tourists come back they would have the *capability*
of doing anything in space. They truly would be *advocates*
of space. But, in order to make these special missions
happen, we will need to add more modules onto our space
station."

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Involving Students in Original Investigations

Because students are surrounded by words, vocabulary makes and excellent topic of investigation. Some possibilities include:

The use of slang versus more formal vocabulary.

The vocabulary of different groups: Short order cooks, movie people, sportscasters on TV, hucksters on TV or at fairs

The vocabulary of different age groups: Younger children, adolescents, parents, grandparents

The vocabulary that is appropriate in different settings: School, home, church, the cafeteria.

The use of terms of address such as Mr., Mrs., Miss, Ms., Dr.

The use of first names: on TV and in the newspaper, for females versus males, for children versus adults.

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An Original Investigation of Slang

This is a three-step investigation that extends over several weeks and includes both in-class and out-of-class activities.

Step 1: Students make a record of 10 slang terms they use and their meanings, leaving space beside each definition for alternate slang terms for each meaning.

Step 2: Students ask their parents or caregivers for the slang term they have for each meaning (it may or may not be the same one students used) and whether they still use their original slang term, use a more modern slang term, or try not to use slang. Students record their responses.

Step 3: Students meet in groups to discuss what they found. Each student reports on what he or she found with one slang term. The class as a whole discusses such questions as How much slang terms have changed over the years, How often students use slang compared to their parents, and What do they think of the slang their parents use.

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Teaching Students about Words

Some aspects of words that Nagy and Scott (2000, Scott & Nagy, 2004) suggest teachers consider themselves and consider teaching to students, with a couple of my own suggestions.

Word learning is incremental.

Many words have more than one meaning.

Word meanings are interrelated.

Words affect different people in different ways.

Words are differentially appropriate in different contexts.

English contains many Spanish cognates.

Oral English makes extensive use of idioms.

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