

Fostering Vocabulary
Development in Elementary
Classrooms

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The importance of vocabulary instruction

- ✓ Vocabulary knowledge is significantly related to reading comprehension, decoding, spelling, and school achievement
- ✓ Children come to school with vastly different funds of knowledge about words; in K and elementary years, fostering word learning should be a high-priority goal to help some children “catch up,,
- ✓ Helping children learn about words is one way to build linguistic awareness, which in turn fosters both language learning and literacy development



"How do you ever expect to get anywhere with such a tiny vocabulary?"

What does it mean to “know,” a word?

✓ RUN

✓ TREELET

Three dimensions of word knowledge

✓ Breadth

✓ Depth

✓ Flexibility

Basic words and complex words known by 1st, 3rd, and 5th graders

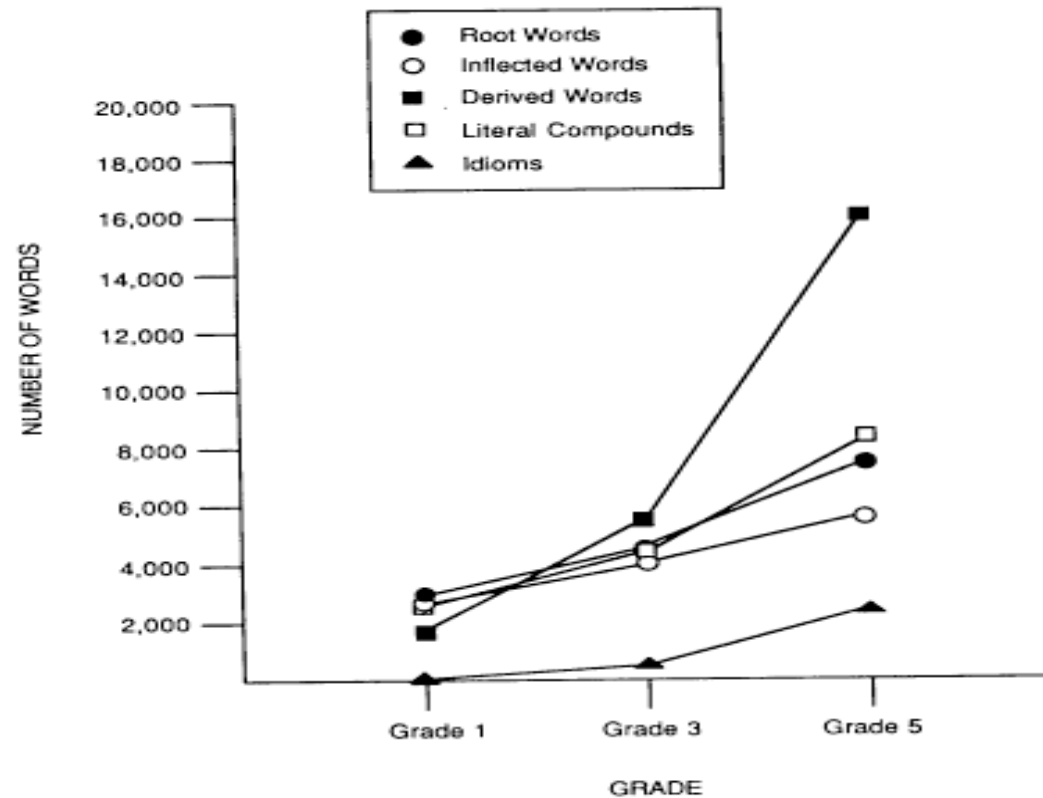


FIG. 1.—Mean estimated number of words known for each morphologically defined word type as a function of grade.

How do children learn words?

- ✓ Incidental word learning
- ✓ Teacher-supported word learning in everyday activities
 - Talking about words during “read-aloud,, sessions
- ✓ “Intentional,, word learning:
 - Studying words in texts
 - Learning content-area terms
- ✓ Applying word-learning strategies

Developmental changes in verbal conceptual systems (Nelson, 1996)

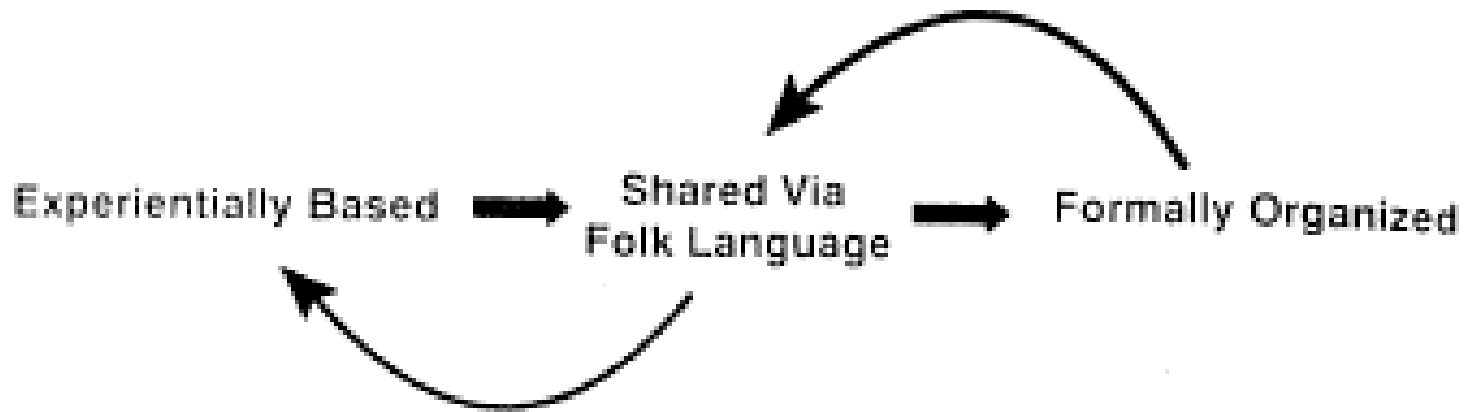
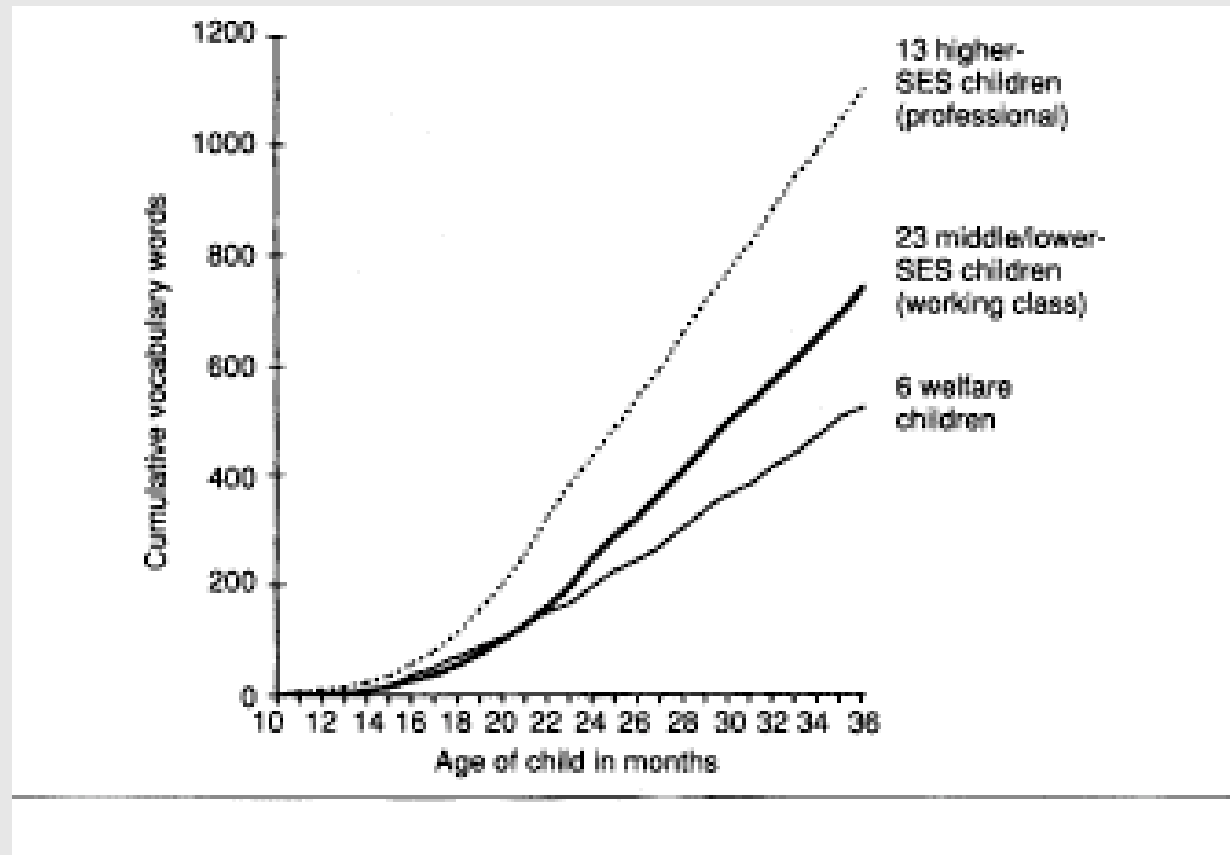


Figure 11.1. Changes in conceptual representation systems

The importance of incidental word learning

- ✓ Children learn about 3,000 words a year but only about 300 from organized instruction
- ✓ “Because the bulk of children’s vocabulary growth occurs incidentally. . . the single most important goal of vocabulary instruction should be to increase the amount of incidental word learning by students.,,
(Nagy & Herman, 1987)

Influence of family language on children's vocabulary (ages 1-3)



Ways teachers can support incidental word learning

- ✓ Lots of talk in the classroom
 - Discussion of events and experiences
 - Discussion of books
 - Peer groups collaborating on learning activities
- ✓ Listening to stories/books read aloud
- ✓ Word games
- ✓ Teachers' modeling of curiosity about words

Learning words and learning word-learning strategies

✓ Pre-Reading Vocabulary instruction

✓ Context Analysis strategy

✓ Word Analysis strategy (Structural Analysis)

Pre-Reading: Rationale

- ✓ Students learn ways to learn and remember words
- ✓ Knowing key words before reading helps comprehension and learning
- ✓ Method can be combined with activities used to access or develop fund of background knowledge

Pre-Reading: Methods

- ✓ 6 to 10 words selected from passage or chapter;
- ✓ Read words and study meanings (dictionary?)
- ✓ Students locate words during reading; consider meaning in context
- ✓ Review word cards from Word Bank on a regular basis
- ✓ Keep track of progress on quizzes

Illustration: Science passage

- ✓ Words for this lesson: shaft, replace, cartilage, growth plate, stringy
- ✓ Read the words; look up definitions (or read definitions); use the word in a sentence.
- ✓ To activate background knowledge, use open-ended discussion or KWL (Ogle).
- ✓ Read passage; depending on reading activity, discuss use of words

Excerpt from science passage

- ✓ During your growth years, the ends of your long bones are fastened to the shafts by the growth plate. Gradually hard new bone cells grow out from the shaft. When they grow out, they replace the soft cartilage. The cartilage is pushed towards the ends of the long bones. As the cartilage pushes outward, the long bones grow. By the time you are 18 to 20 years old, hard bone cells have replaced the cartilage in the growth plate.

Pre-Reading: Follow-Up Activities

- ✓ Practice Word Bank cards for drills
- ✓ Write paragraphs using a certain number of the topical words
- ✓ Write a summary of a passage or story, using some of the words
- ✓ Practice dictionary skills (e.g., how many other meanings are there for the words?)

Pre-Reading: Guidelines for Effective Use

- ✓ Select “useful,, words, also ones that will affect comprehension of that passage
- ✓ Don’t require learning of more words than students can remember; success is a key factor
- ✓ If passage is loaded with other “difficult,, words, learning 6-10 before reading may not improve overall comprehension

Pre-Reading Vocabulary: Limitations

- ✓ Don't count on this method to significantly increase overall breadth of vocabulary
- ✓ This method may also not contribute to “depth,, of word knowledge
- ✓ Because words are selected from specific reading materials, this method may not address particular needs of the individual student

Context-Analysis Strategy: Rationale

- ✓ Students acquire a strategy they can use to understand words in texts as they read
- ✓ Method should develop students' inferential word-learning during reading
- ✓ Helps students become accustomed to monitoring their own comprehension--thus, benefits overall comprehension of passages

Context-Analysis Strategy: Method

- ✓ Help students notice unfamiliar words
 - Work on process of deciding whether particular words are important to understand
- ✓ Learn process (steps) to guide contextual analysis (SLAP)
- ✓ Practice with passages that have specific types of context clues may help
 - Such as synonym, “time,, clue, etc.

The SLAP Strategy

- ✓ Say the word
- ✓ Look for clues
- ✓ Ask yourself what the word might mean;
think of a word that expresses that meaning
- ✓ Put the word in the passage in place of the
unfamiliar word. Does it make sense?

Trying out the SLAP strategy

- ✓ He tried to open the box with no luck. He couldn't find the key, so he decided to use a smidget.
- ✓ Say the word.
- ✓ Look for clues.
- ✓ Ask your self what the meaning might be.
- ✓ Put word in the passage; does it make sense?

Context-Analysis Strategy: Guidelines for Effective Use

- ✓ May not be appropriate below grade 3
- ✓ Combine with work on higher-level decoding strategies, repeated readings
- ✓ Include in book discussions (e.g., reciprocal teaching)
- ✓ To be beneficial for independent reading, strategy must be well ingrained
 - Teachers should provide lots of guided practice and support for independent use

Context-Analysis Strategy: Limitations

- ✓ For use with independent reading, so texts should be at instructional or independent level
- ✓ For students with cognitive or language-learning disabilities, inferential process is difficult to learn
 - emphasize “monitoring,, for comprehension
- ✓ Not appropriate if students cannot read connected text for meaning

Structural Analysis Strategy: Rationale

- ✓ Students acquire strategy that links higher-level decoding skills and inferring meaning of words with prefixes and suffixes (e.g., *disagreement*)
- ✓ By late elementary years, about 60% of the unfamiliar words in school texts are morphologically complex
- ✓ Students' awareness of meaning-bearing units may benefit decoding, spelling, vocabulary, and comprehension

Structural Analysis Strategy: Method

✓ Child learns to

- Recognize and “strip off,, prefixes and suffixes
- Practice steps for analyzing words for pronunciation and meaning
- Learn meanings and grammatical roles of suffixes (e.g., *-less* means without)

✓ Teacher should model process of using this strategy during reading

Structural Analysis Strategy: Follow-Up Activities

- ✓ Word sorts
- ✓ Word building activities/games
- ✓ Work on spelling “rules,, for suffix addition
- ✓ Combine with textual analysis during small-group reading activities
- ✓ Emphasize dictionary skills, combining instruction in the etymology of words

Two Word Sorts: Put words into two piles based on some “rule,,

✓ Remember

✓ Rerun

✓ Return

✓ Restaurant

✓ Relax

✓ Rethink

✓ Rent

✓ Reheat

✓ Lady

✓ Shady

✓ Early

✓ Curly

✓ Sunny

✓ Baby

✓ Ready

✓ Windy

Structural Analysis Strategy: Guidelines for Effective Use

- ✓ Initial learning may focus on words out of context
- ✓ Inferring meanings from word parts should be presented as a way to “estimate,, meaning of whole word
- ✓ Provide guided practice during reading so that students notice and analyze complex words habitually
- ✓ Appropriate for students from 3rd grade on

Structural Analysis: Limitations

- ✓ Students with limited “basic,, vocabulary will have trouble inferring the meanings of complex words (e.g., *graceful, humorous*)
- ✓ Combining meanings of word parts sometimes does not lead student to a “close,, meaning (e.g., *appliance*); combine with context analysis
- ✓ Students with language-learning disabilities may have trouble learning the inferential process

Other Methods

- ✓ Key word method (Mastropieri and Scruggs)
 - Most useful for content area courses
- ✓ Word Concepts/ Learning to define words
- ✓ Semantic feature analysis (Bos and others)
 - Helps students distinguish meanings of words in a specific domain/topic; interactive activities
- ✓ Computer programs for vocabulary development
 - May provide “targeted,, learning, practice, etc.
- ✓ Possible sentences (Stahl)

Effective vocabulary instruction:

- ✓ Provides exposure to different meanings of words
- ✓ Helps students link new and familiar meanings of words
- ✓ Provides illustrations of word usage in natural contexts
- ✓ Builds conceptual and semantic foundations for word knowledge
- ✓ Builds understanding of members of word families
- ✓ Assists efforts to derive word meanings from context