

Principles for Teaching Vocabulary

Research (e.g., Hulstijn, 2001; Read, 2004) has shown that both direct and intentional focus on vocabulary by teachers and indirect exposure to lexical (vocabulary) items, as a by-product of communicative activities, can account for significant gains in learners' vocabulary. Below are some principles to help teachers reflect on when to teach vocabulary and what to teach.

- **Allocate specific class time to vocabulary learning.**
Select several key terms on which to focus from the lesson's materials. Key vocabulary should be emphasized (e.g., introduced, written, repeated, and highlighted for students to see).
- **Help students to learn vocabulary in context.**
Rather than isolating words and/or focusing on dictionary definitions, learners can benefit from attending to vocabulary within a communicative framework in which items appear. Students will then associate new words with a meaningful context to which they apply.
- **Play down the role of bilingual dictionaries.**
Help students resist the temptation to overuse their bilingual dictionaries.
- **Encourage students to develop strategies to determine the meaning of words.**
Help students with strategies such as guessing vocabulary in context, semantic mapping* and collocations**, mnemonic strategies, vocabulary notebooks, or word building through understanding of suffixes, prefixes, or roots.
- **Engage in "unplanned" vocabulary teaching.**
Most of the attention you give to vocabulary will be unplanned: those moments when a student asks about a word or when a word has appeared that you feel deserves some attention. Sometimes, the teacher may want to extend these impromptu moments by giving several examples or encouraging students to use the word in other sentences. Make sure that unplanned teaching, however, does not detract from the central focus of the activity.

References

Brown, H. D. (2007). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy*. New York: Pearson Education, Inc.

Celce-Murcia, M. (Ed.). (1991). *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (2nd ed.). New York: Newbury House.

Hulstijn, J. (2001). Intentional and incidental second language vocabulary learning: A reappraisal of elaboration, rehearsal and automaticity. In P. Robinson (Ed.), *Cognition and second language acquisition instruction* (pp. 258-286). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Read, J. (2004). Research in teaching vocabulary. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 24, 146-161.

***Semantic mapping**

Semantic mapping allows students to explore their knowledge of a new word by mapping it with other related words or phrases similar in meaning to the new word. Its goal is to help students acquire a clearer concept by learning the connections among several related words

Teacher preparation

1. Select a concept of the new word and anticipate students' background knowledge.
2. Reflect on important related ideas, events, characteristics, and examples for discussion.

Instructional procedures

1. Introduce the concept.
2. Have students brainstorm many words regarding the concept.
3. Record their words on the board.
4. Extend the discussion around words that suggest larger related categories, ideas, events, characteristics, and examples.
5. Remind students which words on the list are likely to be most useful as the larger, organizing ideas.
6. Direct students to work together in small groups to decide which words belong under the appropriate categories and to discuss the reasons for their decisions.
7. Give students about 10 minutes to complete their word maps. Walk around the room observing each group's progress, assisting when needed.
8. Allow all groups to present their semantic word maps and their reasons for choosing each word for the appropriate category. (source: http://chs.smuhsd.org/learning_community/content_literacy/semantic_word_map.html)

****Collocation**

Collocations are fixed expressions that become established through repeated use. Such terms as 'crystal clear', 'middle management', 'nuclear family', and 'cosmetic surgery' are examples of collocations.