

Vocabulary, Comprehension, and the Talkative Classroom

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Old News

Relationship of vocabulary and comprehension is well- known:

Vocabulary knowledge is a powerful predictor of reading comprehension.



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How was that interpreted?

The message seemed straightforward:

—teach the meanings of words

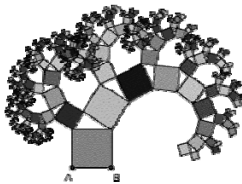
But that didn't work

—because that's not what learners need

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You can't build good vocabulary knowledge from a dictionary alone

Vocabulary knowledge is a network of connected concepts .



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**Where does vocabulary knowledge
come from?**

**Exposure: number of words children
heard at home (Hart & Risley)**

- **Dramatic differences by age 3**
- **Related to literacy in school at age 9**

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Beyond Exposure

**Children whose language developed
most productively took part in
conversational interaction--listening
and responding.**



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What should instruction do?

**Instruction needs to go beyond
getting students to associate words
with their definitions.**

**The complexity of the comprehension
process requires rapid and rich
access to word meanings.**

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How do you get “rapid and rich access”?

Provide learners:

- active engagement with word meanings
- connections between new words and what they already know
- frequent exposures in different contexts

Stahl & Fairbanks (1986); Mezynski (1983)
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What’s the implication? The Talkative Classroom

- Talk to kids.
- Give them lots of language to think and play with!
- Inside and outside of vocabulary class.



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Within all that Talk Kids Need to Learn:

Not words – how to use them

Not definitions – But connections

We need to learn how to fit words into contexts so we can make sense of contexts: context integration

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Research Confirms

Decades of research on vocabulary learning – classroom and laboratory studies confirm what matters

- Exposure – lots of language
- Interaction – give and take around language
- Connections – where words fit with other words, experiences

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In Fact . . .

How fast we read any word is greatly influenced by the quality and quantity of semantic knowledge we have about it.

(Wolf; consistent with Perfetti's Lexical Quality Hypothesis)

Having a richly connected, established vocabulary (semantic network) is physically reflected in the brain.

(Maryann Wolf, *Proust and the Squid*, 2007, 153-154)

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Direct Evidence for Effective Features

Instruction	Encounters	Word Knowledge	Compr
Traditional	4	+	-
Traditional	12	+	-
Rich/Robust	4	+	-
Rich/Robust	12	+	+

McKeown, Beck, Omanson & Pople (1985)

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Effective for All Learners?

English Language Learners:

- Carlo, M.S., August, D., McLaughlin, B., Snow, C.E., Dressler, C., Lippman, D.N., Lively, T.J., & White, C.E. (2004). Closing the gap: Addressing the vocabulary needs of English language learners in bilingual and mainstream classrooms. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 39, 188–215.

Students with Learning Disabilities:

- Oral mode
- Frequency and intensity
- Engagement

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What about Younger Learners?

Study of instruction to increase kindergarteners' and first-graders' knowledge of the meanings of sophisticated words.

Why sophisticated words?

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Reminder: Sophisticated words - aka

Tier Two:

- high-utility words for mature language users
- refined labels for concepts children know
- *dignified, appetite, supportive*
- characterize written text

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Sophisticated words in kindergarten?

**“From that day on, Jessica and her rescuer were inseparable friends.”
(*An Extraordinary Egg*, Leo Lionni)**

**“Lisa was reluctant to leave without Corduroy, but her mother insisted.”
(*A Pocket for Corduroy*, Don Freeman)**

**“His fingers were so delicate, . . . they could hardly feel any pain.”
(*Dr. De Soto*, William Steig)**

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Benefits of sophisticated words for young students

- Provides opportunity to meet or master such words
- Earlier-acquired word meanings are more readily accessed in later life
- Provides a “down payment” on the language children will meet in books

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Method

- Words taught in the context of read-alouds
- All instruction oral
- Rich, interactive activities
- Learning assessed with:
 - ◆ picture task
 - ◆ verbal task

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Results

- In comparison to control children, K & 1st grade children learned a significant number of taught words.
- Words that were given more instruction showed more than twice the gains.

Beck, & McKeown, (2007).

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More Research on Vocabulary with Young Children

Collins (2010). ELL Preschoolers' English Vocabulary Acquisition. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*.

Coyne, McCoach, & Kapp, (2007). Vocabulary intervention for kindergarten students. *Learning Disabilities Quarterly*.

Silverman (2007). A Comparison of 3 Methods of Vocabulary Instruction in Kindergarten. *Elementary School Journal*.

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Comment: Findings

Studies of young children

- learning sophisticated vocabulary words
- based on instruction that engages processing

--> large effect sizes for gains in word knowledge (Coyne et al; Collins; Beck & McKeown; Silverman).

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What about Comprehension?

But what about comprehension for younger learners?

Based on its track record with older students, we might expect instruction that features active processing to impact younger students' comprehension as well.

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Breaking News

Now we have some evidence it does!

Coyne, McCoach, Loftus, Zipoli, Ruby, Crevecoeur, & Kapp & Kapp, (in press). *Direct Vocabulary Instruction in Kindergarten: Investigating Transfer Effects.*

McKeown & Beck (on my computer). *Comparing the Effect of Two Types of Vocabulary Instruction on Kindergartners' Comprehension.*

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Coyne et al Study

- Direct, extended instruction (“interactive, robust, and varied”) compared to no treatment control
- Comprehension measured by recall of a narrative containing instructed words
- Listening comprehension effects trended in favor of the treatment group ($p = .11$)

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McKeown & Beck Study

- Repeated readings with word explanations and word practice
- Story reading with Robust Instruction
- Control condition--just story reading

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How Did We Measure Comprehension for Young Learners?

Context Integration - Explain a context that contains a taught word.

Picture Task - Describe a picture that 'suggests' taught words.

Story comprehension - Listen to a story that contains taught words. Recall the story and answer questions.

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Context Integration

Jim had to insist that Freddy go on the Merry-go-round.

—What did Freddy think about the Merry-go-round?

When the other kids started to pet Sam's dog, the dog was affectionate.

—What was the dog doing?

When Trish played the tuba, her teacher knew she was inspired.

—Why did her teacher think that?

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Why Context Integration?

That's what we need to do as we read.

First noted as important to comprehension by Jenkins, Pany, and Schreck (1978) and Kame'enui, Carnine, and Freschi (1982).

Context integration task showed differences for different types of instruction in McKeown et al (1985).

More recent studies by Perfetti and colleagues (2007) show that skilled comprehension is marked by more successful integration of meaning within text.

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Picture Task



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Why Picture Task?

To assess ease of access to taught words.

Would students produce the words in a situation that suggested features of their meanings?

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Why Story Comprehension Task?

Because that's the whole ball of wax!

But maybe it's an over-reach. There is more involved in understanding a full narrative than vocabulary, even if just listening to it.

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What We Found

Word Knowledge	Context	Picture	Story
Robust = Repeated	Robust > Repeated	Robust > Repeated	No difference among conditions
Robust & Repeated > Control	Robust & Repeated > Control	Robust & Repeated > Control	

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Ingredients of Robust Instruction

- A meaningful context
- Word meaning: student friendly explanations
- Multiple contexts
- Students interact with word meaning
- Lots of exposures

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Student-friendly Explanations

What is a friendly explanation?
Explanation of a word's meaning in everyday, connected language.

Which is friendlier?
conspicuous
Easily seen If something is conspicuous you see it right away because it stands out

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Our context: *A Pocket for Corduroy*

Have fun reading the story!

Words to work with

reluctant steep
insisted patient
ponder inspired
distraught eager

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Introductory Format

<p>Story context: Reluctant: In the story, Lisa was reluctant to leave the laundromat without Corduroy. That means Lisa did not want to leave the laundromat because Corduroy was lost.</p>	<p>Friendly definition: When you are reluctant you are worried about doing something and you don't want to do it.</p>
<p>Context: You might be reluctant to taste a new food you never ate before</p>	<p>Interaction: Let's think about being reluctant. I will say some things and if you think you would be reluctant to do it, say "reluctant." If not, say "no!" Holding a tarantula spider Petting a kitten Jumping out of a tall tree</p>

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Instructional Sequence

Day 1: Read story. Introduce words

Day 2: (finish word introductions)
Follow up interactions

Day 3: Follow up interactions

Day 4: Follow up interactions

Day 5: Follow up interactions
review/assessment?

Forever: Words available in classroom

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Follow-up Interactions

- Review with questions
- Contexts & Situations
- Actions with words
- Sentence stems
- Yes/No sentences

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Review with Questions

1. Does reluctant mean you don't want to do something or to be very excited?
2. What would you be reluctant to do: eat something that smelled funny, or eat your favorite cookie?
3. Does ponder mean to whisper, or to wonder about something?
4. When would you ponder, if you were telling someone a word you knew, or if you were trying to figure out a new word?

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Context and Situations

Let's think about the word reluctant:

- Why would you be reluctant to take out the kitchen trash?
- What's something else you'd be reluctant to do?

Think about the word ponder:

- Why would you ponder your next move in checkers?
- What's something else you might ponder?

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Actions with Words

Think about the word reluctant. If I told you that it was time for gym class but you were reluctant to go, what would you look like? Act like you are feeling reluctant to go to gym.

Think about the word ponder. If you were pondering something, what would you look like? Act like you are pondering something.

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Sentence Stems

Write a sentence for the word cozy.

"I am cozy."

So – try sentence stems:

My cat looks so cozy when _____.

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Sentence Stems: *Corduroy*

I was reluctant to look out the window because _____ .

I had to ponder when the teacher asked us about _____ .

The art teacher inspired us to _____ .

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Yes / No Questions

When anyone asks my name, I have to ponder.

After seeing Emma's tower of blocks, Kelly was inspired to build one herself.

Jan was reluctant to go outside when it was stormy.

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Context Integration Examples

Item	Robust responses	Other (typical)
Lucy thought her little brother was charming.		
--What do you think her brother was doing?		

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Examples Of Context Integration Responses

Item	Robust responses	Other (typical)
Abby was full of glee when she saw the car pull into her driveway. --Why did she feel this way?		

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The Whole Picture

Where do we stand?



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The Whole Picture, cont.

Effective instruction affects comprehension.

But - what is it going to take to affect general comprehension growth? to close the gap?

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The Whole Picture, cont.

Just as word learning needs to be embedded in rich instruction – instruction needs to be embedded in broader ongoing language - talk!

Not just the big words!
(inside and outside of vocabulary class)

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The Classroom Conversation

T: Does inspired mean to feel excited about something or to feel angry?

S: To be excited about something.

T: OK, excited—what’s something you’re excited about doing?

S: Cause you scored a goal in soccer.

T: There you go—scored a goal in soccer! And that makes you want to keep doing better. It inspires you to keep up the good job. I think we’re getting inspired here about our vocabulary lesson.

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Extending the Talk

Pass good responses around

“Serena thinks the principal is always patient—what does she mean by that?”

“Mark is eager for a fire drill. What do you think—do you agree? Why?”

“Andre says his little brother made his dog distraught —what do you think he did to him?”



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Extending the Talk, cont.

Provide opportunities for quick-takes

“What animal would you want for a companion?”

“Did you have to fasten anything this morning before you got to school?”

“What’s the most nutritious thing you’ve eaten today?”



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Starting a Talkative Day

Morning message:

•Today is Tuesday. Let’s get inspired!

Question of the day:

Was anyone reluctant getting out of bed this morning?

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Simple Resources for Talkative Classrooms

Post words being learned on classroom doors - Visitors can join the fun!

Word cards:

Before lunch, before dismissal—pick a card and ask for a meaning/sentence/example.

Have magazines available - Ask students to label pictures with vocabulary words.

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Planting and Seeding Ordinary Talk

Noticing things:

- How does the sky look?
- What did you see on your way to school today?
- Was anyone asleep on the bus?
- Today I saw a chipmunk . . .

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Planting and Seeding Ordinary Talk

On the way:

- What are you looking forward to in music today?
- What are you working on in art?
- What will taste best at lunch?

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Planting and Seeding Ordinary Talk

Telling stories:

- Why do you have the name you do?
- What aisle do you like to go down in the grocery store?

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“Clear your desks.”

“What do I mean when I say clear your desks—what does a clear desk look like?”



“What about a clear sky—what’s that look like?”



“Am I making myself clear . . . wait a minute! Is that like a clear desk?”



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More Talk

Model complete sentences with explicit references:

“Please put the marker in the box on the shelf”

vs.

“Put this over there”

Have students engage in talk:

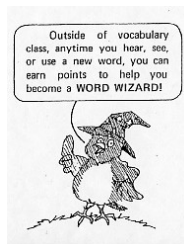
- sharing ideas in a prewriting activity
- teach each other something
- give directions

(Stahl & Nagy, 2006)
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Challenge Students Beyond the Classroom

Word Wizard

- **Points for seeing, hearing, using words outside of school**
- **Points tallied on chart in classroom**



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Homework Challenge - Questions

Give students questions to answer for homework: "Tonight at your home—check and see"

Does anyone insist?

Is there a time you need to be patient?

Do you see anyone on a tv show who seems eager?

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Homework Challenge - Word Cards

Students take word cards to post at home.

The cards remind them to use the words in conversation.

They report on how they used the words.

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The Real, Shameless Reason We Teach Vocabulary to Kindergartners – They're a Riot!



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Thank You



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