Effective Vocabulary Instruction for English-Language Learners

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Mrs. Wright's Third-Grade Lesson

Mrs. Wright's third-grade classroom is made up of eight African-American children, seven Anglo children, five Vietnamese children who are learning English-as-a second language, two Latino students who are learning English-as-a-second language, and one Native-American Indian child. One of the Vietnamese children, Tu Kien, can read in English at grade level. Kien Tu and Bigh Van can read in English at second-grade level. Tran and Lee, who recently arrived in the United States, can read on grade level in Vietnamese, but are just beginning to learn to read in English. The Latino students were born in the United States and can read in English on grade level.

The students and Mrs. Wright are studying different cultures in social studies. At the present, they are in the midst of an integrated unit on Vietnamese society. Mrs. Wright's main goals for the Social Studies lesson today are for the students to learn about some Vietnamese celebrations and to appreciate their meanings. She has chosen a selection on paper blossoms from the text, *Vietnam: A Portrait of the Country Through its Festivals and Traditions* (Grolier Educational, 2002). Mrs. Wright has decided to do a guided reading with the students. The text is probably easily read by students who can read on the third- or fourth-grade level in English. One main idea in the selection is that during the Tet festival spring blossoms fill the streets and houses because the people believe that flowers welcome good spirits. One of Mrs. Wright's vocabulary goals is that the children will know concepts for the words *blossom* and *tissue*—at least as the concepts are exemplified in the context of the Tet festival—as well as the English labels for the concepts. While most of the children probably know at least some aspects of the concepts, they may not grasp the finer understanding of the word *blossom* as a verb, "to blossom," that is, "to

unfold in a gracious, lovely, beautiful, way." Similarly, the meaning of *tissue* as "thinly layered matter" such as the tissue in a blossom petal, will most likely be new for most of her students.

In the morning, while the rest of the class is in literature circle discussions, Mrs. Wright takes the five Vietnamese children aside and explains that, later in the afternoon, she would like them to teach their classmates about the significance of blossoms in the Tet festival and show them how to make paper blossoms that they will display in the room. She gives a copy of this 30-page, richly illustrated Grolier Book to the children and asks Tu Kien to read it to the others while they follow along. She asks Ken Tu and Bigh Van to explain in Vietnamese what they learn to Tran and Lee and emphasizes that they should use the pictures as much as possible as they explain. When the children finish reading and explaining, she sits with them and writes the words *blossom* and *tissue* on a white board, noting that these are two important words that they will need when they teach the class later.

To help the children refine their understandings of the two words, Mrs. Wright uses a Paired Question technique. She shows the boys two questions at a time, one that can be answered with "yes" answer and one with "no." She begins with easy question pairs and moves to more difficult ones:

Mrs. Wright: Do flowers have a blossom?

Children (mainly Tu Kien, Ken Tu, and Bigh Van reply): Yes!

Mrs. Wright: Do dogs have a blossom?

Children: Noooo!

Mrs. Wright: Can a tissue tear?

Children: Yes.

Mrs. Wright: Can a tissue cry?

Children: No.

Now she asks harder questions:

Mrs. Wright: Can a person blossom?

Children: No!

Mrs. Wright now explains the word meaning when used as a verb.

Mrs. Wright: Can a book blossom?

Children: No!

Mrs. Wright: Can a tissue be made of paper?

Children: Yes.

Mrs. Wright: Is there tissue in a blossom?

Children: No!

Mrs. Wright explains the meaning of tissue as it relates to the word *blossom*.

Finally, Mrs. Wright reviews the vocabulary building strategy of using context to infer word meanings. She shows the children the sentences: "The flower was beautiful. Its blossom was pink and white." Then, she gives the children pink, white, and green crayons and asks them to draw something to represent the sentences. Tu Kien translates for Tran and Lee. The children draw flowers that correctly represent the two sentences. Mrs. Wright then performs a think-aloud as she reads and points to the two sentences and explains that, if the students did not known the meaning of the word *blossom*, they could have figured it out by reading the rest of the two sentences. Only one part of the flower is likely to be pink and white.

Four Components of a Comprehensive Vocabulary Program for English-Language Learners and Why They Are Important

In this chapter, we describe four components of a comprehensive vocabulary program for English-language learners. In our opening scenario, Mrs. Wright used each of the four components. She planfully engaged her English-language learners in four different types of vocabulary activities. When she asked Tu Kien to read aloud to the others and Ken Tu and Bigh Van to discuss the selection's meaning, she provided rich and varied language experiences. When she used the Paired Question technique, she taught individual words. When she reviewed using context to infer word meanings, she was reviewing a word learning strategy. Finally, throughout the lesson, she was developing the students' word consciousness. These four types of activities—providing English-language learners with rich and varied language experiences, teaching individual words, teaching word learning strategies, and fostering

word consciousness—constitute what we believe is a comprehensive and powerful program of vocabulary instruction for native English speakers (Graves, 2006), as well as for English-language learners.

The vocabulary learning task is huge. The books and other reading materials used by school children include over 180,000 different words. A typical child enters school with a very small reading vocabulary. Once in school, however, a typical child's reading vocabulary is likely to soar at a rate of 3,000-4,000 words a year, leading to a reading vocabulary of something like 25,000 words by eighth grade, and a reading vocabulary of something like 50,000 words by the end of high school (Graves, 2006; Nagy & Herman, 1987).

As such, a comprehensive and powerful vocabulary program is important for all students, particularly for English-language learners (American Educational Research Association, 2004; Nation, 2001; Schmitt, 2000) for a number reasons.

- First, English-language learners face the same huge learning task that native speakers do, but because they begin learning English later in their lives, their vocabulary learning needs to be accelerated.
- Second, vocabulary knowledge is strongly linked to both oral and reading comprehension, for all students, including English-language learners (Fitzgerald & Graves, 2004; Shanahan, in press).
- Third, vocabulary is one of the most crucial correlates of school success (Hart & Risley, 2003).
- Fourth, school texts that English-language learners must read include a good deal of sophisticated vocabulary (Graves & Slater, in press).
- Fifth, English-language learners' reading test performance is dependent upon wide-ranging vocabulary knowledge (García, 1991).
- Sixth, acquiring a deep understanding of word meanings can be especially difficult for English-language learners (Verhallen & Schoonen, 1993).

- Finally, in languages like Spanish that have large numbers of English cognates (words that are similar in appearance and meaning, such as “special” and “especial”), it is important for students to learn to recognize English cognates and thereby add to their English vocabulary (García, 1998), something that not all students do (García & Nagy, 1993).

Teaching Vocabulary to English-Language Learners

In this section, we present specific examples of each of the four-part program.

Providing Rich and Varied language Experiences

By "language experiences" we mean listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In the preschool years, children need to listen and speak as much as possible. They need to engage in real discussions—give and take conversations in which home caretakers and later classroom teachers give them the opportunity to think and discuss topics of interest in an open, positive, and supportive climate. Anything we can do to promote real discussions in school and out of it is worthwhile.

Reading to children is also worthwhile. As teachers, we should frequently read to children, model our enthusiasm for reading, and do everything we can to get parents and other caregivers involved in reading to, and with, their children. Children learn most of their vocabulary from reading (Sternberg, 1983). Therefore, if we substantially increase the amount of reading they do, we can markedly increase their vocabularies. Moreover, wide reading fosters automaticity, provides knowledge about different topics and literary forms, and puts students on the road to becoming lifelong readers.

Finally, as we now know but somehow did not know a few years ago, writing is a powerful ally and aide to reading. From the very beginning, students need to engage frequently in paired reading and writing activities, some of which focus on learning word meanings.

In addition to doing a lot of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, primary-grade students with relatively small vocabularies, including many English-language learners—will profit from "interactive oral reading." Interactive oral reading means that the both the student(s) and the “other”—usually an

adult—transact with one another and text while reading aloud. If children are going to learn really new words, words that are not already in their listening vocabularies, one way to learn them is through oral language activities such as interactive oral reading.

The following description of effective interactive reading draws heavily on the work of Jeanne De Temple and Catherine Snow (2003) as well as our own synthesis of the literature.

Effective interactive oral reading is indeed interactive. That is, both the reader (usually the teacher) and the children play active roles. The reader (usually the teacher) frequently pauses, prompts children to respond, and follows up those responses with answers and perhaps more prompts. For instance, the reader might pause and say, "What do you think about that?" or "Why do you suppose that happened?" or "What do you think will happen next?" Children respond to the prompts or questions, elaborate in some of their responses, and perhaps ask questions of their own. For example, the children might say, "My Mom does not do that." or "He was a bad dog." or "Now he eats it." Additionally, the interactions are frequently supportive and instructive. In other words, the reader scaffolds children's efforts to understand the words and the text.

Effective interactive oral reading usually involves multiple readings of the book. This allows the children and the reader to revisit the topic and words several times, and it allows the children to begin actively using some of the words they have heard and perhaps had explained in previous readings.

Effective interactive oral reading directly focuses children's attention on a relatively small number of words. Programs often focus on 10-20 words per week. In some cases, the word work comes during the first reading, in some cases during subsequent readings, and in some cases after the book has been read.

Effective interactive oral reading requires readers to read fluently, with appropriate intonation and expression. Readers need to engage children with an animated and lively reading style. Such renditions provide students with additional clues to making meaning, intonation, and the natural rhythm, melody and rhyme of the English language.

Effective interactive oral reading requires carefully selected books. The books need to be interesting and enjoyable for children and stretch their thinking a bit. Of course, the books also need to include some challenging words that are worth study and have the potential to enhance students' vocabularies.

Teaching Individual Words

Different words present students with very different learning challenges, depending on factors such as how much students already know about the word, whether a student's native language contains a cognate of the word, whether a student's native language contains a word representing the same concept, how well you want students to learn the word, and whether learning the word requires students to learn a new and difficult concept (Graves, 2006). Each of these word learning challenges requires a different sort of instruction, which may sound daunting. But there is a variety of approaches that can and should be used. Here, we give an example of a very powerful technique for one of the most important word learning challenges—learning words that represent new and difficult concepts. Techniques appropriate for other word learning tasks can be found in Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002), Graves (2006), and Stahl & Nagy (2006)

English-language learners need to learn new concepts and the labels for those concepts. We have found a set of six steps developed by Dorothy Frayer (Frayer, Frederick, & Klausmeier, 1969) to be effective: Define a new concept; distinguish between the new concept and similar, but different ones; give examples of the concept; give non-examples of the concept; ask students to distinguish between examples and non-examples; and have students give examples and non-examples while providing them with positive and constructive feedback.

To illustrate this approach we describe Ms. García teaching part of a very brief guided-reading lesson that she is doing in her second-grade classroom. In Ms. García's class there are 12 African American children, 8 Anglo students, and 3 Latino students who arrived at the school in the spring of first grade. The three Latino children, María, Rosa, and Marco, are reading in English at about a mid-first-grade level. The class is beginning to learn about Latin American culture. Today Ms. García wants the

students to understand what Latin America is and where it is located. She has written a brief text that explains that Latin America refers to several countries, which she names. She will use the text to help the students understand what Latin America is and to identify the countries on the globe. Yesterday, she brought a globe to class and placed it on her desk and was surprised when some of the children asked, "What's that?" Today, she begins her brief guided reading lesson by introducing the topic and then teaching the students the concept of *globe*. We will now illustrate how she teaches the concept *globe* within this lesson.

Define the new concept. Ms. García starts by giving the children a definition of *globe* and describing some of its attributes. She shows a poster with the following three sentences and reads them: "A *globe* represents a planet. This globe represents our planet, earth. A globe is round, shaped like a ball." As she says the words *round* and *ball*, she motions to gesture the shapes. "It shows countries and where they are." Next, she points to the globe she has brought to school. She says, "This is a globe of the earth. It is shaped like a ball, and it's round. See the lines showing the countries? Now Ms. García references a cognate in Spanish—*globo*. Although her Latino students cannot read in Spanish, she thinks they might be familiar with the word in aural language. She writes *globe* and *globo* on the whiteboard, points to each, and says each aloud. She makes sure that Maria, Rosa, and Marco are looking and listening. Ms. García says, "These are the same words. One is English, and one is Spanish. Notice that they look a lot alike."

Distinguish the new concept from similar, but different concepts. Learning the boundaries for concepts is important to clear understanding. For instance, a woman recently told one of us that as she and her family were driving through the country one day her daughter began pointing to the cows and saying, "Cow. Cow. Cow." The mother was excited and proud to see that her prior teaching about cows and what they looked like was taking hold. As they drove on, the daughter noticed some horses in the field, pointed, and said, "Cow! Cow! Cow!" The mother was deflated. This is a good example of partial concept learning. The daughter had learned critical attributes of what a cow is—it has four legs, a long

tail, stands in the field, and so on. At the same time, she had not learned what it was *not*—that there are characteristics which other animals share, but which exclude them from the category *cow*.

Being aware of this, Ms. García wisely helps the children to understand some ways in which the concept *globe* overlaps with other concepts, but also, how *globe* is distinguished. She shows a world map and says, "This is a map. It shows the earth too, but in a different way. How is it different?" Rosa says, "It's flat," and Ms. García says, "Yes, a *globe* is round. A *map* is flat." She then shows the students a *contour map*, says the words, and writes them on the board. She says, "A *contour map* also shows the earth, but in a different way. How is it different from a *globe*?" Maria says, "It's bumpy." Ms. García says, "Yes. A *globe is* round. A *map* is flat. A *contour map* is flat and bumpy."

Give examples. Ms. García points to the globe and says, "The most common *globe* is a globe of the earth. Globes come in other sizes and colors though." She then shows a miniature globe of the earth, a cobalt-blue globe ornament and says, "This is a globe too. But it's not a globe of the earth. It's one I have in my garden because I think it's pretty."

Give non-examples. Ms. García shows a map of Arkansas and says, "This is not a *globe*." She shows a map of her neighborhood and says, "This is not a *globe*."

Present examples and non-examples and ask students to distinguish them. Ms. García shows an aerial photo of New York state (non-example), a red sphere representing Mars (example), a walking map of Charleston (non-example), a ball-shaped model of the moon (example). She points to each and asks the children to tell whether each is an example of *globe*. As the children respond, she tells them if they are right or not.

Have students present examples and non-examples. Finally, Ms. García asks the students if they can think of some other examples of a *globe*. Some students say, "An orange. A soccer ball. A basketball. A penny." "All of those," Ms. Garcia says, "are globes except the penny. Can anyone tell why a penny is not a globe?" Marco says, "Because it's flat." "Right," says Ms. García. "Now what are things that might be similar, but aren't globes?" Students say, "Maps." Ms. García then concludes this part of her lesson by summarizing the definition of *globe*.

Teaching concepts using the Frayer steps can take some time, and it can also involve some preparation on the part of the teacher. However, for important concepts, the results are well worth the effort, and, in many cases, English-language learners will only learn the new concepts deeply if considerable time is spent. The Frayer method provides a viable and effective lesson structure for such concept learning, one that is time-tested with native-language speakers, but also one that is likely to be particularly beneficial for English-language language learners precisely because it is so structured.

Teaching Word Learning Strategies Learning individual words is important for English-language learners, because of the large number of words they need to learn in order to match the vocabularies of their English speaking classmates. Learning strategies for figuring out words on their own is even more important. Three word-learning strategies are particularly valuable: using context to infer the meanings of unknown words, using word parts to deduce the meanings of unknown words, and learning to use the dictionary. In this section, we focus on using one type of word part—prefixes—to unlock meanings of words.

Instruction in prefixes is particularly worthwhile for English-language learners for several reasons. First, there is a relatively small number of prefixes—making them relatively easy to learn; but they are used in a large number of word, so they are important to know. About 70 years ago, Stauffer (1942) found that nearly one-fourth of the 20,000 words in Thorndike's (1932) list of 20,000 words were prefixed words, and the 15 most frequently occurring prefixes occurred in over 4,000 words. More recently, White, Sowell, and Yanagihara (1989) noted that the three most frequent prefixes (*un-*, *re-*, and *in-*) account for 50 percent of prefixed words. Second, prefixes tend to be consistently spelled and consistently positioned at the beginning of words, making them easy to spot. Third, prefixes usually have a clear lexical meaning.

Our approach to teaching prefixes (Graves, 2004) includes four basic steps: (1) Introduction, clarification, motivation, and overview; (2) explicit instruction on three prefixes; (3) teaching students a strategy for figuring out word meanings; (4) and review. We illustrate the steps in an English-as-a-second-language pullout class in which the teacher, Mr. Mach, is working with five students whose oral

English levels are rated as "very low-intermediate" for their age/grade on a commonly administered oral English assessment. Three are Latino students in fourth grade, Gerardo, Abriana, and Juan, who read on a second-grade level in English. One is a Hmong student, who uses his English name, Ken; he reads on a third-grade level in English. Another is a Tarascan Indian student from Mexico, Marco, who is in fifth grade and reads on a second-grade level in English.

Introduction, clarification, motivation, and overview. On Day 1, the teacher introduces the concept of prefixes and the strategy of using them to unlock the meanings of unknown words and motivates the students by stressing the value of prefixes. Mr. Mach displays a poster with the title, "Prefixes—One Key to Learning Word Meaning," at the top. He points to the title and says, "If you learn about this thing called 'prefixes,' you will be able to figure out meanings of words in English—when you hear them and read them. This will also help you when you write in English."

He then asks the students what they already know about prefixes. Ken says, "Nothing." Mr. Mach uncovers the next lines on the poster and points to each as he reads and elaborates it:

Prefix: a group of letters at the front of word *un*—not

- Never alone. Always with a word *un*happy ☹
- Changes the word meaning happy ☺/*un*happy ☹
- If it is a prefix, when you take it away, you still have a real word

  *un*happy: happy – *un*. *Happy* is a real word. So *un* is a prefix.

  *un*cle: cle – *un*. *Cle* is *not* a real word. So *un* is *not* a prefix.

Mr. Mach asks the students if they know any other prefixes, and all say "No." He then writes three prefixes and their meanings on a white board—*un*- (not), *re*- (again), and *in*- (not). He notes that these are the three prefixes they will learn together over the next few days. He asks the students to write the three prefixes in a list on a paper and tells them they have a homework assignment—they should find one word for each prefix, write the three words on the paper, and bring the list back tomorrow.

Explicit instruction three prefixes. On the second day Mr. Mach begins by reviewing the poster. Next, he asks the students to show him their homework papers. Abriana, Juan, and Ken show him their

completed papers, but Gerardo and Marco have nothing to show. Mr. Mach writes the students' selections on a white board under the appropriate prefix heading, purposefully putting "correct" choices at the top:

un-	*re-*	*in-*
*un*done	*re*do	*in*correct
*un*tied	*re*start	*in*complete
*un*ited	*re*nder	*in*fant

Mr. Mach points to "*un*done," says it, and asks, "Is '*un*' a prefix here Ken?" Ken says, "Yes." Mr. Mach asks how he knows. Ken says, "I can cover up the "*un*" and what's left is 'done,' and that's a real word. Mr. Mach says, "Good. What does '*un*done' mean?" Ken says, "Not done." Mr. Mach repeats these steps for "*un*tied," asking Julia to answer. For "*un*ited," Mr. Mach begins in the same way, asking Juan, "Is '*un*' a prefix here?" Juan says, "Well, no." "Why not," asks Mr. Mach. "Because 'ited' isn't a real word when you take away the '*un*,'" says Juan. Mr. Mach continues with the remaining words in the same fashion. Mr. Mach erases the incorrect words at the end.

Next. Mr. Mach tells the students that now they will be learning more about using these three prefixes to unlock meanings of words. First, he shows this poster:

The Prefix re-

1. The teacher asked Julio to rewrite his spelling test because his writing was so messy the she could not read it. rewrite—to write again
2. Lee had to repeat her joke. Her grandfather did not hear it. repeat—to say again
3. If commence means begin, then recommence means _____.

Mr. Mach leads the students from the meaning of the familiar prefixed word to the meaning of the prefix:

Mr. Mach (after reading the first sentence): If Abriana were asked to rewrite a test, what must she do?

Ken: She has to take it over. She has to take it again.

Mr. Mach: Yes. What is the meaning of "re," Marco?

Marco: Again. A second time. Over again.

Mr. Mach repeats this process for the second sentence on the poster and ends by asking Abrianna to fill in the blank for the third sentence as he reads it. Abrianna does it correctly.

After this, Mr. Mach hands each of the students a check sheet, reads the directions and asks them to complete the sheet on their own. Part of a check sheet looks like this:

Can You Find It?

A word or prefix is hidden in each line of the letters below. Read the definition. Circle the word or prefix when you find it.

1. Circle the prefix meaning "again." subantirenobit
2. Circle the word in each line that means:
   a. "see again." subseerevisionnosee
   b. "come back again" undosubvisitrevisit

When they're done, he gives immediate feedback. He repeats the process for the other two prefixes.

Teaching the Prefix Removal and Replacement Strategy to Figure out Word Meanings. On day 3 Mr. Mach begins the session by showing a poster titled, "The Prefix Removal and Replacement Strategy." On the poster is a list:

- Remove the prefix.
- Is there a real word left?
- What does the prefix mean, and what does the rest of the word mean?
- So what does the prefixed word mean?
- Try it in a sentence.

Mr. Mach then models using the Prefix Strategy with the word *uncover,* reading the poster line by line and showing how he uses the steps to figure out the meaning of the word. He then asks Ken to do the steps with the word *re-cook,* and Marco to do the steps with the word *renumber*. Finally, he repeats the procedures he used on Day 2 to teach three additional prefixes—*dis-*, *en-*, and *non-*.

Review. On day 4 Mr. Mach points to the Prefix Strategy poster and reviews the strategy. Then, he provides guided practice by having students each use the strategy, one at a time with a new set of words for the prefixes *dis-*, *en-*, and *non-*.

As the final activity, Mr. Mach gives the students a quiz which requires them to state the steps of the prefix strategy and give the meanings of the six prefixes that were taught. He corrects the quiz immediately and gives the students feedback before they return to their classes.

Fostering Word Consciousness

Word consciousness refers to awareness of words, interest in words, and knowledge about words and the way they work (Anderson & Nagy, 1992; Graves & Watts, 2002; Nagy & Scott, 2004). Students who are word conscious are aware of the words around them—ones they read and hear, write and speak. They have an appreciation of the power of words, an understanding of why certain words are used instead of others, a sense of the words that could be used in place of those they've selected to write or say, and are cognizant of first encounters with new words. They are also interested in learning new words and using them skillfully and precisely.

Like the first three parts of the comprehensive vocabulary program we advocate, word consciousness is important for all students but particularly English-language learners. Because they have more English words to learn than their English speaking classmates and because most of their word learning is taking place incidentally as they are reading and listening, word consciousness is crucial to English learners' success in expanding the breadth and depth of their word knowledge over the course of their lifetimes.

Word consciousness should be fostered in all students, from preschoolers to high schoolers and beyond. Approaches to fostering it include modeling, recognizing, and encouraging adept diction, promoting word play, providing rich and expressive instruction; involving students in original investigations involving words, and teaching students a variety of useful facts about words (Graves, 2006; Graves & Watts, 2002). Here we discuss original investigation, which incorporates some parts of a classroom activity Peter Dewitz observed (personal communication, October 16, 2004).

Henry Koch, a sixth-grade English teacher at a large suburban middle school, has been for 25 years. In that time, he has seen his classroom change from one in which English was the only language spoken to one in which half the students speak English as their native language and the other half speak a variety of languages including Spanish, Vietnamese, Somali, Tai, and Arabic. Knowing that idioms represent a major learning challenge for the vast majority of English-language learners, Mr. Koch has planned a six-week original investigation dealing with them. Here's how it works:

Introduction. Mr. Koch begins the activity by telling students that idioms are "common English phrases whose meanings cannot be understood from the combined meaning of their individual words." (Please see more about teaching idioms in Chapter 5.)

Examples of idioms. He then gives some examples of idioms, explains how each idiom works, and gives a sentence or short paragraph that illustrates the use of each of them. "Have many irons in the fire" doesn't usually refer to fire or to irons. Instead it refers to a situation in which a person has a number of options or a number of things going on at once. The idiom suggests this meaning because if someone has many irons in the fire, he or she has a number of irons hot and ready to use. "Val wasn't that unhappy when she didn't get the first job she applied for because she had many irons in the fire."

Elaborating why idioms are important, but challenging to learn. After giving these explanations and examples, Mr. Koch tells the students that there are thousands of idioms in English, that they are tricky to understand, and that they pose a real challenge for people learning English. So the class is going to investigate, share, discuss, and try to better understand idioms over the next six weeks.

Student activity. Here's what the class will do. First, each English-language learner will team up with a native English speaker. Since the class consists of about half English learners and about half native speakers, this works. If some teams have three members, that's okay. Each day, two teams are responsible for bringing in an idiom, explaining it to the class, and posting it on the Idiom Board. Teams post them on 5 1/2 by 8 cards on a large bulletin board that occupies much of one classroom wall. The card includes the idiom, its meaning, and a sentence or short paragraph illustrating its meaning. Since

there are about 15 teams, each responsible for contributing one or two a week over the six weeks, the Idiom Board should contain about 120 entries by the end of the investigation.

The idioms can be ones that the English learner in the team knows, ones that the native speaker in the team knows, or ones that a friend or relative of either member of the team knows. Mr. Koch discourages students from taking idioms from the Internet or a dictionary such of the *Longman American Idioms Dictionary* (Pearson Education Limited, 1999).

In addition to making an oral presentation about their idioms, teams earn 5 points for posting it on a card. The cards include spaces for other teams to record experiences they have had with the idioms. A sample card for the idiom "pump iron" is shown in Figure 1. [Insert Figure 1 about here.] As can be seen, five other teams have had experiences with the idiom: Two teams used it, two teams heard it, and one found it on the Internet.

Teams earn one point for each entry they have on a card and are on their honor to record only experiences that actually happen. However, each day right after the new idioms are introduced, other teams can challenge those who have posted experiences. If challenged, the posting team has to describe where they heard or used the idiom, indicate where they found it on the Internet, or explain any other type of experience the have had with it. If they can explain, they earn 2 points. If they cannot explain, the challenging team earns 2 points.

In the end. At the end of the sixth week, Mr. Koch tallies the points, recognizes the team or teams with the most points, stresses the importance of idioms, and encourages his English-language learners to be on the lookout for them. He also suggests that when his English learners come across a phrase they believe is an idiom, they confirm it by talking with one of their native speaking classmates or by checking one of the several copies of the *Longman American Idioms Dictionary,* that are kept in the classroom.

This class investigation has three main purposes. First, it teaches English-language learners a substantial number of idioms. Second, it alerts all students, but particularly English learners, to be on the

lookout for idioms they need to master. Finally, it teaches all students something about how the English language works.

Classroom Tips

Many common English words have multiple meanings. For example, *table* can mean a piece of furniture or a graphic representation of data. *Custom* can mean an old habit or something that is made to order. Learning multiple meanings is a challenge for all students, but it a particular challenge for English-language learners. Word consciousness games like the one in Figure 2 [Insert Figure 2 about here], which is based on the work of Richard Lederer (1988), help make students aware of the fact that many words have multiple meanings. Photocopy the directions so that students can follow along as you read them. We deliberately use the word *polysemy* in the title so that students can learn a "big" word and be proud of doing so.

You Try It

The vocabulary program we describe here and the accompanying techniques—the Frayer method, teaching prefixes, and doing a word-of-the-day activity—are applicable in a variety of settings and situations. The program can be used in combination with a basal program, for remediation, with whole class, with small groups, with trade books, and with classes that contain exclusively English-language learners, and classes that contain English-language learners and native-English speakers. But, of course, the nature of the instruction differs from one situation to another.

Here are some examples. If you are using a basal program, it will undoubtedly include some instruction that focuses on individual words. However, little if any of that instruction is going to be nearly as deep and powerful as the Frayer method. So be sure to teach some words using that method. When using trade books, you are on your own when it comes to selecting vocabulary to teach and for devising methods to teach the words. So we suggest targeting the vocabulary most crucial for understanding the text and using a variety of methods such as those described in Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002), Graves (2006), and Stahl and Nagy (2006).

All of the techniques can be used with either whole classes or small groups, depending upon who will profit from the instruction—all of your students or only some of them.

Finally, if you are working with students reading below grade level, whether exclusively English-language learners or with both English learners and native speakers, having a robust and comprehensive program is important. Building such a program usually means using whatever vocabulary instruction is included in the basic program you are using and adding to that program. Be sure that you spend some time on providing rich and varied language experiences, some time teaching individual words, some time teaching word learning strategies, and some time fostering word consciousness.

Summary

Building and using a rich, robust vocabulary is important in school and out of school. The number of words that students typically learn by the time they graduate from high school is huge, something like 50,000 words. This is a particularly substantial task for English-language learners. A vocabulary program such as the one outlined here—a program that provides students with rich and varied language experiences, teaches individual words, teaches word learning strategies, and fosters word consciousness—provides English-language learners with the assistance, skills, and motivation they need to develop powerful English vocabularies. We recommend that teachers at all grade levels and in all subject areas work together to implement such a program.

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Figure 1: Bulletin board card for idiom activity

"Pump iron" Do heavy lifting to build up your muscles. Juan had been pumping iron for two years, and although he was short he now looked like a body builder.		
Team AD/KD Used it.	Team DD/TK Heard it.	Team BB/MG Found it on Internet.
Team MV/RL Found it on Internet.	Team LL/PA Used it.	

Figure 2. Polysemy Puzzle

Polysemy Puzzle

A lot of English words have several different meanings. The Polysemy Puzzle below will help you understand words with multiple meanings. It has two parts. The word *polysemy* means multiple meanings. In the first part, one meaning is on the left, one meaning is on the right, and the meanings are separated by several blanks. The number of blanks indicates the number of letters in the word that has both of the meanings, and you have to fill in the words. In the second part, identify words that have two meanings and the number of letters indicated by the short blanks. Then, write both the words and their meanings in the spaces provided.

Part 1

summit ___ ___ ___ spinning toy

large black bird ___ ___ ___ ___ to brag

way of writing ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ photo

nation ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ rural area

police car ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ type of ship

school leader ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ most important.

Part 2

_____ ___ ___ ___ _____

_____ ___ ___ ___ ___ _____

_____ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ _____

_____ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ _____

_____ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ _____

_____ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ _____