EDUC 403 - Individualized Reading Instruction in the Elementary Grades, Winter 2008

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Overview

- Why is vocabulary instruction important?
- What do we know about effective means of vocabulary instruction?
- Selecting and engaging children with Tier II words
Why is vocabulary important?

- Vocabulary knowledge is related to reading comprehension
- When reading comprehension is compromised, it is difficult to learn new concepts and vocabulary from text
- Matthew’s effects lead to gaps between children
Children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds know FAR FEWER words by age 3 than their middle class and wealthy peers and their growth trajectory is slower (Hart & Risley, 1995).
Increases in Vocabulary Gaps

• By first-grade, children from higher-SES groups knew about twice as many words as lower SES children.

• High-knowledge third graders had vocabularies about equal to lowest-performing 12th graders.

• By senior year of high school, students at the top of their class knew about four times as many words as their lower-performing classmates.
Written context lacks the features of oral language that support learning new words and meanings, such as intonation, body language, and shared physical surroundings; it is decontextualized.

When children are initially learning to read, the books often use familiar words and controlled text in order to enable children to become good decoders.
All the available evidence suggests that there is little emphasis on the acquisition of vocabulary in school curricula.

However, we do know that there are ways to effectively improve vocabulary development through instruction.
What have some leaders in the field suggested as instructional techniques?

- **Wide reading**: Struggling readers do not read well enough to learn vocabulary through wide reading.

- **Learning from Context**: Relying on context alone often does not provide enough information to derive word meanings.
Tier 1 words: Not all words need instructional attention. The first tier consists of the most basic words – clock, baby, happy, walk, etc. Most children know these words.

Tier 2 words: Words that comprise the second tier are those that are of high frequency for mature language users. Words in the second tier include coincidence, absurd, industrious, and fortunate.

Tier 3 words: Tier three words are domain specific and low frequency. Examples of tier three words include isotope, lathe, peninsula, and refinery. In general, a rich understanding of these words would not be of high utility for most learners. These words are probably best learned when a specific need arises, such as introducing peninsula during a geography lesson.