

A discussion starter and professional development tool for schools, teachers and leaders.

Bespoke definitions



'Pupils will naturally learn enough new vocabulary through reading and exposure to language.'



While exposure to rich language is important, research has shown that explicit instruction and practice with new words is necessary for pupils to develop a deep understanding of vocabulary. Wide reading should be encouraged and scaffolded, with explicit opportunities to explore, discuss and apply new vocabulary pupils are exposed to when they read.

Purposeful variation



'Some words are too simple or too difficult to vary instruction.'



We might think that simple words don't need to be changed and difficult words can't be varied easily. But we can actually change any type of word on purpose, even if it's hard or a common vocabulary item. For example, we can look at how the word "model" is used in different texts and subjects to understand its different meanings, even though it may seem simple.

Immediate interaction



'Repetition is the only way to reinforce long term retention.'



We may think that repeating words multiple times is the only way to reinforce learning. However, immediate interaction can provide further active, engaging and 'sticky' ways for pupils to reinforce their understanding of vocabulary. Teachers can use immediate interaction by asking pupils to use new words in sentences, or engage in debates and discussions.

Deep processing



'Vocabulary instruction means teaching individual words from my word lists.'



Vocabulary instruction should not be limited to individual words—or lists—but should also involve teaching pupils about the rich relationships between words (such as synonyms, antonyms, word families and connotations) and how these relationships can help deepen their understanding of language. For instance, explaining the nuanced differences between the words 'frugal' and 'cheap' when describing a character.

Active interest



'High-quality explanations are sufficient for bringing vocabulary to life in my classroom.'



Explicit vocabulary instruction is not just about the 'what words teachers explicitly teach'. Independent engagement with vocabulary is critical for promoting deeper learning and retention of new vocabulary e.g. use of discussion, word play, graphic organisers such as a Frayer model.

Repetition, repetition



'Explicit vocabulary teaching focusses solely on memorisation.'



Rote memorising definitions of words through strategies like vocabulary drills and word lists is not enough to develop a rich, deep vocabulary knowledge. Teachers need to help pupils connect new words to prior knowledge, provide examples and non-examples of the words in context, and encourage pupils to use new words in their own speaking and writing. For instance, writing several short sentences with the target word 'fastidious'.

Adapted from Beck, I. L., McKeown, M. G. and Kucan, L. (2013) *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*, New York: Guildford.

Beck, I. et al. (2018) *Deepening knowledge through vocabulary learning*, *Impact Journal: Developing Effective Learners*, (Issue 3, Summer 2018).

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