Vocabulary instruction has been like the weather: Everyone talks about it, but no one is quite sure what to do about it. Over the last decade, however, there have been advances in our knowledge of how classroom instruction can be structured to maximize student learning. This text is therefore written for preservice and inservice teachers of all grade levels and in all content areas who recognize the importance of vocabulary development and want ideas for implementing best practice research in their classrooms. This text is also written for teachers who have a sense of direction but who want some new classroom-tested strategies to renew their curriculum.

Focus of the Text

Research and practice emphasize that attention to learning vocabulary is an important part of all content learning as well as a significant part of any literacy program. The Common Core State Standards (2010) reflect this emphasis by the inclusion of vocabulary across the Reading, Language Arts, and Content Area domains. Therefore, many of the techniques for teaching vocabulary explored in this book have the broader goal of enhancing the acquisition of content knowledge.

Also explored are independent means of learning vocabulary, such as using metacognitive skills and contextual cues. New features of this edition include greater attention to academic vocabulary and to students with special learning needs. Also, Web sites, apps, and other media tools for vocabulary exploration are included for many chapters as well as in the appendixes.

New Additions to This Edition

This fifth edition of Teaching Vocabulary in All Classrooms retains the most popular special features of earlier editions and adds some new enhancements. New features of this edition include ideas for teaching academic vocabulary, for teaching the EL and struggling reader, for new resources such as learner’s dictionaries, and for spelling and morphology instruction for older students. Also, this edition provides expanded treatment of vocabulary ideas designed for teachers working with diverse students in their classrooms, particularly English learners and struggling readers. It also emphasizes Common Core Connections for each chapter.

Special Features

This book has the following special features to help guide the reader:

- **Prepare Yourself**—A knowledge rating activity that introduces the major content issues by asking students to evaluate their own prior knowledge.
- **Strategy Overview Guide**—A guide to the instructional strategies highlighted in each chapter; it can be used as a quick reference tool.
PREFACE

- **Common Core Connection**—A guideline to link chapter content with the Common Core State Standards.
- **Teaching Idea File Cards**—Shorthand references to a number of strategies and resources for easy duplication in a teacher resource file or curriculum resource guide.
- **Classroom Investigation and Book Club Questions**—Ideas for discussion in university classes or for teacher study groups.

If you are a reading and language teacher or a content-area teacher, if you are a kindergarten or a high school teacher, if you are a teacher of gifted or at risk students, this text has ideas for your classroom. If you are a student or a teacher of methods classes in reading and language, in social studies, in science, or in special needs instruction, this book will supplement your other texts by giving you ideas for handling the important vocabulary unique to your classes. We hope you will use the ideas in the text as springboards for experimentation in your own classrooms.

**Acknowledgments**

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We have tried to give credit to our contributors wherever possible but know that ideas get adapted, modified, or changed as they meet individual classroom needs. If you, the readers, have any new adaptations or suggestions that we could credit to you in future editions, we would love to hear from you at cblachowicz@nl.edu and pfisher@nl.edu.

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Camille Blachowicz
Peter Fisher
## Spotlight on Vocabulary: A Theoretical and Practical Perspective

### PREPARE YOURSELF

Prepare yourself by evaluating your own knowledge. Rate your ability to answer some of the key questions for this chapter. Check the boxes that best describe your prereading knowledge.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Concept Questions</th>
<th>Well Informed</th>
<th>Aware</th>
<th>Need Ideas</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What is some of the basic instructional research on vocabulary learning?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. What are some assumptions about vocabulary instruction that flow from the research?</td>
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<td>3. What are four basic components of a research-based vocabulary program?</td>
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<td>4. What guidelines for instruction can be drawn from research?</td>
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This chapter presents background, ideas, and strategies to help you understand the research foundations for vocabulary instruction. In subsequent chapters, this Strategy Overview Guide will describe the instructional strategies introduced in the chapter, their goals, and their connection to the Common Core state standards. In this chapter, we set the stage for the instructional ideas that constitute the main part of this book by introducing you to some of the research that underpins good vocabulary instruction. Because the history of research on vocabulary is so rich and varied, we have organized our discussion around three research questions that are critical to the choices you’ll have to make for your own classroom: What does the research tell us about vocabulary, what does it mean to know a word, and what is effective vocabulary instruction? Each of these questions is introduced, discussed, and used to generate some guidelines for classroom instruction.

What Does the Research Tell Us about Vocabulary?

Kurt Lewin (1951) noted many years ago, “There is nothing as practical as a good theory.” As an intelligent professional, you already have a theory of instruction that you enact every day in the classroom. In this chapter, we spotlight issues and ideas that form the knowledge base for vocabulary instruction. This is an exciting time for teachers and researchers interested in vocabulary. Nationwide reports and initiatives such as the Common Core State Standards (2010), The National Reading Panel Report (2002), and meta-analyses of literacy development from early childhood to adulthood (Mol & Bus, 2011) have all highlighted the need to pay attention to this important topic. In the age of growing diversity of first languages brought to school, this is even more critical. The goal of this section is to help you fine-tune that theory by comparing it to the evidence of research and best practices.

One of the longest, most clearly articulated lines of research in literacy education describes the strong connection between the vocabulary knowledge of readers and their ability to understand what they read (Davis, 1944, 1968; Kameenui & Baumann, 2012). This relationship makes good, intuitive sense not only to a non-educator, who might suggest, “You certainly will understand what you read better if you know the words!” but also to teachers and researchers who observe and study the ways in which complex, unfamiliar, or technical vocabulary makes reading difficult.

Five important ideas organizing some of the relevant research can help inform your theory of instruction. Each of these is backed by research and results in important assumptions that underpin effective instruction:

1. We all have multiple vocabularies.
2. Word learning is incremental: it happens bit by bit.
3. We develop our vocabularies when we are engaged with words.
4. We learn words incidentally from contextual experiences.
5. We learn words intentionally from good instruction.

We All Have Multiple Vocabularies

One issue that contributes to the difficulty of defining vocabulary is the lack of clarity across research as to what is being referenced. In this book, we are narrowing the focus by focusing on meaning vocabulary—not on phonics, decoding, or sight word learning that are important parts of the early foundations of literacy. Even when discussing word parts or spelling, we are zeroing in on these affixes and roots as meaningful units that help the reader understand the concepts being presented.

When we use the term vocabulary, we are referring to words (and phrases) that express something about a concept. Everyone has many types of “vocabularies.” Sometimes we are talking about the words that students use in speech (oral vocabulary) but would not be able to decode in written text (reading vocabulary). Sometimes they can understand a word or phrase they hear (listening vocabulary) but could not use that same word in speech or writing. The chart in Table 1.1 is a handy visual to represent these different types of vocabularies.

Students’ receptive vocabularies are often far advanced of their expressive ones, especially in the early grades. Biemiller & Slonim (2001) propose that students’ receptive vocabularies can be at least two grade levels higher than their expressive vocabularies. So when we read to children, we can use more difficult vocabulary to stretch their receptive abilities. Expressive use of words is more difficult than receptive use. For reading or listening (receptive), students often just need a general idea of a word and can use syntactic and semantic context clues to help them understand; for the same word in speech or writing, more precision is required in both meaning and usage.

In school, we want to develop all four—oral receptive (for listening), oral expressive (for speaking), reading (receptive), and writing (expressive)—vocabularies. So, as teachers, we need to understand that some of our instruction is to build receptive vocabulary, which means students have to recognize the word when it is used in something they are reading or listening to, and sometimes we are teaching for the more difficult ability to use the word correctly in their own speech or writing. The first is usually a prerequisite for the second, which is why the development of oral vocabulary through listening and talk (conversational, problem solving, and presentation) is critical and the use of rich and varied vocabulary in the classroom is essential.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1.1 Receptive/Expressive Classification of Vocabularies</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Speech</strong></td>
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<td>Print</td>
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Because the diversity of oral vocabularies students bring to school is so wide (Hart & Risley, 1995; Graves, 2006), development of oral vocabularies through read-alouds with complex texts is an important component of all elementary curricula. Further, the current multi-state emphasis on the use of texts of increasing complexity (CCSS, 2010) highlights the importance of vocabulary development in all classrooms and subject domains. So our first assumption implies that instruction in the classroom must deal with multiple aspects of students’ vocabularies and engage them in rich and varied language as a necessary part of good instruction.

**We Learn Words Incrementally (Bit by Bit over Time)**

Another assumption that can inform our instruction is that words are usually not learned all at once from one exposure. Researchers agree that word learning is not an all-or-nothing proposition, like a switch that turns a light on or off. A better metaphor is that of a dimmer switch that gradually supplies an increasingly richer supply of light. For example, children learn the word *mommy* or *mama* and begin to apply it to all women, sometimes with humorous results. Ultimately, they narrow its meaning to “my mother” or learn to use it with qualifications for others, such as “Maria’s mama.” This commonly observed process mirrors the research that suggests that learners move from not knowing a word, to being somewhat acquainted with it, to a deeper, richer, more flexible word knowledge that allows them to use new words in many modalities of expression (Graves, 1986; McKeown & Beck, 1989).

Repeated encounters with a word in a variety of rich oral and written contexts provide experiences and clues to the word’s meaning and limitations that build over time, helping to develop and change our mental structures for the word’s meaning (Eller, Pappas, & Brown, 1988; Vosniadou & Ortony, 1983).

**Connecting New to Known.** Meaningful use, review, and practice that calls upon students to use vocabulary in authentic ways are a “must” to develop rich and full word knowledge. So, connecting new words to words that are already known is an important part of vocabulary learning; we build relational sets of words, not an alphabetized dictionary, in our heads.

As learners read or meet words in other meaningful contexts, they begin to build frameworks of relationships that we refer to as “the word’s meaning.” Each time a word is encountered, another bit of information is added to the framework, enlarging or changing it. For example, the student reading the sentence

> I saw two frimps.

may start to build a framework for *frimps* that looks like this:

```
Class = visible objects
frimps can be seen
frimps can be counted (there are two)
```
What Does the Research Tell Us about Vocabulary?

Reading on and seeing the sentence

They looked tasty to me.

adds further information to the reader's framework:

Class = food

frimps can be seen

can be counted (there are two)

look edible

look attractive

Reading further to the sentence

I picked them off the bush, and peeled and ate them. Yummy!

modifies the framework somewhat to include this information:

Class = fruit or vegetable

frimps can be seen

can be counted (there are two)

look edible

look attractive

grow on a bush

have peels

Reading the last sentence

My stomach turned cold; I died.

results in a framework that looks like this:

Class = poisonous fruit

frimps can be seen

can be counted (there are two)

look edible/but are poisonous

look attractive

grow on a bush

have peels

Any reader who already has a knowledge of food, fruits, fruit peels, and poisonous fruit can add frimp to an already existing network of meaning connecting those categories. However, for a student who is not familiar with the anchor concepts of
“food,” “fruit,” “peels,” and “edible or poisonous food,” picking up the information from the context might be more difficult. If frimps are important to the curriculum, a teacher might wish to handle instruction differently based on what the students already know.

Using a more realistic example, imagine a group of fourth-grade students who are familiar with the term crown. Teaching the meaning of the word diadem won’t be too difficult. Students already have the concept of a “crown” and are learning only a new label for a related term. Little, if any, instruction might be needed. Alternatively, an associational, mnemonic, or imaging method might be used, with the teacher encouraging students to create their own relationship for the word by connecting it to the reading selection in some general or personal way, such as with a drawing of one of the characters with clothing labeled.

For the same students, in the same selection, the word nostalgia, however, would probably be harder to teach because it is an abstract concept that might not be too familiar to most nine-year-olds. To teach the word, the teacher would have to help students establish a rich network of related concepts, such as “longing” and “the past.” So it makes sense to look on knowing a word as a continuous process that can be affected by meaningful encounters with words and by instruction aimed at helping learners develop a network of understanding. The instructional situation that the teacher selects will vary depending on both the framework of knowledge the learners already have and the importance of the term to the task at hand, which we will explore in our section on effective teaching.

We Learn When We Are Engaged with Words

All teachers know the motivational value of play. Word play has a foundation of research (Blachowicz & Fisher, 2012) and is an important contributor to the word-rich classroom. The ability to reflect on, manipulate, combine, and recombine the components of words in jokes and riddles is an important part of vocabulary learning and develops metalinguistic reflection on words as objects to be manipulated intelligently and for humor (Nagy & Scott, 2000; Tunmer, Herriman, & Nesdaile, 1988). Phonemic awareness (being able to segment phonemes, such as the am- in ambulance), morphological awareness (of word-part meanings), and syntactic awareness (how a word functions in language) all play important parts in word learning (Carlisle, 1995; Willows & Ryan, 1986). There is also evidence that this type of learning is developmental over the school years (Johnson & Anglin, 1995; Roth, Speece, Cooper, & De la Paz, 1996).

Part of creating a positive environment for word learning involves having activities, games, materials, and other resources that allow students to play with words. Who would not enjoy spending a few minutes each day figuring out a wuzzle (word puzzle)? Word games and puzzles call on students to think flexibly and metacognitively about words. Much of the fun stems from the fact that words can be used in multiple ways with humorous results. Things we enjoy and view as sources of pleasure stay with us throughout our lives.

The motivated learner is also the engaged learner who has a personal sense of self-confidence in participating in learning activities (Au, 1997), participates in a knowledgeable and strategic fashion, and is socially interactive (Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997). This engagement and enjoyment is highly correlated with achievement in all areas of literacy (Campbell, Voelkl, & Donahue, 1997), including vocabulary learning.
In one highly controlled study of vocabulary learning in the middle grades (Beck, Perfetti, & McKeown, 1982), a curious phenomenon surfaced. Out of all the classrooms involved in the research project, students in one classroom learned more incidental vocabulary—words no one was attempting to teach. When trying to locate the source of this learning, the researchers were unable to come up with any instruction or materials that could account for the difference. Then one researcher noted a poster of interesting words in the classroom. When the teacher was asked about it, she noted that it was the “word wall”—a place where students could write new words they encountered in reading, in conversation, on TV, or in their daily experiences. If they could write the word, talk about where they heard or saw it, and use it, they received points in a class contest. Very little expense, instructional time, or effort was involved, but the students became “tuned in” to learning new words in a way that positively affected their learning. They actively watched and listened for new words and shared them with their peers. They were motivated word learners.

Both choice and self-direction are important components of motivation, along with challenge, support, and student awareness of progress (Lesaux, Harris, & Sloan, 2012). With students, especially those learning English as a second language, some degree of choice about word learning is important. Jiminez (1997) found that middle school readers were more motivated and learned more vocabulary when they could have a say in selecting some of the words they were to learn. Using the Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy (Haggard, 1982), a strategy which helps students develop selection and learning strategies, motivated students to say:

“I used to only think about vocabulary in school. The whole world is vocabulary.”

“I hear words everywhere that would be good to use.”

(Ruddell & Shearer, 2002, p. 352)
This self-selection does not “water down” vocabulary learning in the classroom. Fourth-grade students allowed to choose their own study words to learn from a novel unit chose words of greater difficulty than graded word lists would have provided them, and then they learned the words they selected (Fisher, Blachowicz, & Smith, 1991). So our second assumption implies that play, personal interest, and choice are powerful aids to vocabulary learning.

We Learn Words Incidentally from Contextual Experiences

Estimates suggest that school-age students learn an average of 3,000 to 4,000 words per year (Nagy & Herman, 1987; D'Anna, Zechmeister, & Hall, 1991), with some researchers still suggesting that this average varies widely based on the background of home and school experiences (Becker, 1977; White, Graves, & Slater, 1990). “Learning” in most of these studies refers to growth in familiarity of recognition for certain frequent words as measured on wide-scale tests or through research studies such as those carried out for The Living Word Vocabulary (Dale & O’Rourke, 1981).

This rapid and large growth again suggests that a significant amount of vocabulary learning takes place through incidental or environmental learning, including wide reading, discussion, listening, and exposure to media, for example, rather than from direct instruction. Students who know the phrase tight end as a position in football have typically learned that through play and experience, not through books. We learn from interacting with and using words in all sorts of meaningful contexts, and it is important that the classroom supports and builds on this kind of learning.

Anne Cunningham (2005) has done an excellent summary of the research in education and psychology that underpins the aspects of wide reading (such as engagement, repeated exposure to words, etc.) that are beneficial to students. Furthermore, discussion in the classroom (Stahl & Vancil, 1986) and around the dinner table (Snow, 1991) is another correlate of incidental word learning. Classroom talk that includes conversation, talk for problem solving, and talk for presentation all develop different registers and vocabularies for students. Although this type of learning through exposure cannot guarantee the learning of specific vocabulary words, it does develop a wide, flexible, and usable general vocabulary.

Contextual Vocabulary Learning Is Problem Solving. How does contextual learning happen? Earlier we gave you an example of learning with frimps. We know from our own reading experiences and from research (Freebody & Anderson, 1983b) that we can comprehend stories fairly well without knowing every word. Reading materials are redundant; they give us lots of information to help us get the gist of the story without knowing every word. For example, consider the following paragraph with the keyword glunch:

The glunches were walking toward the house. Their antennae bobbed in anger. Each paw held a different weapon: swords, guns, bludgeons, and truncheons.
Several clues tell us that whatever a *glunch* is, more than one are coming toward the house: The word has a standard plural ending (-es), the verb *were* indicates plurality, and the word *their* in the following sentence refers to more than one. *Glunches* are capable of locomotion (walking) and have paws. Because of what we know about *anger* and *weapons* and their use, and from past reading and experience, we can infer that the glunches may be about to attack. Further, our knowledge of stories suggests that if this paragraph occurs in a longer selection, there will be some sort of battle or other resolution of their anger in later paragraphs. We could also read passages prior to this paragraph to try to find out what motivated the glunches to anger.

It’s clear that we could understand quite a bit about this paragraph without knowing the keyword *glunch*. Learners’ knowledge of the syntax, grammar, stories, concepts, and the world in general can help them overcome their lack of word knowledge. This explains why wide reading and a wide range of exposure to both oral and written language are critical factors in incidental word learning. We learn about grammar, syntax, and stories—all information that allows context to help us understand, even when we don’t know every word. For many narratives, prior knowledge and context can help students understand without the need for preteaching of specific vocabulary. There are, of course, limits to the support that rich context and our own prior knowledge can provide. If there are many unknown words, comprehension will be too difficult. In certain situations, the context is not rich enough to support readers without help (Jenkins, Stein, & Wysocki, 1984). For highly technical reading, or reading with many new concepts, building a conceptual base with new terminology may be necessary before adequate understanding can take place. We will elaborate on learning from context in Chapter 2, so let’s move on to other ways vocabularies grow.

**Reading Builds Vocabulary.** As noted in the work of Cunningham (2005) and others, rich exposure to words, such as that provided by wide reading, helps students construct and retain meaningful personal contexts for words (Whittlesea, 1987). For example, the word *wardrobe* in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (Lewis, 2000) becomes meaningful in a way it never could in its dictionary definition or in an isolated sentence. Specific events in the novel help the learner note that a wardrobe is a piece of furniture that can be located in a bedroom, it has a front door, and it is big enough to walk through. Readers who have read that wonderful book have no trouble conceptualizing or remembering the term *wardrobe*. Further, connection of vocabulary words to organizational patterns, as is done with story organizers such as Vocab-o-gram (Blachowicz & Fisher, 2010), results in greater retention of words (Blachowicz & Leipzig, 1989) as well as increased use of vocabulary in writing (Blachowicz, Bates, & Cieply, 2012).

**We Learn Intentionally from Good Instruction.** Some learners come to school knowing fewer school-type words (Becker, 1977) or have limited networks of meaning for the words that are familiar to them (Graves & Slater, 1987). This lack of knowledge makes it harder for these students to make new connections of meaning that support contextual learning. Other learners also lag behind peers
in their ability to use strategies that allow them to gain new word meanings from context (McKeown, 1985). Research suggests that judicious attention to concept development and vocabulary can have a positive effect on the growth of usable vocabulary and can also positively affect comprehension (Lesaux et al., 1982, 2010; Biemiller, 2001; Stahl & Fairbanks, 1986).

The Multiphase Comprehensive Vocabulary Improvement Program (MCVIP) (Baumann, Manyak, Blachowicz et al., 2012) documented the aspects of balanced vocabulary instruction which resulted in gains on standardized and performance-based assessments of vocabulary for upper-elementary students. This model (see Figure 1.1) integrates much of the research presented earlier in laying out the components of a balanced vocabulary program.

The model is also consistent with the research-based assumptions about learning that are shared by educators who focus on instruction. These include understanding that the term vocabulary has more than one meaning, that vocabulary learning requires student engagement, that this learning is incremental and happens over time and multiple encounters, and that it results from both intentional instruction and incidental learning through context in rich language environments.

These understandings suggest that teachers also need to think about vocabulary instruction in more than one way. Both of these first two assumptions suggest that we need a FLOOD of words to surround our students. Not everything needs to be formally taught or assessed, but we need to provide rich language environments in our schools and classrooms—well stocked with books, word games, puzzles, word-focused puzzles and riddle books, references, and electronic tools—and TIME to use these things, to read widely, and to write frequently. There also needs to be at least three levels of talk and writing going on: conversational—where students learn the “rules” of friendly talk and note

![Figure 1.1 Components of a Comprehensive Vocabulary Program](image-url)
writing, problem solving, language they use when working in groups on an academic task—and presentational, when they speak or write to an audience to present their ideas.

Third, it’s clear that good instruction can affect vocabulary learning significantly, and good instruction can be either FAST or FOCUSED. FAST instruction can be all that is needed when a concept is well established and a new word needs to be attached to it. For example, the word diadem is easy to teach since it is another word for a type of crown, a word very familiar to students or, if not, easily taught with a picture.

Other words are more difficult to teach and call for FOCUSED instruction. Democracy is an abstract concept that has many different features, which also may differ slightly from country to country. This is a topic more readily developed within a unit with reading, discussion, and exercises such as feature analyses or definition frames. So our mantra for thinking about one way we plan our vocabulary teaching is, “FLOOD, FAST, and FOCUS” (Blachowicz, Fisher, Ogle, & Watts-Taffe, 2013; Blachowicz, Baumann, Manyak, & Graves, 2013) as we build a repertoire of instructional strategies, which will be reflected in our later chapters.

**What Do Effective Vocabulary Teachers Do?**

Using the research and best-practices base, and with the understanding that all instruction must deal with the variable of what the learners already know and the level of learning that is required, we can move on to the next issue—which do effective vocabulary teachers do? Although we consider these guidelines separately, note at the outset that they are interdependent in the real life of the classroom (see Figure 1.2).

### FIGURE 1.2 Guidelines for Effective Vocabulary Instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effective Vocabulary Instruction</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provides Word-Rich Environment/Word Awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develops Independent Strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develops Language and Word-Learning Behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develops General, Academic, and Domain Vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses Assessment to Match Instruction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Guideline 1: The effective vocabulary teacher structures an engaging, word-rich environment to develop students' word consciousness and to foster incidental word learning.

Word consciousness refers to an awareness and interest in words and their meanings and involves both metacognition about words and motivation for learning (Graves & Watts-Taffe, 2002). There are many ways to foster word consciousness in the classroom. First of all, the classroom needs to be welcoming and equipped with tools for motivating and developing interest in words—books about words in the classroom library, magazines reflecting student interests, word games, puzzles, word charts, computer word games, and access to word sites such as Word of the Day all help surround students with what they need to become enthusiastic word learners. Tools for creative expression, as simple as papers and pens, but also including electronic and artistic media allow students to use words in many expressive ways.

With a well-prepared environment, there needs to be time set aside in the school day to use it! Time for reading and writing is essential as a great number of words students learn each year are encountered in wide reading which has a positive effect on learning (Cunningham, 2005). Good teachers also all know the value of play in learning. Word play—games, riddles, jokes, and puzzles—is not only highly motivating, but it also has a strong research base (Blachowicz & Fisher, 2012):

- Word play is motivating and an important component of the word-rich classroom.
- Word play calls on students to reflect metacognitively on words, word parts, and context.
- Word play requires students to be active learners and capitalizes on possibilities for the social construction of meaning.
- Word play develops domains of word meaning and relatedness as it engages students in practice and rehearsal of words.

In word play, category games, such as Scattergories, are the “play” versions of techniques we discussed earlier for developing semantic relationships. Picture games, such as Pictionary, that use art to display meaning, acting out games, such as Charades, and synonym games, such as Password and Taboo, all emphasize semantic categories and relatedness and provide for practice and rehearsal. In addition to the obvious active learning involved, word play provides a vehicle for use and rehearsal, the creation of a personal record including visualization in graphics and drawing (Pressley & Woloshyn, 1995), and kinesthetic representations in drama (Duffelmeyer, 1980). Discussion, sharing, and use of the words are necessary components of active involvement, as are feedback and scaffolding on the part of the teacher. With struggling readers, use of personal collections and game-like review using Word Wizard or other collection strategies can make a difference with students who do not typically enjoy word play (Fisher, Bates, Gurvitz, & Blachowicz, 2013). These are good examples of why word play develops word learners!

We also believe that teachers must be constantly on the alert to find opportunities for focusing on new and interesting words. Listening to students talk and commenting, “Luscious—that’s a great word, Melissa. Can you tell everyone what it means?” as well as teacher-interjections of their own learning, “I learned the word sidebar during the Watergate hearings. It’s side talk that goes on between lawyers related to the issues they are talking about” and so forth, take little time and provide maximum exposure. We like to think of word vigilance as a term that describes what teachers need to cultivate in order to always stretch and extend their students’ consciousness and learning of wonderful new words. Lastly, teachers need to be committed to a classroom full of conversational, problem solving, and presentational talk, which we will return to a bit later.
Guideline 2: The effective vocabulary teacher develops students’ independent word learning strategies.

Good learners take control of their own learning (Nagy & Scott, 2000). Studies that focus on student self-selection of vocabulary suggest that having students themselves identify words they need to learn results in powerful vocabulary learning. Haggard (1982) interviewed adults and secondary school learners about their memories of learning new words and found that these learners most easily retained words that were usable in their peer groups—popular among peers, occurring frequently in their readings, buzzwords in the media. Her subsequent teaching studies, involving self-selection of words to be learned (1982, 1985), suggested that the control offered by self-selection was an important factor in building a generalized vocabulary. Moreover, for ESL students, some self-selection is critical to getting a true picture of words that confound learning and motivate students to learn (Jiminez, 1997).

In light of the popularity of wide reading approaches and cooperative group models of classroom instruction, Fisher, Blachowicz, and Smith (1991) examined the effects of self-selection in cooperative reading groups on word learning. The fourth-grade groups analyzed in this study were highly successful in learning a majority of the words chosen for study. In a later study with older fifth- and seventh-grade readers (Blachowicz, Fisher, Costa, & Pozzi, 1993), the results were repeated and new information was added. The students’ teachers, who were co-researchers in the study, were interested not only in whether the words were learned, but in whether the students chose challenging words for study. In all groups studied, the students consistently chose words at or above grade level for study. These and other studies indicate that self-selection and self-study processes can be viable choices for some of the word study in the classroom. Collaborative word choice, with the students selecting some words to be learned and the teacher also contributing words for study, may be called for in content-area learning and with difficult new conceptual topics (Beyersdorfer, 1991). The Common Core State Standards (2010) emphasize the importance of teaching students the text structure, frequency, and typographical clues that can help them choose their own words for study. Combined with teacher selection and support, helping students learn to select words for self-study is a powerful tool for independent learning.

Besides knowing which words to choose for study, students have to be able to use the tools they need to gain new word meaning. Research on learning from context emphasizes that it is a major avenue to word learning but points out that it is unreasonable to expect single contextual exposures to new words to do the job (Schatz & Baldwin, 1986). Students need to understand context and how to use it.

Instructional studies (Baumann, Ware, & Edwards, 2007; Buikema & Graves, 1993) suggest that context-use instruction that involves explicit instruction (with good planning, practice, and feedback), scaffolding that leads to more student responsibility, and a metacognitive focus can help students become conscious learners from context. Similarly, instruction focusing on structural analysis or morphology, the learning of word parts, suggests that such instruction can be generative in learning new words when the instructional support emphasizes problem solving.

Students also need supportive instruction to learn how to use the dictionary, an important word-learning tool. Every teacher who has watched a student struggle in looking up a word knows that using a dictionary can be a complex and difficult task. Stories of dictionary use often take on a “kids say the darnedest things” aura: The student whose only meaning of sharp has to do with good looks feels vindicated by finding acute as one meaning for sharp in the dictionary (as in “That sure is acute boy in my class”). Another, noting that erode is defined as “eats out,” produces a sentence, “Since my mom went back to work, my family erodes a lot” (Miller & Gildea, 1987). Aside from (continued)
providing humorous anecdotes for the teacher’s room, dictionaries and dictionary use are coming under closer scrutiny by those involved in instruction. Students need instruction to understand how dictionaries work or how they can most effectively take information from them.

For contextual analysis, morphology instruction, and work with dictionaries, it is wise to remember to work from the known to the unknown. As students engage in learning any one of these processes, they must come to understand the underlying rationale. This is best achieved through exploration of the “how to” with familiar words and phrases and by creating their own dictionaries. Once they have mastered the process with easy words, they can practice with more and more difficult words until the process becomes automatic.

Guideline 3: The effective vocabulary teacher plans instruction that emphasizes the use of rich and varied language and models good word-learning behaviors.

Just as teachers use the phrase “flood of books” to talk about situations in which students have many and varied opportunities to read (Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1988), so “flood of words” is an important concept for general vocabulary development, one we will return to in later chapters. Reading to children has been shown to have an effect not only on their recognition knowledge of new words but also on their ability to use these words in their own retellings (Blachowicz & Obrochta, 2007; Elley, 1988). Wide reading is another hallmark of word learning, with many studies suggesting that word learning occurs normally and incidentally during normal reading (Herman, Anderson, Pearson, & Nagy, 1987). Furthermore, discussion, both in the classroom (Stahl & Vancil, 1986) and around the dinner table (Snow, 1991), is another correlate of incidental word learning. Although this type of learning through exposure cannot guarantee the learning of specific vocabulary words, it does develop a wide, flexible, and usable general vocabulary.

Besides doing the things that result in greater incidental learning, teachers also need to focus intentionally on vocabulary and make word learning a part of every day, not just during those times called “vocabulary instruction.” As with Word Wizard noted earlier, the students become attuned to listening for new and interesting words and need this interest validated in the classroom on a regular basis. Techniques like “word of the day,” “mystery word,” and so forth, are easy, low-maintenance, inexpensive, and time-effective ways of making sure that kids are intentionally exposed to words each day and are motivated to do their own word learning.

One necessary requirement is that teachers are models of word learning. We can probably remember the year we learned lots of new words in school, when we had a teacher who was an avid punster or a crossword puzzle aficionado or was otherwise involved in word play. By being a good model of enthusiastic and pleasurable word learning, teachers can be sure that they and their classrooms are models of best practices.

Along with helping students develop control of their own word learning through self-selection, supported selection, and the use of context, word structure, and reference tools that we noted earlier, the effective vocabulary teacher presents new vocabulary in ways that model good learning. This type of instruction involves developing learners who are active, who personalize their learning, who look for multiple sources of information to build meaning, who can and do engage effectively in conversational, problem solving, and presentational talk, and who are playful with words. For the teacher, this entails giving students lots of experience in active listening, speaking, reading, and writing so that they can develop both receptive and expressive vocabularies that we highlighted earlier.
Good learners are active. As in all learning situations, having the learners actively attempting to construct their own meanings is a hallmark of good instruction. Many comparisons of instructional methodologies suggest that having the learners take an active role in constructing a network of meaning for a word is critical. Learning new words as we have new experiences is one of the most durable and long-lasting ways to develop a rich vocabulary. Words like thread, needle, selvage, pattern, and dart are naturally learned in the context of learning to sew, just as hit, run, base, and fly take on special meanings for the baseball player. This is particularly important with learners whose primary language is not English. They may need the additional contextual help of physical objects and movement to internalize English vocabulary.

Another way for students to become actively involved in discovering meaning is by engaging in pre- and post-reading problem solving and presentational talk that engages them in making predictions about word meaning, locating and evaluating evidence, discussing and supporting or revising their ideas, and presenting their ideas to the group (Blachowicz, Bates, & Cieply, 2012). Along with these comprehensive types of instruction, teachers can extend learning through something as simple as asking questions that require students to evaluate different features of word meaning (Beck & McKeown, 1983). For example, answering and then explaining one’s answer to the question “Would a recluse enjoy parties?” helps students focus on the important features of the word recluse, a person who chooses to be alone rather than with others.

Making word meanings and relationships visible is another way to involve students actively in constructing word meaning. Semantic webs, maps, organizers, or other relational charts, such as the one on cities shown in Figure 1.3 not only graphically display attributes of meanings, but they provide memory organizers for later word use. Many studies have shown the efficacy of putting word meaning into graphic form such as a map or web, semantic feature chart (Johnson, Toms-Bronowski, & Pittelman, 1982), advanced organizer (Herber & Herber, 1993), or vocabulary frame (Blachowicz, Bates, & Cieply, 2012). It is critical to note, however, that mere construction of such maps, without discussion, is not effective (Stahl & Vancil, 1986).

Other approaches that stress actively relating words to one another are clustering strategies that call for students to group words into related sets, brainstorming, grouping and labeling (Marzano & Marzano, 1988), designing concept hierarchies (Wixson, 1986) or constructing definition maps related to concept hierarchies (Bannon, Fisher, Pozzi, & Wessel, 1990; Schwartz & Raphael, 1985), and mapping

![Figure 1.3 Web Example](image-url)
words according to their relation to story structure categories (Blachowicz, 1986). All these approaches involve student construction of maps, graphs, charts, webs, or clusters that represent the semantic relatedness of words to other words and concepts. Again, discussion, sharing, and use of the words are necessary components of active involvement, as is feedback and scaffolding on the part of the teacher.

Making learning personal is another strategy of effective learners. We have already commented on the way in which learning words in the context of learning some important skill or concept is one of the most durable ways to learn words. These meanings are personalized by our experiences. Words not learned in firsthand experiences can also be personalized; relating new words to one’s own past experiences has been a component of many successful studies. Eeds and Cockrum (1985) had students provide prior-knowledge cues for new words, a method related to that used by Carr (Carr & Mazur-Stewart, 1988), who asked students to construct personal cues to meaning along with graphic and other methods. Acting out word meaning (Duffelmeyer, 1980) has also led to increased word learning.

Creating one’s own mnemonic or image is another way to personalize meaning. Although active, semantically rich instruction and learning seems best for learning new concepts, tagging a new label onto a well-established concept can be done through the creation of associations. Mnemonic strategies, those strategies aimed at helping us remember, such as ROY G. BIV for the colors of the spectrum (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet), are time-honored ways to assist memory. Keyword methods are the best known of these word-learning strategies. They involve the creation of a verbal connection, an image, or a picture to help cement the meaning in memory. For example, to remember the word phototropism, the bending of plants toward light, a student created the picture shown in Figure 1.4 as a visual mnemonic. The verbal labels photographer and tropical plant aided memory for the word, and the drawing of the tropical flower bending to the light (the sun) supplied a visual image to support it.

**FIGURE 1.4  Keyword Image—Phototropism**
Helping students gather information across text and sources is another way teachers can model mature word-learning strategies. It’s important for students to keep looking for different types of information that will flesh out the meaning they need to understand. For learning specific words, rather than for building a generalized, nonspecific vocabulary, research suggests that providing students with multiple sources of information, along with opportunities to use the words in meaningful communication situations, results in superior word learning. Numerous studies comparing definitional instruction with incidental learning from context or with no-instruction control conditions support the notion that teaching definitions results in learning (Kame’enui, Carnine, & Freschi, 1982; Pany & Jenkins, 1978; Stahl, 1983).

Keep in mind that the performance of students who received instruction that combined definitional information with other active processing, such as adding contextual information (Stahl, 1983), writing (Duin & Graves, 1987), contextual discovery (Gipe, 1979–1980), or rich manipulation of words (Beck & McKeown, 1983), exceeded the performance of students who only received definitional instruction. A meta-analysis of studies that compared different types of instruction (Stahl & Fairbanks, 1986) concludes that methods with multiple sources of information for students provide superior word learning. In effective classrooms, students encounter words in context as well as work to create or understand appropriate definitions, synonyms, and other word relations.

Along with instruction, students need to experiment with and use new words. Different types of instruction and amounts of repetition can result in different types and depths of learning. When the goal is to have students gain control of vocabulary to use for their own expression, students need many experiences that allow them to encounter and use words in meaningful ways. Use in writing and conversation, where feedback is available, is essential to durable and deep learning. Creating personal word books and dictionaries is a good first step to word ownership; use in many situations is a second step. Using new words in discussion, in writing, in independent projects, and in word play develops real ownership and moves those words into students’ personal vocabularies.

Technology also presents many opportunities for word learning that are just beginning to be investigated (Blachowicz, Beyersdorfer, & Fisher, 2006). Technology is clearly changing both the nature of our interaction with text and the vocabularies we use to do so. Research in other areas of literacy education suggests some conclusions and questions that still need to be answered.

First, we know that children learn vocabulary from the wide reading of books, magazines, and other forms of text. We also know that students are motivated to use technology in their daily lives. What we need to know is whether technology is being used by the same students who read widely in other forms of text or whether it is appealing to a new population of readers. If it is, they will be reading electronic text that is almost always in a nontraditional fiction format. Does this fact impact on incidental word learning?

Second, we know that vocabulary is learned through multiple exposures to words in a variety of ways. Electronic text and other forms of technology provide opportunities for greater interaction with new concepts and vocabulary. Is the nature of the exposures in electronic text different, perhaps more efficient, than in traditional text in terms of word learning?

Third, we know that many students do not use dictionaries, glossaries, and other resources to aid word learning with traditional textual forms. Given the easy access to resources for word learning through technology, are certain types of students (for example, poorer readers or those with different learning styles) differentially impacted by such resources? In relation to such mediated learning, we also need to know more about effective ways to facilitate word learning for all students with technology in our classrooms for all students. Lastly, electronic books and magazines are motivating

(continued)
to many readers, particularly for struggling ones who may have negative associations with traditional books. Technology is an area for vocabulary growth that we are just beginning to research and understand but which appears to have significant potential for vocabulary development.

And, as we noted in the first guideline, play is also an important part of word use and word learning. Part of creating a “positive environment for word learning” involves having activities, games, materials, and other resources that allow students to play with words. Who wouldn’t enjoy spending a few minutes each day figuring out a puzzle or word riddle?

(Guideline 3 cont.)

Guideline 4: The effective vocabulary teacher teaches general, academic, and domain-specific vocabulary as well as figurative and nuanced word usage.

Careful selection of the words to receive focus is another important part of the teacher’s responsibility. For example, Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002) propose three tiers of word study: Tier 1 words, which are common words that probably do not need to be taught; Tier 2 words, which are high-frequency words that are not as simple as Tier 1 words but are new terms for familiar concepts or general academic words such as compare; and Tier 3 words, which are frequently related to one content area domain.

Another way to look at words to choose for instruction is in relationship to the students’ “need to know”—how will they need to use the words after reading? Five types of words are candidates for instructional consideration:

- **Comprehension words**—those words that are essential to understanding a selection to be read. For example, in the sentence “Let’s consider the feelings of the homesick Rebel soldier who longed to be reunited with his family,” Rebel would be a critical comprehension word in a unit or chapter on the Civil War.

- **Useful words**—words that are not critical to understanding a particular selection but are of high utility for later use, such as Beck, McKeown, and Kucan’s Tier 2 words. Homesick would be an example.

- **Generative words**—words that you might wish to study because they have parts or morphemes that lead to further word learning. If prefixes were to be studied, reunited might be a good word to key in on for the study of the prefix re-, meaning “again.”

- **General academic words**—words that cause a lot of trouble to students lacking school experience and to second-language learners. They are words and phrases like in contrast, however, analyze, and others that signal academic operations and thoughts that might be unclear. In the sample sentence, consider is an example of an academic term that calls on students to do something that may or may not be clear to them. These academic vocabulary words are especially tricky because they are often assumed and rarely taught. Yet these are the very words that confuse so many students.

- **Domain-specific academic vocabulary**—content area words, such as photosynthesis, Industrial Revolution, and tetrahedron.

Teachers can draw from all these word sets to choose words for instruction relevant to their curriculum and topics of study.

Besides these specific lexicons, there are also figurative uses of words and phrases that can delight and inform the reader, as well as confuse them, and provide creative expression for the
Some Last Thoughts

The learning of new words is not a simple issue, and neither is instruction for word learning. Although much is still to be learned about vocabulary learning and instruction, teachers need to use the best practices they know and the best available research to help students build their vocabularies. This checklist (see Figure 1.5), developed by teachers in our professional development classrooms, might help you think about how your classroom can reflect the guidelines we proposed earlier.
## FIGURE 1.5 Teacher Self-Evaluation Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Self-Evaluation Checklist—Vocabulary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. I show enthusiasm for words and word learning.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Daily read-aloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Daily playful word activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Students indicate teacher loves words and word play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Understand differences and connections between spelling, phonics, and vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. My classroom shows physical signs of word awareness.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Word charts or word walls (showing student input) used and changed regularly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Books on words, word play, specialized and learner dictionaries, dictionaries (where students can easily access them)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Labels in classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Word games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Puzzle books and software</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Student-made word books, alphabet books, dictionaries, computer files, presentations, Smartboard lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. My students show enthusiasm for words and word learning.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Have personal dictionaries or word logs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Can use dictionary on appropriate level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Have a strategy for dealing with unknown words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Spend part of each day reading on appropriate level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Can name a favorite word book, puzzle activity, and/or word game</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Use new vocabulary in talk, discussion, writing, and presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Enjoy and share new words, word games, word play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. My vocabulary instruction includes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Rich instruction on content-area vocabulary words with definitional and contextual information and usage in talk and writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Use of mapping, webbing, and other graphics to show word relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Multiple exposures and chances to see, hear, write, and use new words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Wide reading with post-reading discussion of new words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Developing students’ responsibility for self-selection and self-study (keeping of a word log)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Teaching and practicing of independent strategies (word parts, context, and word references)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Word play and motivation activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Engaging review and use in speaking, writing, discussion, presentation</td>
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<tr>
<td>___ Varied assessments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Looking Back and Looking Ahead

In this chapter, we have presented a theoretical and practical overview of some of the research on vocabulary instruction. We looked at what learners know (and don’t know) about words and what the research suggests about instruction. Included were descriptions of situations that foster word learning and guidelines for structuring instruction. The rest of the chapters in this book contain practical teaching ideas for different instructional situations.

In many classrooms, this vocabulary instruction is the focus in the comprehension strand of commercial reading materials. Typically, a prereading component involves accessing and building prior knowledge, which includes work with key selection vocabulary. Core selections in these programs contain guidelines for teachers to use in developing comprehension and vocabulary along with context use as a major strategy. In other classrooms, teachers use core selections or trade books to develop vocabulary knowledge and strategies. In still other classrooms, vocabulary instruction is a major part of all content-area learning. And for many classrooms, vocabulary instruction takes place in all three of these situations. We provide ideas for each of these situations in the chapters that follow. Because many of these ideas develop the kind of thinking that the Common Core State Standards (2010) are trying to develop, we key selected chapters to example standards to highlight the connections.

Classroom Investigation and Book Club Questions

1. Look at the checklist in Figure 1.5. What are your strengths? Where would you like to put more of your energy? Is there something missing? Something you think does not fit? Something you have a question about? Discuss.

2. What are some good games for word play that work for you? How do they reflect the guidelines for effective vocabulary instruction?

3. What Web word sites do you use with your students? How do they reflect the guidelines for effective vocabulary instruction?
Prepare Yourself

Prepare yourself by evaluating your own knowledge. Rate your ability to answer some of the key questions for this chapter. Check the boxes that best describe your prereading knowledge.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Concept Questions</th>
<th>Well Informed</th>
<th>Aware</th>
<th>Need Ideas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What do we know about learning from context?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What do we know about learning vocabulary from read-alouds?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. How can we encourage incidental word learning?</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. How can we help students learn strategies for problem solving with context?</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. How can teachers use context to present and review new vocabulary?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
This chapter presents background, ideas, and strategies to help you understand learning from *context*, a term that is used in several different ways. We’ll talk about how words are learned incidentally by students placed in a word-rich environment, how strategies for inferring specific meanings can be developed, and how teachers can use contextual methods for introducing new words. The following chart can help you choose suitable instructional strategies for your classroom.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Strategy</th>
<th>Goal—Use When You Want to . . .</th>
<th>Common Core Connection Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read-alouds</td>
<td>Develop listening skills, oral</td>
<td>L3b  Recognize and observe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vocabulary, and understanding</td>
<td>differences between the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of author’s word choice.</td>
<td>conventions of spoken and written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>standard English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dual-language charts and synonym lists</td>
<td>Build awareness of cognates in</td>
<td>L5c  Use the relationships between</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>other languages and basic word</td>
<td>particular words, e.g., synonyms,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>relationships.</td>
<td>etc. . . . to better understand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>each of the words (Gr. 4) (Gr. 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom labeling</td>
<td>Associate words with concrete</td>
<td>L1b  Use the most frequent nouns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>objects; develop concept of word.</td>
<td>and verbs (Gr. K)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media and technology for word learning</td>
<td>Provide for independent and</td>
<td>L Anchor 6  Demonstrate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>multimodal word learning;</td>
<td>independence in gathering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>motivation.</td>
<td>vocabulary knowledge (all grades)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metacognitive context instruction; cloze</td>
<td>Build skill of inferring word</td>
<td>R4c  Use context to confirm or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>meaning.</td>
<td>self-correct word recognition</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>and understanding (Gr. 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary self-selection strategy</td>
<td>Build independence in word</td>
<td>W2d  Use precise language and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>choice for writing and study.</td>
<td>domain-specific vocabulary to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process-oriented context instruction; C(2)QU</td>
<td>Develop ability to problem</td>
<td>inform about and explain a topic (Gr. 6–8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create personal contexts</td>
<td>solve about word meaning using</td>
<td>R4c  Use context to confirm or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>context.</td>
<td>self-correct word recognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Build study skills; develop</td>
<td>and understanding (Gr. 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>multimodal links to word</td>
<td>Anchor St  General academic</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>meaning.</td>
<td>and domain-specific words and</td>
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<td>phrases sufficient for reading,</td>
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<td>writing, speaking, and listening</td>
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<td>at the college and career-readi-</td>
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<td>ness level; demonstrate indepen-</td>
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<td>dence in gathering vocabulary</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>knowledge when encountering an</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>unknown term important to</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>comprehension or expression</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
Learning from Context

How many new words do school-age students learn, on average, in a school year? Chances are that you estimated well below 4,000 words, which many researchers estimate is the number of new words students learn, on average, each year of their school careers (Nagy & Anderson, 1984). Compare this number with the roughly 400 words formally introduced in a year of reading instruction. How do students learn all these words if they are not formally taught?

As teachers, parents, and word learners ourselves, we know the answer. From our own experience, as well as from studies of children’s word learning, we know that the majority of words we learn are learned in situations where words are used in meaningful contexts. Take up a new hobby and the vocabulary of that hobby is learned as a by-product. For example, *knit* and *purl* become part of the knitter’s vocabulary; *c-clamp* and *contact cement* are typical words in a woodworker’s vocabulary. Firsthand learning supplies us with many of our word tools. In school, this learning often takes place in content-area classes and in thematic study. In a science class, the teacher may say, “OK, now we light this *Bunsen burner* carefully before we can boil the water in the *beaker*.” Students observing the lesson can easily attach labels or characteristics to the tools being used. A *Bunsen burner* is something you light to give heat, and the *beaker* is the thing with the water in it. Students might not know these words well enough after one exposure to use them or remember them, but over time, they learn and remember the words as they use them in learning and in discussion.

We also learn through more vicarious experiences. The watcher of Olympic figure skating will not have the same knowledge of skating vocabulary as a figure skater but will soon come to recognize the terms *triple lutz*, *axel*, and *edge* as terms related to skating actions. Similarly, we learn words in listening to others speak and from having them read to us. Research with both preschoolers and older students has shown that students learn new words when they are read to (Serafini & Giorgis, 2003; Eller et al., 1988; Elley, 1988). As students read and reread books,
they develop increasingly sophisticated understandings of new word meanings and begin to use those words in story discussions, retellings, and responses. Lastly, we know that silent, personal reading is a rich source of incidental word learning. So a critical part of word learning happens when students have rich experiences, both firsthand and vicarious, that expose them to new words used in meaningful contexts.

Repeated meaningful encounters with words in direct experience, in read-alouds, in conversation, in personal reading, in discussion, and in drama or television watching can lead students to produce an immediate label for an object or concept or to build clues to these word meanings over time. This informal learning from context can be facilitated by instruction that will be described in the following section on developing oral vocabulary and is the first avenue to learning from context.

Although this incidental learning from context is a powerful means for building vocabulary, teachers also have other options for working with context. We can help students develop the ability to problem-solve using new words and their contexts. This type of instruction involves modeling the thinking processes we use when trying to figure out word meaning and can also help students understand how contexts work. For example, writers commonly use apposition, a direct statement of a synonym or explanation as a context clue, as in science project directions that note, “The pipette, or eyedropper, should be used to measure the ingredients.” Developing strategies for problem solving with context will be the second focus of this chapter.

A third way teachers focus on context in instruction is to use contextual methods to present new vocabulary words directly. We'll examine each of the processes—enhancing incidental, informal, day-to-day learning; developing the ability to use context; and using context directly to present vocabulary words—in the remainder of this chapter.

**Insights from Early Word Learning**

The primary example of contextual word learning is the way in which language develops in the first three years of a child's life. Clearly, many words are learned through labeling (“Doggie!”), but most are learned from the context of adult and peer speech related to the environment in which children find themselves. Hart and Risley (1995, 2003) suggest that the gap between the number of words that children of professional families hear and the number that the children of welfare families hear prior to going to school is as large as 30 million words. This number is extrapolated from a smaller data set and is not a count of unique words heard (just all the words heard). However, even if the number is only half that, there is clearly a difference in the opportunity to hear and explore new vocabulary. What is more telling is that Hart and Risley came to this research after 30 years of trying to develop vocabulary knowledge in preschool and Head Start programs. In these situations, they were able to increase the size of students’ vocabulary, but the gains were not maintained once students entered school.

Does this mean attempts to teach vocabulary prior to exposure to formal literacy education are worthless? Not according to Whitehurst and his colleagues (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001). They argue that although vocabulary knowledge may set the stage for early reading, “having a larger vocabulary in first grade does
not directly help a child to learn to read” (p. 21). It is critical, they assert, primarily because a larger store of words makes it easier for them to develop phonological sensitivity. Later on in schooling, it is the vocabulary knowledge itself, and the knowledge of particular words, that is more directly related to comprehension, as we will elaborate upon in later chapters.

Learning Vocabulary from Read-Alouds
Some teachers are amazed when they hear that read-alouds with students are not always a positive experience. They associate the activity with undivided adult attention and often lots of cuddles! However, DeTemple and Snow (2003) draw the contrast between talk around shared storybook read-alouds that is not cognitively challenging and talk that is. Their example clearly illustrates what they mean:

(Reading *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*)

**Mother:** What’s that? (*Pointing to the sun*)

**Child:** (Shrugs)

**M:** What’s that? What makes you hot?

**C:** I don’t know. Huh?

**M:** What makes you hot?

**C:** (Shrugs)

**M:** The sun don’t make you hot?

**C:** Mmm. (*Nods*)

**M:** It makes you real hot.

**Cognitively Challenging Talk**

**M:** That’s a tusk, see? It’s white. Know what, Domingo?

**C:** Hmmm?

**M:** Because they want it for, um, well, they use it for different things. I think that some museums buy them and... I don’t know about museums, but I know that they kill for this white um...

**C:** There’s no tusks on these elephants though.

**M:** Ma, here’s one that’s dead.

**C:** I don’t think he’s dead. We’ll find out. They use *their tusks to dig*. Oh, see, he’s digging a hole. They use *their tusks to dig for salt*.

**C:** Hmm.

**M:** Let’s look and see if there is another page that you might like. It’s ivory!

The tusks are made of ivory. And they can make things with these tusks and that’s why some animals, they die, hunters kill them.
C: No wonder they have hunters.
M: Yeah, that’s sad.
C: I’m never going to be a hunter when I grow up.

(DeTemple & Snow, 2003, pp. 23–24)

In the second example, the child is not just learning new words (tusk, ivory) but learning about them in ways that are complex and supportive. There has been substantial research on the nature and effects of read-alouds in both home and school settings (Neuman & Dickinson, 2001; Blachowicz & Obropta, 2007). Here are some of the findings:

- Students can learn the meaning of unknown words through incidental exposure during read-alouds.
- Students learn more words when books are read multiple times.
- Not all books are equally effective for vocabulary learning.
- Students do not benefit from being talked at or read to but from being talked with and read with.

In school, in particular,

- Students learn more words when books are read in small groups.
- The effect of reading storybooks on vocabulary is relatively small (in a school setting) for children under 4 years old and relatively large for children over 5.
- With traditional read-alouds, the vocabulary differences between children continue to grow over time.

If traditional read-alouds in schools do not develop vocabulary well, is there some better way to do it?

**Teaching Vocabulary with Read-Alouds**

Most researchers agree on several principles related to teaching vocabulary with read-alouds in schools:

- There should be some direct teaching of vocabulary during read-alouds in school settings. We now know that incidental word learning will occur but that some students need direct teaching of vocabulary.
- Adult/child discussion should be interactive. As noted earlier, there are cognitively challenging ways to interact with the text. In addition, the students need to be able to contribute to the discussion.
- Groups should ideally be of five or six students.
- Stories should be read multiple times.
The nature of the learning that occurs is different with familiar and unfamiliar books. In an initial reading, the children may focus on the plot or story line. In subsequent readings, the reasons for characters’ actions, and especially unfamiliar vocabulary, may become the focus of their interest. Teachers may also do a series of read-alouds on a topic (Blachowicz & Obrochta, 2005) to develop a topical set of words, an approach we will revisit later.

**Text Talk**

Several researchers have explored effective interaction of teachers and students with stories. Beck and McKeown (2001) call such interaction “Text Talk.” As part of this text talk, they give the example of vocabulary instruction. The following are a teacher’s notes for the activity for the word *reluctant* from *A Pocket for Corduroy* (Freeman, 1978).

In the story, Lisa was reluctant to leave the laundromat without Corduroy. *Reluctant* means you are not sure you want to do something. Say the word with me: *reluctant*.

Someone might be reluctant to eat a food that they never had before, or someone might be reluctant to ride a roller coaster because it looks scary. Think about something you might be reluctant to do. Start your sentence with “I might be reluctant to __________.” After each child responds, call on another child to explain the response. (Beck & McKeown, 2001, p. 18)

This kind of rich talk and discussion around words is what is needed in instruction.

**The Role of Genre.** Much of the research on read-alouds is related to narratives (as the name suggests), but other research under the same umbrella has looked at other genres. Here are some of the findings:

- Alphabet books can be good places to acquire meanings.
- Head Start children who pretend-read information books use typical information-book language, including classes of objects.
- Preschool children make personal associations to information books.
- Informational books are rich sources of important concept and vocabulary knowledge and can lend themselves to read-alouds for all ages, especially older students (Serafini & Giorgis, 2003; Manyak, 2007).

**Vocabulary Visits**

Related to issues of genre, much new research on school-age students and their learning suggests that the primary curriculum is ripe for content learning, and many more resources now exist for content reading for both young and older children (Trelease, 2006; Duke, Bennett-Armistead, & Roberts, 2003). One strategy of using content-area trade books to build vocabulary is “Vocabulary Visits” (Blachowicz & Obrochta, 2005, 2007). Vocabulary Visits are virtual field trips that
use vivid visuals and books to develop concepts and vocabulary for primary-grade students. Teachers assemble thematic text sets that, because of their nature, have a repeated, conceptually related vocabulary (e.g., weather—storms, hurricane, thunder, lightning, damp). They create a visual chart that will stimulate discussion of what can be seen, heard, smelled, tasted—the senses that students use on an actual field trip: What do you see? (lightning, flash, storm); What do you hear? (crash, boom, thunder); What can you feel? (wet, rain, damp, soggy).

Students brainstorm, make a chart to display conceptually related words, do active listening and put their thumbs up when they hear some of the new words, and add to the chart as they are read the other books in the text set. They also take part in semantic sorting and writing activities. Vocabulary Visits are motivating and develop concepts and both oral and written vocabulary for young students.

“Snap When You Hear It”

Stimulating active listening, like that which takes place in the “thumbs up” segment of Vocabulary Visits, is the “Snap When You Hear It” method. Fifth-grade teacher Leah Mirante and reading specialist Karen Petelle have used this method the last several years in Mrs. Mirante’s classroom. The method works as follows: The teacher introduces the Tier 2 or domain vocabulary words for a particular subject or unit and, together with the class, develops a “kid-friendly” definition. Students then work to understand the word as it is used in the academic context. So, once the students understand the meaning of the word in the academic context, it is posted on the wall with a nonlinguistic representation—usually a student-created vocabulary cartoon. Students are then encouraged to snap their fingers whenever they hear the word being used. (A quieter alternative in teacher Jesse Orbea’s primary class is to make a “V for Vocabulary” sign by holding up the middle and pointer fingers whenever a target word is heard.)

Throughout the day in Leah Mirante’s fifth-grade classroom, students are incorporating the “Snap When You Hear It” method. Every time a vocabulary word is heard in conversation, seen in text (any content area), or incorporated into writing, students snap to alert others around them that one of the Tier 2 vocabulary words is being used. An interesting encounter occurred when the local D.A.R.E. officer was visiting the classroom, and she used a Tier 2 word that was posted on the wall. Instantly, and with tremendous excitement, the students began snapping at the officer. She turned to Mrs. Mirante with a questioning look. A student proceeded to explain to her that she was using one of the target vocabulary words. The officer was impressed with the students’ listening skills and vocabulary knowledge. From that point on, she tried to incorporate as many words from the word wall as possible in the lessons she taught.

A parent in this same classroom also had positive results with this method. Originally, when Mrs. Mirante explained the “Snap When You Hear It” method at the opening year curriculum night, some parents were very skeptical that their children would follow through with their vocabulary learning and employ this method at home. In a particular home one day, while the news was on, a parent heard her child snapping at the television. She was in awe. Her child was snapping because he had heard target vocabulary words he learned in class.
He had dedicated those words to his schema and was applying them in his everyday life. Not only was this child hearing the target vocabulary words, but he was also applying them to his own writing, which was evident in his end-of-year portfolio.

The “Snap When You Hear It” method is an easy, no-cost method used to boost vocabulary knowledge, awareness, and usage. Students learn the meaning of the target vocabulary in context as well as any multiple meanings the words might have. With the “Snap When You Hear It” method, students not only pay closer attention to language, but they get excited about it and make each exposure meaningful.

The Nature of the Words to Be Taught in Read-Alouds

We have discussed the selection of words to be taught in some depth in Chapter 1. The nature of the words to be taught in the early grades in read-alouds is open to some debate. Biemiller (1999) lists 3,000 root words commonly known by grade 4 and suggests they should be taught directly to students. Other researchers are not quite so prescriptive. Beck and colleagues (2002) talk about three tiers of words. Tier 1 consists of words that are basic and don’t need to be taught (e.g., table). Tier 2 words are words of relatively high frequency and are used across several domains of knowledge. Tier 3 words are low-frequency words specific to a domain of knowledge and not of general utility to most learners. They argue that teachers should focus on selecting and teaching Tier 2 words.

Our feeling is that although these ideas are useful, teachers using read-alouds should also choose to teach words that are interesting, that stimulate the students, and, in content domains, that reflect the “big ideas” being taught. The task of choosing words to teach prior to a read-aloud of a storybook or literary piece is both time consuming and subjective. Is it necessarily more effective than choosing words as they are experienced in a text? Further, perhaps it is equally important and maybe more effective to teach the words on the second or third reading.

Teaching Vocabulary Using Other Methods

Although using read-alouds is only one method of teaching vocabulary to young children, it has been emphasized here in contrast to other methods that apply across many grade levels and do not rely on contextual word learning. Here are some suggestions discussed in later chapters:

Categorizing Activities

- Word sorts for semantic categories
- Re-sorting for new categories
- Classification games
- Introducing new words through rhymes
- Students’ word of the day/week
Word Games to Develop Word Awareness

- Memory games (I went to the zoo and I saw a green gorilla, a fuschia fox, etc.)
- Games with meanings (synonym games—alphabet antonym or synonym table)
- Games with rhymes (tongue twisters)

Encouraging Incidental Word Learning

Developing Rich Language Environments

We noted in Chapter 1 that wide exposure to words is a powerful force for word learning, particularly for the development of oral vocabularies. For students of all ages, but particularly for preschoolers or students who are not secure in English, having a FLOOD of words in the classroom is essential. Devoting time for classroom talk is an important aspect of encouraging incidental word learning. Talk in the classroom is of three kinds: conversation with learning about turn taking and responding; problem-solving talk, where students talk around a task; and presentational talk, where students present ideas and evidence to the group orally or in writing.

Using activities such as “show and tell” at the lower levels and current events and cooperative grouping for older students maximizes the opportunities your students have to hear and use language in meaningful ways. Repeated story, informational, and poetry readings are excellent stimuli for word learning. Connecting new vocabulary to rich illustrations and engaging story lines helps make new words comprehensible and memorable (Freeman & Freeman, 1993). As with all things happening in classrooms, some judicious attention and planning by the teacher can maximize student learning (Elley, 1988). For example, read-alouds can enhance word learning when the teachers try these strategies:

1. Use illustrations to express and clarify meanings. For example, in Audrey and Don Wood’s delightful King Bidgood’s in the Bathtub (1993), words such as battle, trout, masquerade, feast, and plug are clarified by the superb illustrations.

2. Use new words in questions: “If you were going to be in a battle, what would you take?” Such questions involve students in meaningful, thoughtful responses to new words, and the students tend to use these words in their responses. “Well, for the battle, I’d take . . . .” This technique also gives teachers a chance to clarify meanings when students have a misconception.

3. Involve students in creating images for new words to cement their meanings in a personal way. For example, ESL students working with King Bidgood were asked to draw and label the objects in scenes from the book. One student’s feast looked like the one drawn in Figure 2.1.

4. Read and reread favorite books and recommend that students take them home to be read for and by parents. Research indicates that students learn more about a word’s meaning each time the word is used in a meaningful way.
5. For ESL students, create word lists that use words in their native language as well as in English. For example, for *King Bidgood*, the word list created by a bilingual English–Spanish teacher for her class looked like the word chart shown in Table 2.1, with spaces for students to provide their own picture clues.

Use of good literature, repeated exposure, use in discussion and image making, and relation to first languages are all ways vocabulary from a read-aloud book can find its way into students’ oral vocabularies.

**Classroom Labeling**

In addition to read-aloud sharing, classroom labeling is a good way to teach new vocabulary. Objects and situations in the classroom provide natural contexts for learning. Using a label maker (a large one for young students and a smaller size for older students), students can label classroom objects to produce a vocabulary set that is contextualized by the classroom. This process can also assist the students in spelling when they want to describe the classroom aquarium or write about the mealworms in science class. Students in advanced classes can use a professional label maker to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Picture Clue</th>
<th>Español</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>trout</td>
<td>la trucha</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>battle</td>
<td>la batalla</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mask</td>
<td>la máscara</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plug</td>
<td>el tapón</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Encouraging Incidental Word Learning

Context clues in the form of labeled pictures also provide useful contextualized information, particularly for older, second-language, or LEP students. Volumes illustrated by Richard Scarry can be useful in advanced classrooms when basic vocabulary is needed. Scarry also produced a series of books in many languages so that terms can be compared across languages and used by all students. Figure 2.3 contains a list of his books that are also available in Spanish. Many are also available in other languages, such as French, Italian, and German.

Wide Reading

Wide reading is also a powerful determiner of vocabulary growth. Sustained Silent Reading, the process of including independent reading in each day’s instructional program, ensures that students regularly receive new words and see these words
These Richard Scarry books contain detailed and labeled drawings of objects and other concepts in both English and Spanish.

*Learn to Count*
*Great Big Schoolhouse*
*Great Big Air Book*
*Busiest People Ever*
*Naughty Bunny*
*My House*
*What Do People Do All Day?*
*ABC Word Book*
*At Work*
*Nicky Goes to the Doctor*
*Best Word Book Ever*
*Story Book Dictionary*

repeated. Experiments such as the “book flood,” which involved students in a large volume of independent reading (Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1988; Cunningham, 2005), have indicated that wide reading means wide vocabulary growth. Also, “low-workload” techniques such as keeping a word wall or bulletin board of interesting words that are discussed as they are added have proved to be productive tools for informal word learning. Teaching Idea File 2.1 summarizes some of the ways you might encourage informal word learning.

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**TEACHING IDEA FILE 2.1  Encouraging Informal Word Learning**

1. Use illustrations, pantomime, and objects to clarify meaning and make new words comprehensible.
2. Use new words in questions and discussion.
3. Have students create personal images as mnemonics.
4. Reread favorite selections to “imprint” new words.
5. Create multilingual synonym lists.
6. Use labels whenever possible.
7. Keep English and non-English books in sets so that students can use one for reference.
8. Set aside time for personal reading and encourage wide reading at a comfortable level.
Using Technology

Capitalize on students’ love of technology by using technology that can teach. For example, you could consider using captioned TV and videos for instruction. These are useful for making new vocabulary more comprehensible not only for students with hearing impairments, but also for students who are nonnative speakers of English. Videos can also be rented in captioned form. Newscasts, presidential addresses, and other topical events are often captioned. Taping them for use in current events class can help students hear and see new words at the same time.

Tablet, reader, and computerized audiobooks and word-processing programs can also be useful for providing multiple types of context clues to word meaning. (Figure 2.4 contains some sources for audiobooks.) Many of these allow students to hear the story at the same time they see the words. Several also allow readers to highlight words to hear them pronounced again and defined. There are also word-processing programs, such as Kids Works 2, that print in primary or regular type, have a file of vocabulary rebuses, and use synthesized speech to read back to students what they have written. Music can also be a means of acquiring new vocabulary. Music videos often provide words to match the music, and students also enjoy karaoke singing, which involves reading lyrics to match the music. SMART boards can also provide a platform for group sharing. Technology has a motivational factor that will frequently interest students who would be reluctant to learn in other ways. Make these available to students, and you have instant motivation.

Learning to Problem-Solve with Context

Besides ensuring that students are surrounded by words in contextual settings, teachers also want to help students hone their abilities to figure out new words from context and use problem-solving talk to do so. A meta-analysis by
Fukkink and de Glopper (1998) suggests that teaching students to use context typically results in gains in word learning. Recently, work by Baumann and his colleagues (Baumann et al., 2002; Baumann, Blachowicz, Manyak, Graves, & Olejnik, 2009–2012; Baumann, Edwards, Boland, Olejnik, & Kame’enui, 2003) has supported the notion that this instruction should be an important part of the elementary curriculum. An effective process for using context involves several stages of active problem solving (McKeown, 1985) and ongoing reflection. The strategic and metacognitive process of context use can be envisioned as having three components:

1. Students must know why and when to use context. Studies of at-risk readers frequently reveal great cognitive confusion about the potential uses of strategies (Downing & Leong, 1982). Controlling the why and the when involves awareness of both the limitations and contributions of context to word learning. Sometimes the context is quite explicit about word meanings; at other times, the clues given by the author merely suggest an attribute or relationship. Students need to see and discuss various levels of context explicitness to develop sensitivity to the different levels of help context can provide.

2. Students must have a general idea of what kinds of clues may be provided by the context. The following section on teaching about context will describe these characteristics.

3. Most importantly, students must know how to look for and use these clues. Several strategy sequences have been suggested that involve looking at the word and around the word (Baumann, Ware, & Edwards, 2007).

**Teaching about Context**

To sensitize students to the types of information that context can supply, try to have them examine and collect different types of context clues authors provide. This type of instruction is typically included in school curricula and commercial instructional materials in the middle grades. Instead of worksheets focused on single paragraphs, consider mini-lessons built around entire selections in anthologies or periodicals. Introduce examples of context use in mini-lessons and have students examine and discuss them. Then make wall charts with examples they discover in their own reading. For instance, one class discovered that context helps provide readers with the following types of information:

1. **Synonyms.** The farrier, the man who makes shoes for the horses, had to carry his heavy tools in a wheelbarrow.
2. **What a word is or is not like.** Unlike the peacock, the mudhen is not colorful.
3. **Something about location or settings.** The shaman entered the Hopi roundhouse and sat facing the mountains.
4. **Something about what a word is used for.** He used the spade to dig up the garden.
5. **What kind of thing or action it is.** Swiveling his hips, waggling the club, and aiming for the pin, he drove his first four golf balls into the water.
6. *How something is done.* He expectorated the gob of tobacco juice neatly into the spittoon.

7. *A general topic or ideas related to the words.* The dancing bears, the musicians, the cooks carrying huge plates of food all came to the church for the *fiesta.*

From their own reading, students can collect, explain, and display new words so they will have concrete examples of the ways in which context explains word meaning. These examples will provide models for writing, and their own creations can also be displayed.

**Metacognitive Context Instruction**

Once students have a basic sensitivity to some of the ways context reveals meanings, structure some group lessons that help them build and test hypotheses about word meaning. Direct students to:

- **Look.** Before, at, and after the word.
- **Reason.** Connect what they know with what the author has written.
- **Predict a possible meaning.**
- **Resolve or redo.** Decide if they know enough, should try again, or should consult an expert or reference.

Baumann and colleagues (2007) suggest posting a “Vocabulary Rule” poster in each classroom to remind students of an effective process for using context (see Table 2.2).

Introduce this strategy through teacher modeling, group work, and discussion. To prepare, select a passage and target a word or words for discussion. For example, before reading *Fog Magic* (Sauer, 1986), a story of a young girl’s time travel into the past, the teacher chose to take out the term *cellar holes.* She used her document camera to project the text with the word *cellar holes* masked out with tape. Then she presented it to the class (see Figure 2.5). The class discussion that resulted was rich and thoughtful.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 2.2  The Vocabulary Rule</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What to do when you come to a word you do not know after you pronounce it . . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Look for context clues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Look for word part clues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Think of a word like it in English or Spanish or another language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- See if what you think makes sense. If not . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Use a reference</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
T(eacher): Remember that for the last few weeks we have been talking about using context clues. Can anyone tell me why we do this?

S(tudent)1: When there’s a word you don’t know, sometimes you can get an idea by looking at the rest of the story for clues.

S2: You can think about what you already know and then see if you can figure out what the new word means or something about it from what the author says.

T: How do we do that?

S3: We look before the word, we look after the word, and we look at the word, too, for prefixes and roots and stuff, but we can’t do that here because you took that all out (laughter).

T: That’s right. I’m making it a real challenge for you. Can you tell me anything about the missing term?

S2: Well, she’s outside, so it’s something outside.

S5: It’s something on the ground ’cause she’s digging later on.

S1: It says, “Smooth little depressions they were . . . ” but I don’t understand that because I know depressed, and this doesn’t make sense.

T: Anyone have anything to say about that? (Students make no response.)

T: Remember to look further on. Is there anything else about depressions?

S4: Later it says that “The shape of the depressions gave a clue,” so it’s not a feeling. It’s something on the ground.

---

**FIGURE 2.5 Text with a Keyword Blanked Out for Contextual Discussion**

Greta knew what this part of the mountain was like in clear weather. To the south of the road there was still unbroken forest—scarred here and there with burned patches, but otherwise dark, mysterious, treacherous, with unexpected chasms. Along the edge of the road to the north a high protective hedge of spruce and alder had been left, cut here and there with entrances. Beyond the hedge lay a clearing that sloped gently toward the sea. And dotting this clearing were ____________. Smooth little depressions they were, covered with the quick-springing growth of the pasture. It looked almost as if the homes of the departed inhabitants had sunk quietly into the earth.

Greta had often played in these ____________. It was fun to imagine where each house had stood, where the doorways had been, where the single street had led. Sometimes the shape of the depressions gave a clue; often a flat stone marked the doorstep. Once she had dug up a tiny spoon in a ____________. A salt spoon it was, with a strange name engraved on the handle.

The missing term is cell**ar holes**.
S5: She played in them, so they were holes or like where walls of old stones were left.

T: What made you think of walls?

S5: Well, they keep talking about the houses and said “houses had stood there . . . the doorways had been there,” so I think she is somewhere where houses used to be. Like after an earthquake or tornado.

S1: “It looks as if the homes had sunk into the earth,” so they must be holes.

T: Would [the word] holes make sense?

S4: Yeah, they could be depressions. She could play in them, and you could dig a spoon out of the hole.

S5: If it’s the hole where a house was, then it could be the basement hole, like the hole they dig when they start to build a house.

S1: Basement makes sense; it’s a hole for a house.

T: Well, what do you think?

S1: I think we should stop. We know enough.

T: Should we stop or keep thinking? (Students agree to stop and uncover the term cellar holes.)

S2: Well, they are holes.

S5: My gram has a fruit cellar in her house, and it’s like, it’s the same as a basement.

S4: OK, we figured it out. Let’s see what this story is about.

T: Good idea.

Where a word is unknown to all the students in a group, or in an individual tutorial situation, the word itself is a place to look, for roots and affixes and to make associations with what is already known. For example, in the same selection, a single student identified depressions as a hard word that he was not sure about.

T: Can you find some clues?

S: I’ve heard of being depressed.

T: Does that make sense here?

S: Not to me.

T: Do you know any other meanings?

S: It has “press” in it. When we rode the subway to the museum, we talked about not touching that handle where it said “To stop train, depress lever.” We figured it meant press it down.

T: So . . .?

S: So these could be pushed-in parts. Like later it says she dug in them. So they’re like holes.

In this instance, looking at the word itself and asking what other associations he had about the word helped the student match what he knew with ideas from the context.
After students become familiar with using a contextual process, student teams can lead the lessons. Working with the teacher, they can choose two words a week they think would be unfamiliar to the group and model the process with the first word and lead the discussion on the second. Students also like to play “Mystery Word,” in which photocopied pages, news articles, and magazine articles are posted on the chalkboard daily with one or two words designated as mystery words. Students note on index cards what clues they pick up about the word and where they were located and then make hypotheses about the word’s meaning. The cards are placed in an envelope tacked below the selection. At the end of the day, the student team that posted the word would review the cards and discuss the word. If needed, students would consult a dictionary to see whether their reasoning about the word clues and the word was consistent with established definitions.

When context wasn’t helpful, students often rewrote sections of text to make the surrounding text more explanatory or provided a synonym version for later study. Many of these versions have been collected and kept for next year’s students, who will use the same textbooks. A brief summary of a strategy for using context is shown in Teaching Idea File 2.2.

### Using the Cloze Procedure

The **cloze procedure** can also help students learn to use context to infer word meanings. It is a particularly useful strategy in individualized instruction, such as in intervention programs. When done with an overhead, as with the zip cloze procedure, the cloze procedure can be effective with a small group as well. In a cloze passage, selected words are omitted from the text and replaced with a line or space. Reading a cloze passage requires readers to use their knowledge of context...
to supply appropriate words and concepts to create a meaningful passage. For example, a cloze passage might look like this:

More direct instruction and ______ with vocabulary may be given by using the ______ procedure in its many modifications. A cloze passage ______ selected words from the ______ and replaces them with a line or ______. Reading a cloze passage requires ______ to use their knowledge of ______ to supply appropriate words and concepts to ______ a meaningful passage.

In completing a cloze passage, the teacher should have the students supply sets of words that might be appropriate to create a meaningful passage. For the sample passage, several words could fit many of the omissions. For example, you might have supplied: experience/practice; cloze; deletes/omits/leaves out; passage/paragraph/text; space; readers/students; meaning/context; complete/create/finish/fill in.

Although cloze passages used for assessment typically remove every fifth word, cloze for instruction can be structured more selectively and flexibly. Oral cloze, with rich discussion around the choices, can be used for emergent readers or any students who need practice with oral expression. Selected content words can be deleted from a high-interest, natural language or predictable selection from any book or pupil-made story used in the classroom. For best results, choose interesting content, predictable structures or refrain, clear and captivating illustrations, and familiar experiences. In using a selection for oral cloze, the teacher first shares the illustrations that carry information and clues and then reads aloud, substituting a pause for each of the words omitted.

For example, a class who had read Judith Viorst’s *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* (1972) made their own versions of a very bad day. The teacher used several of these for oral cloze, having the students hold up their illustrations for the class. One student’s example is shown here:

I went to bed with candy in my <mouth> and now there’s candy on my <face>. When I got up this morning I tripped on the <toys> that were all over my <floor>. While I ate, I dropped <food> all over my <shirt>. Then I went to school but I forgot my <homework> so the teacher was <mad>. I could tell it was going to be a terrible, horrible, no good, very <bad> day.

As the teacher reads the story, the students supply possibilities for the words omitted. Student enthusiasm for the original book and their adaptations makes the “contribution rate” high and provides many alternatives for discussion of possible vocabulary and contextual appropriateness. After the story or segment has been read and a number of suggestions offered, students often like to tape-record different versions to keep oral records of “Room 101’s Different Terrible Days.” The goal is not to limit choices to the author’s vocabulary but to generate a range of words that would fit the context. This technique helps students develop sets of synonyms and a sense of flexibility of vocabulary choice.
Zip Cloze. One problem that readers sometimes encounter when using context is a total loss of the sense of the selection someplace in the passage. Where more sophisticated readers might push on and attempt to recapture the meaning, less flexible readers often become frustrated and give up. The zip procedure (so named by a second-grade class with an innate sense of onomatopoeia) supplies constant feedback to readers to “keep them going” in the context.

The story to be used can be an ordinary book, big book, or wall chart, but the most effective format involves putting the story or passage on an overhead transparency. Masking tape is used to block out the words that have been chosen for deletion. The children first skim for gist and then supply the masked words one at a time. As each possibility is predicted and discussed, the tape is pulled off (or “zipped”) so readers receive immediate feedback from the text as well as being given more of the context from which to make further predictions. The zip procedure can be used in individual books by rubber banding a sheet protector over the page and using a marking pen to blank out words. Children enjoy preparing zip selections for others and can work on individual goals to increase their own awareness of certain word classes (for instance, they could tape over the nouns) or sentence elements (they might tape over the words or phrases that describe something).

Maze Cloze. For students who might need more support or practice in distinguishing between related words, the maze procedure can be used. Rather than deleting words from a passage, teachers provide students with several choices at each contextual point. The first exercises of this type should offer clear, unambiguous choices. The following example illustrates such choices:

- The boy on the hill lived in a yellow _______ umbrella
- The house had seven _______ very _______ stars rooms

After students become comfortable with the procedure, more sophisticated exercises can be structured to draw attention to specific word classes, pronominal references, connotation and denotation, and so on. For example, students might be asked to choose words with positive (or negative) connotations in the following maze cloze:

The young man wanted to make a good impression on his date. He described the restaurant they were heading for as being popular and (inexpensive/cheap). The decor was (simple/plain), and you could dress (casually/sloppily).

Maze gives students a chance to evaluate possibilities for contextual appropriateness without having to generate terms from their own memory. It is especially useful for students who might have word-finding problems or who might have limited-English-recall vocabularies.
**Synonym Cloze.** Synonym cloze passages use context to provide students with a support system. As in a regular cloze passage, words are deleted, but further cues are provided by placing a synonym or synonym phrase under the space. For example,

```
The boy petted his <puppy> before going <outside>
   little dog   outdoors
```

In this type of exercise, students have access to additional cues, which is especially useful for students who need to broaden their vocabularies by building stores of synonyms.

**Self-Selected Vocabulary from Context**

In addition to using context as a formal device, many teachers have students create personal word lists or word files from the new words they meet in context. In Chapter 4, we look at many different ways this process can be used with literature circles and other literature-based approaches. Students should be instructed to choose words that are important to understanding a selection or words that they find interesting. When recording the words, students should record the location and a bit of the context. Students can then proceed to use a reference book (see Chapter 6) or participate in an activity such as the vocabulary self-selection strategy (Haggard, 1982; Harmon et al., 2003). (See Teaching Idea File 2.3.)

The **Vocabulary Self-Selection Strategy (VSS)** is a group activity in which each student, and the teacher as well, is responsible for bringing two words to the attention of the group (for larger groups, reduce to one word or have students

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**TEACHING IDEA FILE 2.3**

**Vocabulary Self-Selection Strategy**

(Haggard, 1982)

1. Students bring two words to class that they have found in reading or listening, etc.
2. Each student presents words to the group.
3. The group votes on five to eight words to be learned for the week.
4. The teacher leads a discussion to clarify, elaborate, and extend word meanings. Discussion is critical.
5. Students enter their words into personal word logs and create some sort of memory and meaning aid (chart, diagram, picture, mnemonic, definition frame, etc.).
6. Students may create writing assignments, activities, games, and tests for practice.
Students are encouraged to choose words they have seen, heard in conversation or on TV, or come across in pleasure reading or in textbooks. Students place their words on the board, with spelling assistance offered by the teacher.

Each pupil, in turn, talks about his or her word, where it was encountered, what it might mean, and why he or she thinks it is important for the class to know. After all the words have been presented, the class narrows the list to a predetermined number (five to eight per week is typical). Once the final list is picked, students again talk about their words, and the teacher leads discussions to clarify, refine, or extend the definitions. Discussion is a critical part of the process. Students then enter the words in their vocabulary logs and practice using the words in activities ranging from doing crosswords to researching word histories to creating a class assessment. The cycle starts again the next week.

The process can be modified in many ways to suit a particular class. The teacher can ask students to focus on words in particular areas or ones that are related to a specific content under study. Because of the emphasis on explanation from context (telling where the word was found, what it means, why it is important to know), VSSS is especially useful for students learning English as a second language. In discussions, students can explore synonyms, word histories, and personal experiences. Because the teacher also brings words, teacher modeling takes place, which is helpful to students who need additional guidance. Students enjoy choosing their own words to learn, and they like the variety of words presented.

**Using Contextual Methods to Present New Vocabulary**

Besides helping students develop strategies for using context, teachers can also use contextual methods to present specific vocabulary or to help students create contexts to learn new words. The next two strategies can be used for prereading presentation of new vocabulary.

**C(2)QU**

Teachers can involve students in a process approach to using context at the same time they present specific vocabulary (Blachowicz, 1993). A process formulated in several middle-grade classrooms is C(2)QU (or See-Two-Cue-You, in homage to *Star Wars*!). As a mode of presenting new vocabulary, the purpose of C(2)QU is to present both definitional and contextual information about new words to students in a way that allows them to hypothesize about meaning, to articulate the cues that lead to the hypothesis, and to refine and use what they have learned with feedback from the group and from the teacher if necessary.

Prepare for the process by composing a SMART board, PowerPoint, or transparency slide on the words you wish to examine (see Figure 2.6 for an example with the word *stepmother*). The strategy has four steps:

- **C1**: Present the word in a broad but meaningful context, such as a word selected from a story or chapter. Ask students to form hypotheses about the word’s meaning; to give attributes, ideas, or associations; and to “think aloud” to explain to the group the sources of their hypotheses.
Problem-solve with Context

Learning to Problem-Solve with Context

### FIGURE 2.6  C(2)QU Example

**C1:** (First example in context)
My new stepmother moved into our house after the wedding.

**C2:** (Second example in context)
When my father married again, his new wife became my stepmother.

**Q:** (Question involving interpretation)
Can a person have a mother and a stepmother at the same time? (Open to multiple interpretations in the discussion. It depends on whether or not the father is a widower or divorced.)

**U:** (Teacher asks students to give examples of word use or give attributes)

- **C2:** Provide more explicit context with some definitional information. Ask students to reflect on their initial ideas and to reaffirm or refine them again in a “think-aloud” mode.
- **Q:** Ask a question that involves semantic interpretation of the word. At this point, you can also ask for a definition or give one if necessary. Discuss as needed with group members, using each other’s cues and explanations as more data.
- **U:** Ask students to use the word in a meaningful sentence. Go back into the C(2)QU loop as needed.

Words suitable for this process are any that appear in reading material in a context that provides some information for hypothesizing. Most productive are new labels for already-known concepts or partially known words for which the context adds a new twist or further rich information. C(2)QU is also a good process for cooperative reading groups where one role is that of “vocabulary director.” Teachers can model the process for the vocabulary directors and then let them choose words from a chapter for their group’s focus. They use the process with their groups and come back together to evaluate how the process worked. C(2)QU helps students develop a context-use process that involves rich discussion and self-monitoring. A summary of this technique is shown in Teaching Idea File 2.4.

**The Sentence Game**

A similar process can be made into a game for student guessing (after Gipe, 1979–1980, as interpreted in Barr & Johnson, 1997). Prepare a question and three-sentence context for each word that follows this pattern:

- **Question.** Uses the meaning of the word
- **Sentence 1.** A broad but meaningful context
- **Sentence 2.** Adds more detailed information
- **Sentence 3.** An explicit definition
For example, if you wanted students to learn the word *aeronaut*:

- **Question.** What is an aeronaut’s job?
- **Sentence 1.** The aeronaut was getting the hot air balloon ready for flying.
- **Sentence 2.** The aeronaut told her helpers to let go of the ropes so she could fly the hot air balloon.
- **Sentence 3.** An aeronaut is a person who flies a hot air balloon.

Student teams are shown the question first and shown Sentence 1. Any team that can correctly answer the question after this first clue wins 2 points. If the students need more help, the second sentence is shown. Correct responses after two clue sentences win 1 point. The definition is used for checking or for instruction if no group comes up with the right answer. For more difficult words, any number of sentences can be used with clues. Students often enjoy setting up a TV game show process for this game and can form teams to compose contexts as well.

A similar game is “Be a Mind Reader” (Cunningham & Hall, 2008), which is useful for vocabulary review with practice in using context.

**Weekly Vocabulary Review Game**

*Be a Mind Reader*

**Classroom activity time:** 5–10 minutes

**Organization:** whole class, teacher-directed
Materials: weekly vocabulary chart; set of prepared word “clues”; paper and pencil for each child

Procedure: Choose a “mystery” word from among the weekly vocabulary words. Prepare a set of five clues that, by process of elimination, reveal this one word. Have students number their papers from 1 to 5. Read each clue, writing or displaying it as it is read. Students write a word from the list that fits each clue and any preceding clues. When the fifth clue is revealed, all students should have written the “mystery” word. Hint: Students love this game: prepare clues for at least two or three words!

Example:

| Clue 1: “It’s a word on our chart.” |
| Clue 2: “It has two syllables.” |
| Clue 3: “It ends with the letter e.” |
| Clue 4: “It begins with a vowel.” |
| Clue 5: “It means to take for granted; to believe.” |

Rationale:

Students review the week’s words by considering their features and definitions in a game-like activity. Clues contain significant metalinguistic terms (syllable, vowel, prefix, root word, synonym, antonym), providing students with an opportunity to review and use these.

Extensions:

Each week, a team of students can be challenged to make the Mind Reader clues and to lead the activity.

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Create a Personal Context

Creating personal contexts helps students learn and remember new words. These contexts can take several forms. Written personal contexts can describe a word’s importance to a book, an event, or an individual. For example, for the word wardrobe, a student created the following in his word journal:

When I read The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, I imagined this really big closet with doors on both sides. There was a picture in my book, and it looked bigger than any closet in our house. When I was little, I used to like to make a cave in my closet and pretend it was my tent, with all the clothes hanging down. So I had a good feeling for that wardrobe. I saw the movie Shadowlands, which is about the author of the Narnia books, and they showed a wardrobe in his attic. I was surprised because the one in my imagination was so much bigger.
FIGURE 2.7  Student’s Use of Personal Visual Context to Remember the Word *Scabbard*

![Image of a cartoon character holding a scabbard]

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FIGURE 2.8  Cartoon Contexts

![Image of a cartoon with various scenes and text]

Illustration by David Rickert. Reprinted with permission.
Another student used personal visual contexts to help him establish and remember the meaning of the word scabbard (see Figure 2.7). ESL students often draw and label in two languages. These visual descriptions are powerful aids for memory and meaning.

**Cartoon Contexts.** David Rickert, an award-winning cartoonist and high school teacher from Hilliard Darby High School, creates Cartoon Contexts for content-area vocabulary (see Figure 2.8). He uses this cartoon to help students contextualize words sharing the roots and affixes bio, graph, ology, and others. Both reading and creating these contexts can help students cement their knowledge with both textual and visual contexts.

**Looking Back and Looking Ahead**

Because context is one of the most important aspects of all word learning in all types of classes, it was our first instructional focus. In this chapter, we have described several different ways in which context can aid vocabulary learning—from its use as a teacher presentation method to a process for developing metacognitive context-use strategies for students. In the next chapter, we look at the place of word learning in reading strategy instruction.

**Classroom Investigation and Book Club Questions**

1. Pick a vocabulary word or element and make your own Cartoon Context.
2. Go online and find one idea for context instruction for ELL students that you would like to try in your classroom.
3. Prepare a “Be a Mind Reader” activity and try it with an adult. Critique it.