

Robust Vocabulary Instruction

This instructional routine is based off of the principles of *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*. Here is the routine (based on Beck, McKeown, & Kucan's best practices) broken down into six practical steps:

Step 1. Choosing the Right Words to Teach

www.TextProject.org provides a list of 4,000 Simple Word Families that make up 90% of all texts! When I choose vocabulary words to teach, I cross-reference words from our class texts with this high frequency word list to ensure that I am choosing vocabulary my students will encounter regularly.

Step 2. Have Students Rate Their Word Knowledge

When I introduce vocabulary, I give students a word knowledge chart and have them hold up the number of fingers that represent their knowledge:

- 1- I don't know it. I've never heard it.
- 2- I've heard it, but I don't know what it means.
- 3- I can use it in a sentence.
- 4- I can teach it to the class.

I acknowledge responses and say, "I see we have a lot of different levels of knowledge, but let's get everyone to a 4!" You can also ask them to rate their knowledge several days before instruction to help you select vocabulary. Rating knowledge is similar to accessing prior knowledge before reading, and it helps students understand that "knowing" a word is a continuum.

Step 3. Provide a Student-Friendly Definition

In order to provide a student friendly definition, I consult several sources:

www.ldoceonline.com, <http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english-cobuild-learners>, and <http://onelook.com>. The first two dictionaries provide simplified definitions, and the third is a consensus dictionary.

Step 4. Provide Different Contexts

A valuable way to decide which contexts you will provide is to see how the vocabulary word frequently collocates, or goes with other words. To find this information, I use the *Frequency List* on www.WordandPhrase.info. Simply type in the word, and the most frequent collocates appear. For example, "resist" is a word that I taught recently, and the most frequent collocate is "temptation." When I taught the word, I had students use the phrase "resist the temptation." Another popular collocate for this word was "arrest" to "resist arrest," so we also did an activity that incorporated that use.

Step 5. Have Students Interact with the Word

This is your opportunity to reach all learning modalities. Vocabulary activities should be a combination, or alternation, of visual, auditory, oral, kinesthetic, and tactile activities. On the first day, I prefer to do oral activities that encourage students to use the word in speech. For example, after I provide the context from our story, for the word "resist," I show students a picture of a mouse turned away from a piece of cheese in a trap. I provided this

frame: The _____ is **resisting the temptation** to _____.

We read the frame one time chorally, and then I ask some questions: What is this a picture of? What is the mouse stopping himself from doing? When I think the students are ready I have several different volunteers describe the picture using the sentence frame. I provide 2-3 more pictures: someone resisting the temptation to eat chocolate, watch television, stay up late, etc. I call on different students and sometimes have them share with partners. The next step is to have them come up with their own examples and make connections to their lives. We brainstorm a class list of things we've resisted. I leave the list up and provide a frame for them: I have **resisted the temptation** to _____. They can then look at the list and choose something that's true for them.

Step 6. Review, Review, Review

Vocabulary words need constant reinforcement. Review is built in daily at the beginning of vocabulary instruction and in our closing activities. Over school breaks students can choose to be apart of www.Remind.com, where I message vocabulary questions and reminders.

In closing, remember, "knowing" a word is a multi-faceted concept. We do not just want our students to be able to recite a definition; ultimately, we want students to be able to read, write, speak, and think with this new word, and that requires a new kind of instruction: *Robust Vocabulary Instruction*.