

The Deliberate Teaching and



Deliberately teaching vocabulary is one of the least efficient ways of developing learners' vocabulary knowledge but nonetheless it is an important part of a well-balanced vocabulary program.

The main problem with vocabulary teaching is that only a few words and a small part of what is required to know a word can be dealt with at any one time. This limitation also applies to incidental learning from listening or reading, but it is much easier to arrange for large amounts of independent listening and reading than it is to arrange for large amounts of teaching. Teaching can effectively deal with only a small amount of information about a word at a time. The more complex the information is, the more likely the learners are to misinterpret it.

We need to see learning any particular word as being a cumulative process where knowledge is built up over a series of varied meetings with the word. At best, teaching can provide only one or two of these meetings. The other meetings involve deliberate study, meeting through meaning-focused input and output, and fluency development activities.

The positive effects of vocabulary teaching are that it can provide

help when learners feel it is most needed. This is particularly true for vocabulary teaching that occurs in the context of message-focused activities involving listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and where the teaching deals with items that learners see as being very relevant for the activity.

The first decision to make when teaching a word is to decide whether the word is worth spending time on or not. If the word is a low frequency word and is not a useful technical word and not one that is particularly useful for the learners, it should be dealt with as quickly as possible. Usually when words come up in the context of a reading or listening text, or if learners need a word or phrase when speaking or writing, they need quick help which does not interrupt the activity too much.

Ways of quickly giving attention to words

Often a teacher needs to give attention to a word without too much interruption to an activity like listening to a story that is going on. The small amount of research on such teaching indicates that it has a strong effect on vocabulary learning. There are several ways of doing this.

and Learning of Vocabulary

Paul Nation suggests strategies to get the most out of vocabulary teaching

Quickly give the meaning by

- 1 Using an L1 translation,
- 2 using a known L2 synonym or a simple definition in the L2,
- 3 Showing an object or picture,
- 4 Giving a quick demonstration,
- 5 Drawing a simple picture or diagram,
- 6 Breaking the word into parts and giving the meaning of the parts and the whole word (the word part strategy),
- 7 Giving several example sentences with the word in context to show the meaning,
- 8 Commenting on the underlying meaning of the word and other referents.

Draw attention to the form of the word by

- 1 Showing how the spelling of the word is like the spelling of known words,
- 2 Giving the stress pattern of the word and its pronunciation,
- 3 Showing the prefix, stem, and suffix that make up the word,
- 4 Getting the learners to repeat the pronunciation of the word,
- 5 Writing the word on the board,
- 6 Pointing out any spelling irregularity in the word.

Draw attention to the use of the word by

- 1 Quickly showing the grammatical pattern the word fits into (countable/uncountable, transitive/intransitive, etc.),
- 2 Giving a few collocates,
- 3 Mentioning any restrictions on the use of the word (formal, colloquial, impolite, only used in the United States, only used with children, old fashioned, technical, infrequent),
- 4 Giving a well known opposite, or a well known word describing the group or lexical set it fits into.

There are principles that can guide ways of quickly giving attention

- 1 Keep the teaching simple and clear. Don't give complicated explanations.
- 2 Relate the present teaching to past knowledge by showing a pattern or analogies.
- 3 Use both oral and written presentation - write it on the blackboard as well as explaining.
- 4 Give most attention to words that are already partly known.
- 5 Tell the learners if it is a high frequency word that is worth noting for future attention.
- 6 Don't bring in other unknown or poorly known related words like near synonyms, opposites, or members of the same lexical set.

Sometimes however a teacher may want to spend time on a word.

In general, time should be spent on high frequency words or words that fill a language need that the learners have.