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Teaching Academic Vocabulary

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As colleagues, we need to have a united, sustained, and informed vision about how we're going to tackle this monster of academic language. It will take more than rhetoric. It means that on any given day, each teacher that an English Language Learner encounters must be prepared to teach vocabulary in a way that is viable, engages the student in the instruction, and gets him or her to use the vocabulary.



If we look at the big picture of comprehensive strategies for helping protracted English Language Learners build academic vocabulary, we can highlight several key points about what we know these students need.

■ **English Language Learners need to engage in fluent, wide reading.**



I strongly recommend that teachers use short, engaging, issue-based nonfiction readings. These readings will expose students to more academic vocabulary. You could read for a month in literature and come up with a pretty anemic toolkit of words that are valuable for academic purposes. I also recommend that students do more than one reading on the same topic. Too often, we give them just one exposure, then go on to something new. This is not a

This is Part 2 of a two-part brief about how to effectively select and teach academic vocabulary to protracted English Language Learners. It is based on a presentation made by Dr. Kinsella at the ELL Administrator Conference hosted by the Sonoma County Office of Education in April 2005. As part of its Aiming High initiative, SCOE is providing this brief to teachers throughout Sonoma County with a goal of helping them close the achievement gap for English Learners.

realistic pattern in terms of college or the workplace where narrow reading is common. Nor is it helpful in terms of retention. If they see the word “impact” in three separate readings, it will be a word that enters their lexicon.

■ **English Language Learners need to have direct scaffolded instruction of important words.**

Students do not acquire academic language simply by listening to literate presentations by teachers. Vulnerable second language learners need direct, recognizable, and accountable instruction of high-utility vocabulary. Since not all words require instructional primacy, teachers must have a pedagogically defensible justification for why they select certain words. Some words are taught so students can comprehend big concepts, while others are useful for general academic purposes.

■ **English Language Learners need to be taught more word knowledge, parts of speech, and word usage.** They have to understand how words work and should be studying and visualizing words.

■ **English Language Learners need structured opportunities to use the new academic vocabulary every day.** This is part of the accountability that will ensure students are actually using the new vocabulary. I see teachers with lesson plans describing how they’re going to teach a standard by talking about this and doing that. I ask them, “At what moment will you interrupt your instruction? If you’re asking a question, how will you make sure that everyone responds? What opportunities have you built in for students to actually use the vocabulary?” Students will not develop a powerful expressive academic

vocabulary just from listening to a discussion. They develop it by really being taught and by being put in situations where they have to use the words.

What is effective academic vocabulary instruction?

An instructional sequence for pre-teaching important new words should include steps that not only convey the meaning of the word, but also check for understanding to see that students actually grasp the meaning. It’s important that the instructional sequence for teaching each word be consistent. This will make it easier for students to follow.

The example of academic vocabulary instruction presented below shows how important it is for a teacher to come to class prepared to teach the words. In this example, the class has been given a note-taking scaffold that they refer to during the instruction.

Instructor: The next word I’m going to teach you is “lexicon.” The word is on your vocabulary note-taking sheet. Lexicon is a noun, a concrete word, something a person could have. Here is an example of a sentence using the word lexicon: We are working on developing your academic English lexicon through reading and instruction.

Listen to me say it first: lex’ i con. Now, let’s all say it together, slowly and in parts.

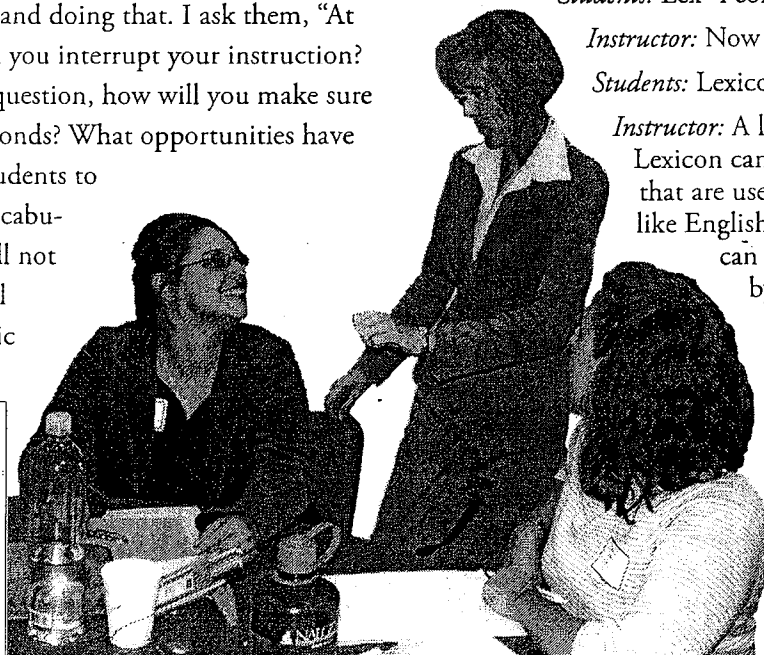
Students: Lex’ i con.

Instructor: Now let’s say it quickly.

Students: Lexicon.

Instructor: A lexicon is like a dictionary. Lexicon can refer to different words that are used in a particular language like English or Spanish. Or a lexicon can refer to words used by people in a certain profession, like doctors or teachers. A doctor’s lexicon may include terms like disease, surgery, patients, etc.

If you want to order a special coffee drink, you need to know the difference between



At a training on vocabulary instruction in mixed-ability classrooms, Kate Kinsella (center) works with Mountain Shadows Middle School teachers Amy Reibli and Christina Grace.

a latté and cappuccino because these are important terms in the coffee-maker's _____.

Students: Lexicon.

Instructor: Based on your interactions with skateboarders, would you say they have a lexicon? Thumbs up or down. What are some terms in the skateboarder's lexicon?

Students give examples, including "grinding."

Instructor: "Grinding" may be a word in the lexicon of both the skateboarder and coffee-maker, but they mean quite different things. So the same word can be in the lexicon of different groups of people.

need to hear the word repeated several times. Break the word into parts on the board to ensure that they hear each syllable.

- **Ask students to repeat the word.** If it's a long word, it's important to have them say it slowly, pronouncing each syllable. This increases the odds that when they read it, they will say each syllable. Repeat it many times, sometimes slowly and sometimes quickly.
- **Clarify the part of speech.** Is it a thing, an action, or a descriptive word? Give an example in a sentence.

■ **Give synonyms and explanations.** Make sure the synonyms are words the students are familiar with.

■ **Provide a visual non-linguistic representation** or an illustrative sentence to help them develop a strong mental model.

■ **Rephrase the explanation,** asking students to fill in the blank and say the word again. This increases

the chances that they will have an accurate auditory imprint and develop muscle memory. Saying the word when they encounter it will increase the odds that they can decode it and that it will become a sight word for them.

- **Assess students' comprehension of the word.** Look for evidence that the students are thinking and following the instructional sequence. Ask for quick formative assessments—like thumbs up, thumbs down—or ask students to generate their own examples.

Of course, not every word needs to be taught at this level of intensity. It's important for teachers to make

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Sample Note-Taking Scaffold for Students

Students fill in the blanks as the teacher teaches the words

Term	Synonym/Explanation	Example/Image
symptom, n.	SYN: _____, indication DEF: A sign or physical condition that shows you may have a certain _____	Common symptoms of the flu are _____, body aches, and decreased _____
prevalent, adj. prevalence, n.	SYN: _____ DEF: Common at a particular time or in a particular _____	Chicken pox is more prevalent among _____ The prevalence of _____ due to smoking among _____ has increased in recent years.

Using a complete sentence, give me one reason why you believe that skateboarders do or do not have an identifiable lexicon.

Students respond.

This example showcases a number of strategies for effective vocabulary instruction. When providing vocabulary instruction, teachers should:

- **Give students the opportunity to see the word being taught** by writing it on the board or including it as part of a printed handout.

Pronounce the word. Say it with good diction so students get a clear auditory imprint. If the majority of the students are English Language Learners, they

Local example: Kawana School

Developing academic vocabulary in mathematics using Thinking Maps

Kawana School in the Bellevue Union district has been using a professional development model known as Lesson Study for several years now. Through Lesson Study, teachers are working together to write, study, teach, revise, and re-teach mathematics lessons. Their schoolwide goal is to deliver instruction that gives students the confidence and academic language skills to explain their mathematical thinking.

With a student population that includes 72% English Learners, Kawana's teachers must incorporate effective vocabulary instruction across the curriculum. One strategy they're using to support vocabulary learning is Thinking Maps. These non-linguistic representations help students organize and graphically display their thoughts. They ease some of the language demands for English Learners while still supporting vocabulary development and subject-specific learning.

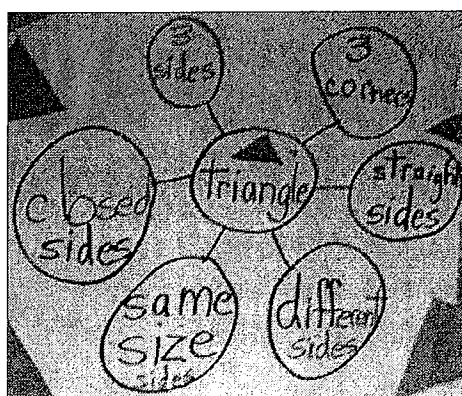
What follows is a description of a math unit, *Shapes of Faces*, developed by first-grade teachers Suzanne Bethel, Margaret Close, Maureen Minto, and Kristi Slayback. The unit includes 13 lessons, referenced to the Houghton Mifflin Math text. The lessons incorporate a variety of Thinking Maps, which were used to help the students identify, name, and understand basic geometric shapes.

Shapes of Faces: A First-Grade Mathematics Unit

This lesson series supports first-grade mathematics content standard 2.2, which states that students should learn to “classify familiar plane and solid objects by attributes ... and explain which attributes are being used for classification.” The students are already able to recognize and name simple shapes—circle, square, triangle. Now, they are building on that knowledge to learn mathematics vocabulary like *corner*, *side*, *face*, *length*, *edge*, *hexagon*, *cube*, *pyramid*, and *prism*.

The teachers start the unit by introducing students to a variety of two-dimensional shapes. They show students examples of each shape, discuss its attributes, and help students recognize the shape on the *faces* of three-dimensional objects. To learn more about each shape, students go on a “shape hunt” in the classroom, cut shapes out of paper, and create Circle Maps about the shapes.

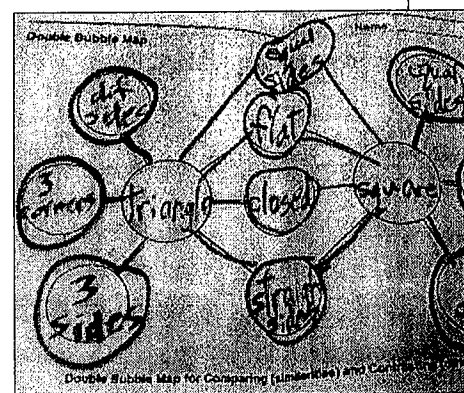
One of the students' Circle Maps



Once the students are able to identify and define the shapes, they're asked to compare the similarities and differences of the shapes. They use Double-Bubble Maps to make the comparisons. New vocabulary words help them compare the number of *corners* and *sides* that each figure has.

Further along in the unit, the students begin exploring three-dimensional shapes. They trace the faces of solids—cube, rectangular prism, square pyramid, triangular prism, and cylinder—and make a “recipe” to describe the shapes that make up the faces of the solids. For example, a triangular prism has two triangular faces and three rectangular faces.

Toward the end of the unit, students actually learn to build three-dimensional shapes. Flat shapes called *nets* are introduced. These are two-dimensional patterns that, when folded, form three-dimensional shapes, much like making a box from a flattened piece of cardboard. Teachers show students a net for a cube and ask them to predict what solid it will form. Students refer to the Thinking Maps posted around the room to respond to the teacher's question. As illustrated in the following student responses, the students are effectively using the vocabulary that was at the core of this lesson.

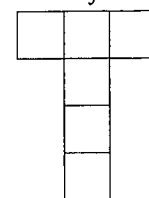


Double-Bubble Map comparing triangles &



Triangular pris

The net of a cube



“It's a cube, because when you put this part over here and this up, it makes a cube.” (The student shows how the net would be folded.)

“A cube because it has only squares on it.”

“It has six squares.”

“It has six sides.”

Cognates: A tool for building academic language

There are thousands of English words that have a related word in Spanish. With a similar meaning, spelling, and pronunciation, these words—called cognates—can be a bridge to the English language for Spanish-speaking students.

Teaching students about English/Spanish cognates can significantly increase the number of words in their vocabulary and provide skills that help them infer meaning in newly encountered words. Students can be taught specific cognates—*family* and *familia*—and they can learn general rules about how to recognize cognates in both written and spoken contexts. Older students can explore more sophisticated cognates, including ones that have multiple meanings.

When teaching students about cognates:

- State the English word and the Spanish cognate.
- Have students say the word in both English and Spanish.
- Have students look at the words and discuss how they are alike and how they are different. Look at endings, roots, and affixes across the languages.
- Verify the meaning of the word in English and Spanish. Is the meaning the same? Is it the same

“It is a cube because a cube has six faces and this has six faces.”

Not all the students are convinced that the net will fold to form a cube. Using an overhead projector, students outline the faces and count the squares, then prove their theory by folding and taping the net into a cube. They work with other nets and other shapes, sharing their findings with the class by using sentence frames provided by the teacher.

Frame: My solid has ____ squares.

Response: My solid has 6 squares.

Frame: My ____ has ____ and ____.

Response: My cube has 6 faces and 12 edges.

Frame: This net has ____ faces and can be folded into a ____.

Response: This net has square faces and can be folded into a cube. ♦

in all contexts?
How is the word used across the languages?

One word of caution about cognates—not all words that look or sound like cognates actually are.

“False cognates” are words that have similar spelling and pronunciation, but don’t share the same meaning. For

example, *embarazada* (which means pregnant) is a false cognate of *embarrassed*. When students learn about cognates, it’s important to point out false cognates as well. ♦

What the research says

Research has shown that English Learners who are aware of cognates have higher levels of English reading comprehension than do EL students who are not aware of these connections. (Hiebert and Kamil, 2004)

It’s estimated that there are 10,000 to 15,000 English/Spanish cognates and that cognates comprise 30 to 50 percent of an educated person’s active vocabulary. (Nash, 1997)

Recognizing Cognates: Nouns

- English nouns ending in *-or* or *-al* are very often identical in Spanish
actor / actor – capital / capital
- Many English nouns ending with *-ist* can be converted to Spanish by adding *-a*
artist / artista – dentist / dentista
- Very often, *-ism* endings can be replaced with *-ismo* to translate words into Spanish
idealism / idealismo – tourism / turismo
- Very often, *-ance* and *-ence* endings can be replaced with *-ancia* or *-encia*
distance / distancia – intelligence / inteligencia
- Very often, *-ty* endings can be replaced with *-dad* to translate words into Spanish
electricity / electricidad – variety / variedad

More information about cognates will be on the Framework for Intervention CD, which will be available this spring.

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a distinction between a word that needs only a brief description and one that must be learned and retained as part of the students' academic vocabulary. This is the first step in a teacher's preparation for teaching vocabulary associated with a particular reading or unit.*

Once you have identified the words you intend to teach, you can begin your lesson by giving students a Vocabulary Knowledge Rating Sheet (see sample below). Ask them to assess their level of familiarity with the words you plan to teach that day. Add a few words to the list each day. Put the words on the board and have students copy them. Ask them to assess themselves after instruction as well.

Using new vocabulary in structured classroom discussions

One thing I don't see happening in classrooms is daily accountability for students to use the new vocabulary they have acquired. Our classrooms are typically the only context students have to utilize a more formal and academic variety of English. English Language Learners especially need us to provide daily

structured and accountable activities that guide their hearing, speaking, reading, and writing of academic English. Simply encouraging students to use new vocabulary does not go far with most learners.

Before students actually start using a word, it's important that they understand its syntax. If there is a class discussion with student-generated examples, the teacher should be clear which examples are accurate so students don't learn inappropriate word usage. Many long-term English Language Learners and recent immigrants have been chronically exposed to inaccurate English or the misuse of words without correction. These errors become fossilized and are difficult to unlearn. It takes a really conscious process to replace inaccurate syntax that has been previously reinforced. It helps if students are exposed to word families. Teaching the words "require" and "requirement" together will help students understand correct word usage.

Over the course of a unit, teachers should determine when and how they will engage students in speaking and writing academic words. Before asking students to participate in a whole-class discussion, I recommend factoring in weekly opportunities for them to write responses to carefully constructed questions.

Students are not likely to generate accurate academic responses using sophisticated syntax and vocabulary without some coaching. We can scaffold this process by providing two or three sentence-starters to frame their response in academic

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* The Aiming High publication distributed in October included an overview of teacher preparation for vocabulary instruction and information about how to select the words to teach.

Vocabulary Knowledge Rating Sheet

High Knowledge

4 = I could easily teach it to the group.

3 = I think I know what it means.

Low Knowledge

2 = I have seen it or heard it before.

1 = I have no idea what it means.

Word	What I think it means before instruction	My rating before instruction	My rating after instruction
factory, n.			
poverty, n.			
wage, n.			
to inform, v.			
information, n.			

discourse. For example, if students are exploring the effects of a fast-food diet on adolescent development, the teacher could introduce relevant academic terms—*impāct*, *health hazard*, *consume*—and offer these two sentence-starters to elicit thoughtful and complete statements:

One serious impact of a regular fast-food diet on adolescent health is ...

Consuming fast food regularly has numerous health hazards, including ...

Students should also be taught communicative strategies to engage in academic discussions in the classroom. Academic discussions require a more formal style of language than students are accustomed to, so certain language functions must be explicitly taught. For example, if students are reporting what a classmate told them during a small group exercise, ask them to use a verb other than “said.” They can say, “My partner shared with me” or “So-and-so pointed out to me.” These are verbs they’ll need when they report on someone’s ideas in academic writing or in the workplace.

Even if students *are* using academic language in class discussions, teachers need to create a context for them to *listen* to each other. This is also part of their accountability for learning. Two techniques that can help with this are described below.

- Have the students write down an answer first, then give them a sentence-starter. If they get the sentence-starter first, they’ll be preoccupied with writing one perfect sentence rather than brainstorming and getting their thoughts down.
- If you give the sentence-starter and go around the room to have students share examples, by the time you come to the sixth person, his or her example may already have been mentioned. That student shouldn’t get off the hook just by saying, “Everyone took my ideas.” The student can explain how his/her idea is similar or related to what another student has reported by saying, “My idea is similar to Ramon’s. I also think that ...”

Language Strategies for Active Classroom Participation	
<p>Expressing an opinion I think/believe that... It seems to me that... In my opinion...</p>	<p>Paraphrasing So you are saying that... In other words, you think... What I hear you saying is...</p>
<p>Asking for clarification What do you mean? Will you explain that again? I have a question about that.</p>	<p>Offering a suggestion Maybe we could... What if we... Here’s something to try.</p>
<p>Individual reporting ___ shared with me that... ___ pointed out to me that... ___ indicated that...</p>	<p>Disagreeing I don’t agree with you because... I got a different answer than you. I see it another way.</p>

The value of generative assessments

Another way to get students to learn and interact with academic words is to create more generative assessments. Unlike short-answer or multiple-choice assessments, generative assessments require profound understanding of the word and its creative application.

For example, if you teach the words “perspective” and “priority” one day and the words “comparison” and “impact” a few days later, you can ask students to take out their notebooks at the beginning of class and do two things: 1) complete the template sentences on the board using the appropriate word, and 2) discuss their sentences with a partner to see if their use of the words makes sense.

I don’t tell my students to put the words in an original sentence because I know they learn best from templates. They are not memorizing my sentences. They are using critical thinking to work with the templates. It’s an opportunity for them to review, rehearse, and think about the words.

If you’ve just taught seven words, have a couple of them on the board the next day in incomplete sentences. After students complete the sentences and explain them to their partners, go around the room or call on individuals to share.

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The strategies outlined here are geared to maximize English Language Learners' exposure to and mastery of the academic vocabulary they'll need to be successful at the high school and college levels. Providing the necessary academic language foundation for under-

Students do not acquire academic language simply by listening to literate presentations by teachers.

prepared students is the work of *all* teachers—at all grade levels and in all subjects. It is a shared responsibility that, when worked at consistently and collaboratively, is certain to help narrow the language divide among our students. ♦

▼ Our next *Aiming High Resource* will highlight a focused approach to *English Language Development*, based on a presentation by *Susana Dutro*.

This publication was developed by the Sonoma County Office of Education in support of Aiming High, a county-wide initiative supported by 28 local districts and the Sonoma County Association of School Administrators (SCASA). For information, contact Jane Escobedo, (707) 522-3305.



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EL assistant Glorianne Naughton works with a student at John Reed School.

Para-educators and academic vocabulary instruction

Recognizing the important role para-educators play in schools with second language learners, SCOE hosts an annual professional development institute for K-12 para-educators who work with English Learners. This year's **Para-Educator Institute** will provide four full days of training—December 5-6, 2005 and February 7-8, 2006—and highlight practical information about what works in the classroom, focusing in particular on vocabulary and math.

One featured presenter at the December meetings is herself a local para-educator. Glorianne Naughton is an EL assistant at John Reed School in Rohnert Park. She will discuss strategies for a vocabulary lesson from the para-professional's perspective, using a literature selection from Houghton Mifflin Reading called *A Famous Bus Ride*. She'll guide participants through a process for developing learning activities that engage students in thinking about new words by using their own life experiences.

The strategies highlighted by Naughton will include: talking about words, explaining words in a student-friendly manner, helping students get meaning from text, making word associations, and completing ideas.

This vocabulary-focused presentation is just one part of the four-day institute, which has been offered in Sonoma County for 15 years now. It's not too late for the para-professionals at your school to enroll in the training and broaden their ability to support effective academic vocabulary instruction. Registration is available online at www.scoe.org/training or by calling SCOE's ELL Services department at (707) 522-3151. ♦

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Preparing for Effective Vocabulary Instruction

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Many students who are not succeeding in upper elementary, middle, and high school are young people who have had most or all of their formal schooling in this country and did not have the opportunity to develop literacy in their primary language. While these students may be able to converse comfortably about everyday topics in their home language, they do not have the linguistic resources to accomplish complex academic tasks in the language they speak at home. At the same time, they are hindered by impoverished academic language foundations in English.

These students are referred to in the literature as **protracted English Language Learners**. Despite uninterrupted years of schooling in the United States, they have salient gaps in English vocabulary, syntax, and grammar. They are challenged throughout the school day by the academic discourse demands of textbooks and literature, essay assignments, lectures, and formal class discussions. Moreover, they lack the academic language competence they need to move on to a community college or university and successfully navigate the post-secondary curriculum in reading and writing.

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This is Part 1 of a two-part brief based on a presentation about how to effectively select and teach academic vocabulary to protracted English Language Learners. It is based on a presentation that Dr. Kinsella made at the ELL Administrator Conference hosted by the Sonoma County Office of Education in April 2005. As part of its Aiming High initiative, SCOE is providing this resource to teachers throughout Sonoma County with a goal of helping them close the achievement gap for English Learners.

Research on second language learners illustrates that vocabulary knowledge is the single best predictor of academic achievement across subject matter domains. Because of the pivotal role academic vocabulary knowledge plays in overall school success and mobility, elementary and secondary teachers alike must devote more time and attention to selecting and explicitly teaching words that will enable English Language Learners to meet the demands of today's standards-based curricula.

I've taught academic literacy classes for protracted English Language Learners at several Bay Area high schools through San Francisco State University's Step to College Program. One particularly memorable student, Consuelo, came to the U.S. in the early elementary grades with interrupted literacy foundations in Spanish. She attended my class during eleventh- and twelfth-grade and is now a community college student with a goal of pursuing a nursing degree. What does Consuelo need to achieve her dream and how can we, as committed educators, help her do it?

Looking at Consuelo's writing will tell us a lot about what she needs to be successful in the post-secondary learning environment. A student's formal writing in response to a nonfiction reading is a key predictor of how protracted English Language Learners will navigate the complex literacy demands of college. Quite often, their writing looks like written-down spoken English. They may reflect thoughtfully on the curricula, but do not express their ideas using the academic discourse that's necessary for higher education coursework.

This is what Consuelo wrote in response to a journal entry prompt asking students to analyze the kinds of environments that make them feel active or passive in the classroom:

The class where I think I'm a passive person is my English class because in English I can't express what I want. I can't say as many things as I want to say. Yes, I do say a little, but not how I would like to. I don't feel like participate because I am afraid to say something wrong or pronounce a word badly. I don't like to be wrong and I think is better to be quiet than to be wrong. That's why I think I am a passive learner in English class, because I don't want to be shamed.

Consuelo has poignantly communicated one of the strongest perspectives I have collected from English Language Learners in the course of my career. She is painfully aware of her shortcomings in English. It's evident she needs routine opportunities not just to talk, but to engage in highly structured and well-supported academic discourse.

Consuelo needs thoughtful, intentional academic language development every hour of the day in every class. Bolstering her academic language will take a dedicated and coordinated effort, but it can be done if her teachers work from a thoughtful instructional framework and there is a schoolwide effort. Every teacher in every classroom needs to address her English language

development needs. This commitment to vocabulary instruction is pivotal to a schoolwide effort confronting the achievement gap in language and literacy.

- ▼ *This publication focuses on the importance of teacher preparation for vocabulary instruction, including how to select the words to teach and some strategies for academic language instruction. The second publication in this series, also based on Dr. Kinsella's presentation, will address the specifics of vocabulary instruction and assessment of student learning.*

Preparation is one of the major differences between offering vocabulary *activities* to students and delivering vocabulary *instruction* to them.

Teacher preparation vs. "on the fly" instruction

Effective vocabulary instruction requires careful planning. Preparation is one of the major differences between offering vocabulary *activities* to students and delivering vocabulary *instruction* to them. Many teachers ask students to acquire critical word meanings through independent dictionary work or by completing skill sheets and crossword puzzles—activities that have

Consuelo needs explanations from dictionaries and from us – explanations and examples that use language she understands.

limited instructional value and require little preparation.

Quite often teachers will come to the classroom having done no advance preparation and engage in what I call “on the fly” teaching of vocabulary. They read a passage, come to a word students

don’t know, and improvise a definition or ask students to define the word. Relying on students is, at best, an inefficient way to teach a new word. You can teach the word first and call on them for an example, but don’t call on them to try to teach it.

Sometimes, teachers will tell students to look for context clues to determine what a word means. This may work if students are reading fourth-grade level

engineered material that’s structured to include synonyms and examples. With more authentic and demanding text, there are rarely sufficient clues for students to successfully grasp the word’s meaning. Even when the passage does provide partial clues, most students lack the analytical skills necessary to exploit the context without confirming the word’s meaning in a dictionary.

Teachers often tell students to look up words in a dictionary. I’m a fan of dictionaries, but all dictionaries are not the same. For example, if Consuelo’s science teacher tells her to “categorize” some objects and she looks up “categorize” in a standard dictionary it will tell her “to arrange in categories, to classify.”

However, if she looks up “categorize” in *Longman Advanced American Dictionary*, it will say “to put people or things into groups according to what type, level, etc. they are; to say what group they are in.” This is not a definition, but rather an explanation accompanied by an example. Consuelo needs explanations from dictionaries and from us—explanations and examples that use language she understands.

Six components of successful vocabulary instruction

What is it that students need but do not get with impromptu or “on the fly” instruction? What is it that teachers need to include in their class preparation?

1. **An advanced organizer.** An advanced organizer gives students a sense of what’s coming and what’s important for them to retain. The teacher is letting them know that he or she is going to teach some important vocabulary. “There are six words I’ve underlined in red chalk on the board. These are words I plan to teach right now. Please get out your notebook, open it to the vocabulary section, and get ready to jot down some of this information.”
2. **A consistent instructional process.** Some teachers use a different strategy for each vocabulary word. The students don’t know if the teacher is going to give an example, a list of synonyms, or ask them for a definition. This chameleon pedagogy makes it difficult for students to know what’s going on and to take notes for study and review.

For further study

For teachers interested in additional reading on the topic of vocabulary development, SCOE recommends the book, *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction* (2002, Guilford Press). “This is an excellent resource for vocabulary development in grades K-12,” says Jane Escobedo, director of ELL Services at SCOE. Authors Isabel Beck, Margaret McKeown, and Linda Kucan suggest strategies for selecting words for instruction, developing student-friendly explanations of new words, and creating learning activities. Concrete examples and sample classroom dialogues are included. ■

3. **A well-organized presentation.** The most important thing English Language Learners need is clear, intentional, and recognizable language instruction. If the teacher is extemporaneously moving around and using random strategies, students get the impression that the teacher isn't prepared and that the lesson really isn't important.
4. **More time dedicated to important academic words.** High-use academic words should be given the same level of attention as words that are simply eye-catching or unusual. Teachers who embark upon a lesson without preparing for vocabulary instruction tend to devote as much or more time to unusual, low-frequency "stumblers" as they do to critical words that drive reading comprehension or to high-utility academic words that students will encounter in many academic contexts.
5. **Visual representations of the words being taught.** If critical information about a word is entrusted primarily to auditory processing, it often results in linguistic approximations. The teacher may be saying "precise" as a synonym for "accurate," but if Consuelo hasn't seen the word, she may be hearing "rice."
6. **Their own written record.** If students have to expend all their intellectual capital just to keep up with a teacher who is teaching on the fly, they will not be able to take the notes they need for review and mastery. For almost every student, academic English is a second language and they must have some sort of written record to learn this challenging material.

Vocabulary Teaching Priorities

- Big idea words that relate to lesson concepts
- High-use and high-frequency academic toolkit words
- High-use disciplinary toolkit words
- Words to engage in literate discourse about topic

Of course, teachers need to launch the big concepts for the lesson. These big idea words are usually called out in bold face at the beginning of the chapter. However, publishers rarely highlight what I would call high-use and high-frequency academic toolkit words that are not lesson-specific. These are words like "consequence," "issue," and "analyze." Being able to use these academic toolkit words will help Consuelo achieve her dream of becoming an R.N.

Each discipline has its own particular toolkit words. A literature-driven language arts curriculum is the hardest for teaching vocabulary because the most important words to be taught are not in the story. These are words like "metaphor" that Consuelo must use in order to engage in literate discourse about the topic or the story. They are the words she needs to discuss the issues, themes, and consequences.

Chapters on the American Revolution in history books all pull out similar lesson-related words to teach: colony, colonist, patriot, loyalist, neutralist, Stamp Act, and traitor. These are the words Consuelo will be explicitly taught and assessed on during the unit. But what about words like independence, perspective, or protest? These are high-use words that she will see again and again in subsequent chapters, but they are not taught.

Teachers have to do more than call out the words that are directly related to the standards at the expense of important high-use academic words. In the high school academic literacy class I teach, I put most of my instructional emphasis on toolkit words and infuse some lesson terms. My litmus test for picking the right vocabulary to teach is to look at the words that would be needed to write a synopsis of the reading for a literate peer.

Choosing vocabulary words and planning to teach them

■ Which words to teach?

Teaching a word well takes planning and it takes time. All words won't merit that level of rigor. How can teachers determine which words should be taught? This is actually the hardest part of vocabulary instruction—being able to analyze the lesson and pull out the words to teach. Almost all teachers need some help with this task.

If you're teaching an important word, it's critical to really teach it and this means teaching word families. If you teach "accurate," teach "accuracy" as well. If you teach "signify," which is an important academic word,

High-use academic words should be given the same level of attention as words that are simply eye-catching or unusual.

be sure to teach "significant" and "significance" as well—both of which are high-frequency words. Averil Coxhead has compiled *The Academic Word List*, which consists of 570 word families that appear frequently in academic

materials in secondary schools and higher education (see <http://language.massey.ac.nz/staff/awl>). These are not specialized discipline terms, but rather generic academic words like "issue," "quality," and "factor."

They are the kinds of words not present in Consuelo's writing, but ones she needs to acquire so she can pass the writing proficiency exam and comprehend readings and lectures across the disciplines.

When I look at writing samples of freshmen entering San Francisco State University who are protracted English Language Learners or recent immigrants, it is immediately obvious when they don't know word families. In response to a reading on discrimination, one student writes:

I am absolutely oppose. My boss discriminations me all the time at Macy's. She salaries me lower than other people and prejudices at me sometimes.

The student understands the words semantically, but not syntactically.

In working with under-prepared students, teachers have to be able to justify how they select the words to teach. An important part of teaching vocabulary is being able to look at a reading and know which words students need to understand because they drive comprehension of

the content and which words they need to have in their academic toolkit.

■ **Creating teacher notes and a note-taking scaffold**

Once you've selected the words to be taught, the next step is to prepare notes for teaching the word. As we'll see later, these notes can also be the basis for creating a note-taking scaffold for students.

In order to teach a word, the teacher has to know how to pronounce it, how to divide it into syllables, and what part of speech it is. It's also a good idea to have some easily understood synonyms for the word and some relevant examples. The box below shows how I would organize my notes for teaching the word "lexicon."

No matter how clear, consistent, and coherent your instruction is, English Language Learners like Consuelo will need some sort of note-taking scaffold in order to be able to follow along. The vocabulary note-taking scaffold I use is similar to my own notes, but with blanks that students can fill in as I present the lesson. For example, the explanation for lexicon in the note-taking scaffold

Sample Teacher Preparation Notes		
Term	Synonym/Explanation	Example/Image
lexicon, n. lex'i con	SYN: a dictionary DEF: all the words in a particular language; the special vocabulary of a profession, hobby	Medical lexicon Navajo lexicon Skater lexicon

might read "the special _____ of a profession or hobby." Students would be responsible for filling in the blanks as I teach the word.

This is a scaffold in every sense of the word—it's a tempering mechanism you put into place for students to complete a challenging task they would not otherwise be able to complete. It's not intended to be a permanent crutch; it's meant to be a gradual release model. It also shows how I consistently teach vocabulary: I pronounce

If you're teaching an important word, it's critical to really teach it and this means teaching word families.

the word, I give the part of speech, a synonym, and an example.

■ Planning backwards

I've found that one of the most helpful things in developing a unit is to ask myself, "What

do I want them to eventually produce? What are the writing tasks I want to engage students in?" Then, I backtrack and see how I can engineer the structured, focused opportunities for them to use the academic vocabulary in the unit I'm teaching. If they'll be getting a writing assignment to summarize information or to take a position on an issue, I find ways to have

a class discussion where they use the academic syntax, including the target words. I find ways to weave in opportunities for students to create and use the kinds of sentences they'll need for the writing assignment.

The hardest part of vocabulary instruction is not learning the process for teaching a new word; it is learning how to analyze the lesson and pull out the words that need to be taught. Planning the instruction, including the preparation of a note-taking scaffold for students, is time-consuming but necessary. Teachers may need coaching in these tasks, but they are easily learned and, once implemented, will yield tremendous long-term benefits for English Language Learners. ■

Teacher Activity: Lesson Planning Practice

1. Read the assigned selection for your lesson and underline any words you anticipate will be either relatively or totally unfamiliar to many of your students.
2. **High-Priority Lesson Terms:** Identify 4-6 of these unfamiliar words that are central lesson terms— words that are related to the focal lesson concepts and main ideas.
3. **High-Utility Academic Toolkit Words:** Identify 4-6 of the unfamiliar words that you consider to be high-utility academic words that students will encounter across subject areas and grade levels.
4. Identify 2-4 of the unfamiliar words that are neither central to comprehension of the main ideas nor highly useful words for general academic purposes. These words should not be pre-taught; they should be dealt with quickly while working on a text by providing a brief simple synonym or explanation and possibly an example.
5. Prepare to teach two words that you have determined to be instructional priorities: one "lesson term" and one "academic toolkit" word. Prepare to teach these two words using the note-taking chart illustrated on page 5.

Vocabulary Instruction Checklist

Teachers should plan to:

- Explicitly teach 5-7 instructionally important words per lesson
- Provide examples of the target words in curriculum-focused contexts
- Teach the "word relationships" of the target words—cognates, synonyms, antonyms, multiple meanings, roots, affixes, etc.
- Expose students to target words multiple times

Students should be engaged in:

- Expressing definitions in their own words
- Recording the words, their definitions, and visual representations
- Learning to use the words by talking, comparing, analyzing, and writing
- Reviewing and practicing the words through learning activities that require discourse

Checklist developed by SCOE

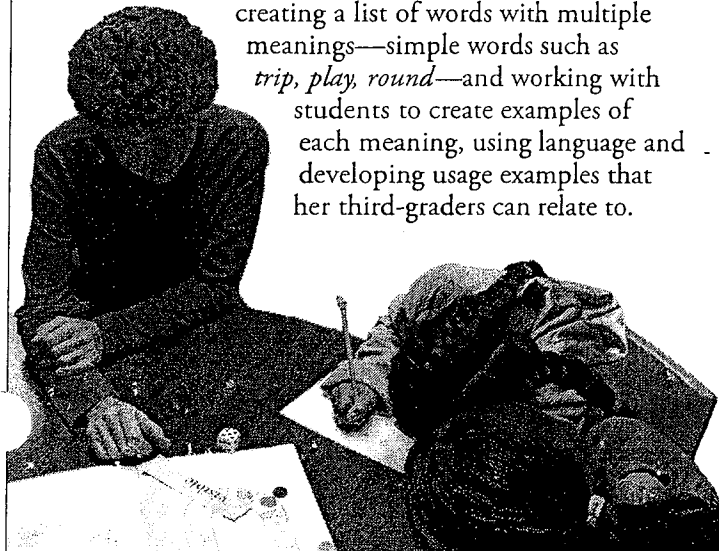
Local example: Brook Hill School

Third-grade teacher brings research-based strategies to life

Bonnie Raines, a third-grade teacher at Brook Hill School in the Santa Rosa City School District, attended the California Vocabulary Forum in Southern California last January, where she had the opportunity to hear cutting-edge researchers present their ideas about vocabulary development. Although she had already been concentrating on vocabulary with her students—three-quarters of whom are second language learners—Raines broadened her perspective at this statewide conference, picked up some new ideas, and is now in the process of applying those ideas in her daily work with students.

Recognizing that she needs to be strategic about the words she chooses to teach, Raines uses researcher Isabel Beck's framework of Tier 1, 2, and 3 words to make her decisions. (Tier 1 words are the most basic and rarely require instruction—*clock, baby, happy*; Tier 2 includes high-frequency words for mature language users—*coincidence, industrious, impact*; less frequently used Tier 3 words are generally limited to specific domains and can be learned as needed in a content area—*isotope, lathe, peninsula*.) Raines tries to select words that students can apply across the curriculum—they provide the biggest bang for the buck—and she provides opportunities for students to use the words in different contexts.

She and other teachers at Brook Hill are also concentrating on teaching words that have multiple meanings, a strategy that helps students build a deeper understanding of words. She's creating a list of words with multiple meanings—simple words such as *trip, play, round*—and working with students to create examples of each meaning, using language and developing usage examples that her third-graders can relate to.



Another vocabulary-building activity centers on a photographic “states of mind book” that Raines developed to help students expand their repertoire of words used to convey emotions and feelings. The book provides simple definitions and includes photos of students acting out vocabulary sentences that demonstrate feelings or stances that frequently appear in literature. Students bring the words to life through play-acting, then use the words they're learning by applying them to different settings. For example, they might debate what kind of incidents would make someone suspicious, annoyed, astonished, or dismayed. There are plans to turn this photo-vocabulary concept into a schoolwide effort with photos and the words they represent posted in the school's multi-purpose room.

Students in Bonnie Raines' class have also started keeping vocabulary notebooks this year. Her hope is that by devoting a notebook specifically to vocabulary, it will convey the importance of this learning to students and heighten their awareness of and excitement about words.

Staff at Brook Hill are currently working to make students aware of cognates that allow Spanish-speaking students to more easily access academic English. The Spanish “frio” is a cognate of the English word “frigid,” which can lead students to the knowledge that frigid means cold. “Many students don't recognize the connection between cognates naturally,” says Raines. “They need to have them pointed out.” Once they see the connection, they can infer word meaning and learn the English word with greater ease. It's a powerful strategy, which teachers intend to teach in every grade, with schoolwide articulation of grade-level lists.

As with all vocabulary instruction, repetition is important in Raines' class. She's always looking for ways that students can use the words she's teaching in different contexts and content areas. Although it's too early in the school year to say how the class as a whole is responding to her most recent instructional strategies, Raines does notice former students using vocabulary spontaneously in everyday situations, thus showing deeper understanding of the words she explicitly taught. ■

Vocabulary instruction should be part of your intervention toolkit

Local Resource: Framework for Intervention

As Kate Kinsella remarked in her presentation, “The commitment to vocabulary instruction is pivotal to a schoolwide effort confronting the achievement gap in language and literacy.” She urged educators *in every classroom* to address the language development needs of second language learners. But what should schools do to help students who have fallen far behind in their learning, students who need more than good in-class vocabulary instruction to reach proficiency?

Educators committed to closing the achievement gap are wrestling with this issue, says Don Russell, SCOE’s assistant superintendent for instruction. “Local schools generally have some sort of intervention program in place, but what we’re all realizing is that one intervention strategy does not fit the needs of all students. We need to be more strategic—and more effective—in using intervention if we are serious about closing the persistent learning gap we’re seeing across the county.”

Russell is heading a SCOE team of curriculum specialists who are designing a *Framework for Intervention* and pulling together resources to help local educators provide strategic, targeted intervention to struggling students. Their cyclical framework is organized around five essential intervention components. For each component, SCOE is gathering the latest research,

information about effective models, and real-life examples showing how those models are being implemented. These resources are being compiled electronically, so instructional leaders will have point-and-click access to the areas that are most relevant to their school. The hope is that this comprehensive tool will give schools the information they need to significantly strengthen their intervention efforts.

How does vocabulary development fit into this mix? According to Jane Escobedo, director of ELL Services at SCOE, English Learners who are below grade level and identified for intervention *always* benefit from explicit vocabulary instruction. “Whenever interventions are provided to second language learners, the components of effective vocabulary instruction—like those outlined by Kate Kinsella—should be incorporated into the program. Lessons should include explicit vocabulary instruction and lots of opportunities for students to use the vocabulary through speaking, reading, and writing activities.”

For her part of the Framework for Intervention project, Escobedo is assembling a variety of resources to help schools determine when students need additional support to develop and expand their vocabulary. Also included will be outlines of strategies for delivering vocabulary-focused interventions, tools for monitoring student progress, and ideas for adjusting instruction based on student performance.

▼ *SCOE plans to have the Framework for Intervention resource available to schools this spring.*



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