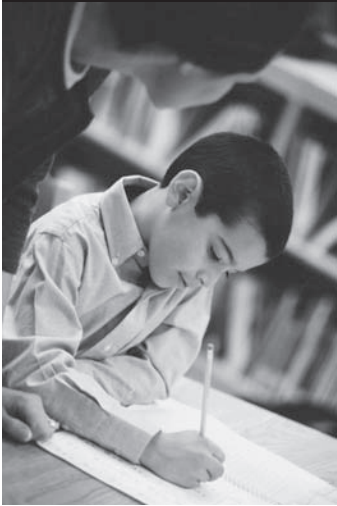


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Teaching Academic Vocabulary

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As colleagues, we need to have a united, sustained, and informed vision about how we're going to tackle this monster of academic language. It will take more than rhetoric. It means that on any given day, each teacher that an English Language Learner encounters must be prepared to teach vocabulary in a way that is viable, engages the student in the instruction, and gets him or her to use the vocabulary.

If we look at the big picture of comprehensive strategies for helping protracted English Language Learners build academic vocabulary, we can highlight several key points about what we know these students need.

■ **English Language Learners need to engage in fluent, wide reading.**

I strongly recommend that teachers use short, engaging, issue-based nonfiction readings. These readings will expose students to more academic vocabulary. You could read for a month in literature and come up with a pretty anemic toolkit of words that are valuable for academic purposes. I also recommend that students do more than one reading on the same topic. Too often, we give them just one exposure, then go on to something new. This is not a

This is Part 2 of a two-part brief about how to effectively select and teach academic vocabulary to protracted English Language Learners. It is based on a presentation made by Dr. Kinsella at the ELL Administrator Conference hosted by the Sonoma County Office of Education in April 2005. As part of its Aiming High initiative, SCOE is providing this brief to teachers throughout Sonoma County with a goal of helping them close the achievement gap for English Learners.

realistic pattern in terms of college or the workplace where narrow reading is common. Nor is it helpful in terms of retention. If they see the word “impact” in three separate readings, it will be a word that enters their lexicon.

- **English Language Learners need to have direct scaffolded instruction of important words.** Students do not acquire academic language simply by listening to literate presentations by teachers. Vulnerable second language learners need direct, recognizable, and accountable instruction of high-utility vocabulary. Since not all words require instructional primacy, teachers must have a pedagogically defensible justification for why they select certain words. Some words are taught so students can comprehend big concepts, while others are useful for general academic purposes.
- **English Language Learners need to be taught more word knowledge, parts of speech, and word usage.** They have to understand how words work and should be studying and visualizing words.
- **English Language Learners need structured opportunities to use the new academic vocabulary every day.** This is part of the accountability that will ensure students are actually using the new vocabulary. I see teachers with lesson plans describing how they’re going to teach a standard by talking about this and doing that. I ask them, “At what moment will you interrupt your instruction? If you’re asking a question, how will you make sure that everyone responds? What opportunities have you built in for students to actually use the vocabulary?” Students will not develop a powerful expressive academic

vocabulary just from listening to a discussion. They develop it by really being taught and by being put in situations where they have to use the words.

What is effective academic vocabulary instruction?

An instructional sequence for pre-teaching important new words should include steps that not only *convey the meaning* of the word, but also *check for understanding* to see that students actually grasp the meaning. It’s important that the instructional sequence for teaching each word be consistent. This will make it easier for students to follow.

The example of academic vocabulary instruction presented below shows how important it is for a teacher to come to class prepared to teach the words. In this example, the class has been given a note-taking scaffold that they refer to during the instruction.

Instructor: The next word I’m going to teach you is “lexicon.” The word is on your vocabulary note-taking sheet. Lexicon is a noun, a concrete word, something a person could have. Here is an example of a sentence using the word lexicon: We are working on developing your academic English lexicon through reading and instruction.

Listen to me say it first: lex’ i con. Now, let’s all say it together, slowly and in parts.

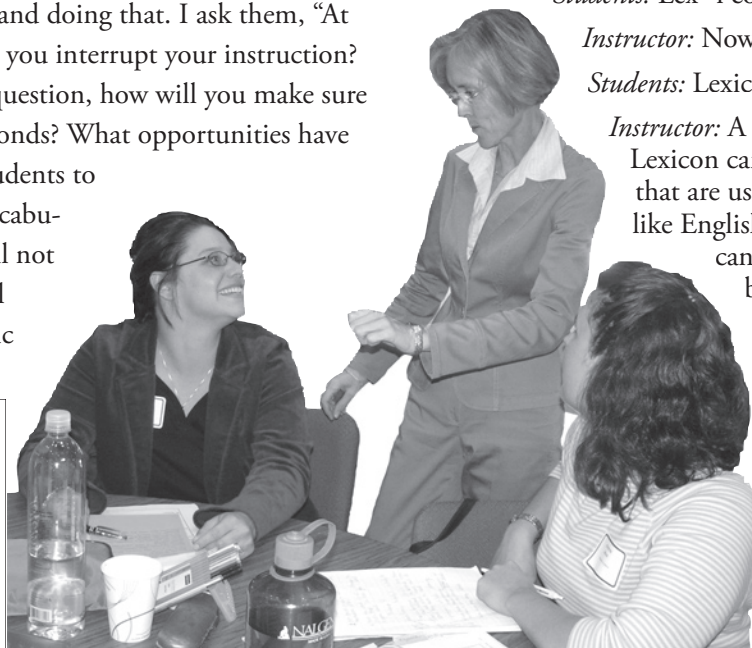
Students: Lex’ i con.

Instructor: Now let’s say it quickly.

Students: Lexicon.

Instructor: A lexicon is like a dictionary. Lexicon can refer to different words that are used in a particular language like English or Spanish. Or a lexicon can refer to words used by people in a certain profession, like doctors or teachers. A doctor’s lexicon may include terms like disease, surgery, patients, etc.

If you want to order a special coffee drink, you need to know the difference between



At a training on vocabulary instruction in mixed-ability classrooms, Kate Kinsella (center) works with Mountain Shadows Middle School teachers Amy Reibli and Christina Grace.

a latté and cappuccino because these are important terms in the coffee-maker's _____.

Students: Lexicon.

Instructor: Based on your interactions with skateboarders, would you say they have a lexicon? Thumbs up or down. What are some terms in the skateboarder's lexicon?

Students give examples, including "grinding."

Instructor: "Grinding" may be a word in the lexicon of both the skateboarder and coffee-maker, but they mean quite different things. So the same word can be in the lexicon of different groups of people.

need to hear the word repeated several times. Break the word into parts on the board to ensure that they hear each syllable.

- **Ask students to repeat the word.** If it's a long word, it's important to have them say it slowly, pronouncing each syllable. This increases the odds that when they read it, they will say each syllable. Repeat it many times, sometimes slowly and sometimes quickly.
- **Clarify the part of speech.** Is it a thing, an action, or a descriptive word? Give an example in a sentence.

■ **Give synonyms and explanations.** Make sure the synonyms are words the students are familiar with.

■ **Provide a visual non-linguistic representation** or an illustrative sentence to help them develop a strong mental model.

■ **Rephrase the explanation,** asking students to fill in the blank and say the word again. This increases

the chances that they will have an accurate auditory imprint and develop muscle memory. Saying the word when they encounter it will increase the odds that they can decode it and that it will become a sight word for them.

- **Assess students' comprehension of the word.** Look for evidence that the students are thinking and following the instructional sequence. Ask for quick formative assessments—like thumbs up, thumbs down—or ask students to generate their own examples.

Of course, not every word needs to be taught at this level of intensity. It's important for teachers to make

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Sample Note-Taking Scaffold for Students

Students fill in the blanks as the teacher teaches the words

Term	Synonym/Explanation	Example/Image
symptom, n.	SYN: _____, indication DEF: A sign or physical condition that shows you may have a certain _____	Common symptoms of the flu are _____, body aches, and decreased _____
prevalent, adj. prevalence, n.	SYN: _____ DEF: Common at a particular time or in a particular _____	Chicken pox is more prevalent among _____ The prevalence of _____ due to smoking among _____ has increased in recent years.

Using a complete sentence, give me one reason why you believe that skateboarders do or do not have an identifiable lexicon.

Students respond.

This example showcases a number of strategies for effective vocabulary instruction. When providing vocabulary instruction, teachers should:

- **Give students the opportunity to see the word being taught** by writing it on the board or including it as part of a printed handout.
- **Pronounce the word.** Say it with good diction so students get a clear auditory imprint. If the majority of the students are English Language Learners, they

Local example: Kawana School

Developing academic vocabulary in mathematics using Thinking Maps

Kawana School in the Bellevue Union district has been using a professional development model known as Lesson Study for several years now. Through Lesson Study, teachers are working together to write, study, teach, revise, and re-teach mathematics lessons. Their schoolwide goal is to deliver instruction that gives students the confidence and academic language skills to explain their mathematical thinking.

With a student population that includes 72% English Learners, Kawana's teachers must incorporate effective vocabulary instruction across the curriculum. One strategy they're using to support vocabulary learning is Thinking Maps. These non-linguistic representations help students organize and graphically display their thoughts. They ease some of the language demands for English Learners while still supporting vocabulary development and subject-specific learning.

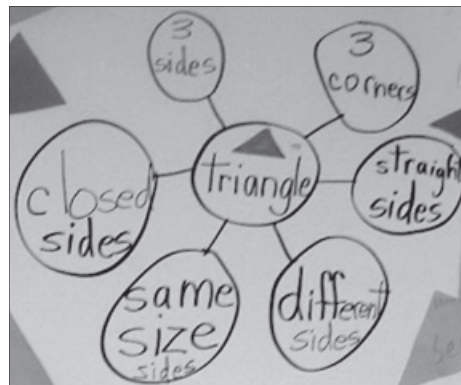
What follows is a description of a math unit, *Shapes of Faces*, developed by first-grade teachers Suzanne Bethel, Margaret Close, Maureen Minto, and Kristi Slayback. The unit includes 13 lessons, referenced to the Houghton Mifflin Math text. The lessons incorporate a variety of Thinking Maps, which were used to help the students identify, name, and understand basic geometric shapes.

Shapes of Faces: A First-Grade Mathematics Unit

This lesson series supports first-grade mathematics content standard 2.2, which states that students should learn to “classify familiar plane and solid objects by attributes . . . and explain which attributes are being used for classification.” The students are already able to recognize and name simple shapes—circle, square, triangle. Now, they are building on that knowledge to learn mathematics vocabulary like *corner*, *side*, *face*, *length*, *edge*, *hexagon*, *cube*, *pyramid*, and *prism*.

The teachers start the unit by introducing students to a variety of two-dimensional shapes. They show students examples of each shape, discuss its attributes, and help students recognize the shape on the *faces* of three-dimensional objects. To learn more about each shape, students go on a “shape hunt” in the classroom, cut shapes out of paper, and create Circle Maps about the shapes.

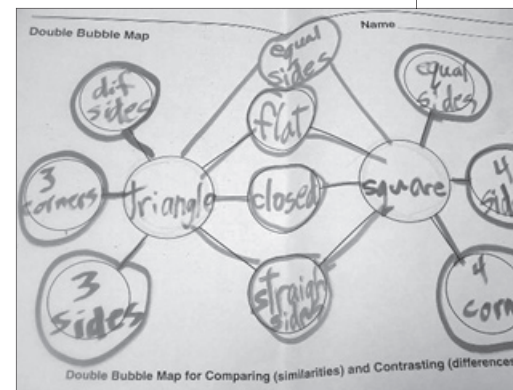
One of the students' Circle Maps



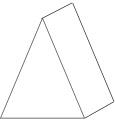
Once the students are able to identify and define the shapes, they're asked to compare the similarities and differences of the shapes. They use Double-Bubble Maps to make the comparisons. New vocabulary words help them compare the number of *corners* and *sides* that each figure has.

Further along in the unit, the students begin exploring three-dimensional shapes. They trace the faces of solids—cube, rectangular prism, square pyramid, triangular prism, and cylinder—and make a “recipe” to describe the shapes that make up the faces of the solids. For example, a triangular prism has two triangular faces and three rectangular faces.

Toward the end of the unit, students actually learn to build three-dimensional shapes. Flat shapes called *nets* are introduced. These are two-dimensional patterns that, when folded, form three-dimensional shapes, much like making a box from a flattened piece of cardboard. Teachers show students a net for a cube and ask them to predict what solid it will form. Students refer to the Thinking Maps posted around the room to respond to the teacher's question. As illustrated in the following student responses, the students are effectively using the vocabulary that was at the core of this lesson.

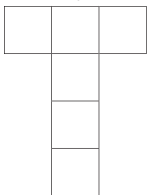


Double-Bubble Map comparing triangles & squares



Triangular prism

The net of a cube



“It’s a cube, because when you put this part over here and this up, it makes a cube.” (The student shows how the net would be folded.)

“A cube because it has only squares on it.”

“It has six squares.”

“It has six sides.”

Cognates: A tool for building academic language

There are thousands of English words that have a related word in Spanish. With a similar meaning, spelling, and pronunciation, these words—called cognates—can be a bridge to the English language for Spanish-speaking students.

Teaching students about English/Spanish cognates can significantly increase the number of words in their vocabulary and provide skills that help them infer meaning in newly encountered words. Students can be taught specific cognates—*family* and *familia*—and they can learn general rules about how to recognize cognates in both written and spoken contexts. Older students can explore more sophisticated cognates, including ones that have multiple meanings.

When teaching students about cognates:

- State the English word and the Spanish cognate.
- Have students say the word in both English and Spanish.
- Have students look at the words and discuss how they are alike and how they are different. Look at endings, roots, and affixes across the languages.
- Verify the meaning of the word in English and Spanish. Is the meaning the same? Is it the same

“It is a cube because a cube has six faces and this has six faces.”

Not all the students are convinced that the net will fold to form a cube. Using an overhead projector, students outline the faces and count the squares, then prove their theory by folding and taping the net into a cube. They work with other nets and other shapes, sharing their findings with the class by using sentence frames provided by the teacher.

Frame: My solid has ____ _____.

Response: My solid has 6 squares.

Frame: My ____ has ____ _____ and ____ _____.

Response: My cube has 6 faces and 12 edges.

Frame: This net has _____ faces and can be folded into a _____.

Response: This net has square faces and can be folded into a cube. ♦

in all contexts?
How is the word used across the languages?

One word of caution about cognates—not all words that look or sound like cognates actually are. “False cognates” are words that have similar spelling and pronunciation, but don’t share the same meaning. For example, *embarazada* (which means pregnant) is a false cognate of *embarrassed*. When students learn about cognates, it’s important to point out false cognates as well. ♦

What the research says

Research has shown that English Learners who are aware of cognates have higher levels of English reading comprehension than do EL students who are not aware of these connections. (Hiebert and Kamil, 2004)

It’s estimated that there are 10,000 to 15,000 English/Spanish cognates and that cognates comprise 30 to 50 percent of an educated person’s active vocabulary. (Nash, 1997)

Recognizing Cognates: Nouns

- **English nouns ending in *-or* or *-al* are very often identical in Spanish**
actor / actor – capital / capital
- **Many English nouns ending with *-ist* can be converted to Spanish by adding *-a***
artist / artista – dentist / dentista
- **Very often, *-ism* endings can be replaced with *-ismo* to translate words into Spanish**
idealism / idealismo – tourism / turismo
- **Very often, *-ance* and *-ence* endings can be replaced with *-ancia* or *-encia***
distance / distancia – intelligence / inteligencia
- **Very often, *-ty* endings can be replaced with *-dad* to translate words into Spanish**
electricity / electricidad – variety / variedad

More information about cognates will be on the Framework for Intervention CD, which will be available this spring.

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a distinction between a word that needs only a brief description and one that must be learned and retained as part of the students' academic vocabulary. This is the first step in a teacher's preparation for teaching vocabulary associated with a particular reading or unit.*

Once you have identified the words you intend to teach, you can begin your lesson by giving students a Vocabulary Knowledge Rating Sheet (see sample below). Ask them to assess their level of familiarity with the words you plan to teach that day. Add a few words to the list each day. Put the words on the board and have students copy them. Ask them to assess themselves after instruction as well.

Using new vocabulary in structured classroom discussions

One thing I don't see happening in classrooms is daily accountability for students to use the new vocabulary they have acquired. Our classrooms are typically the only context students have to utilize a more formal and academic variety of English. English Language Learners especially need us to provide daily

structured and accountable activities that guide their hearing, speaking, reading, and writing of academic English. Simply encouraging students to use new vocabulary does not go far with most learners.

Before students actually start using a word, it's important that they understand its syntax. If there is a class discussion with student-generated examples, the teacher should be clear which examples are accurate so students don't learn inappropriate word usage. Many long-term English Language Learners and recent immigrants have been chronically exposed to inaccurate English or the misuse of words without correction. These errors become fossilized and are difficult to unlearn. It takes a really conscious process to replace inaccurate syntax that has been previously reinforced. It helps if students are exposed to word families. Teaching the words "require" and "requirement" together will help students understand correct word usage.

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Over the course of a unit, teachers should determine when and how they will engage students in speaking and writing academic words. Before asking students to participate in a whole-class discussion, I recommend factoring in weekly opportunities for them to write responses to carefully constructed questions.

Students are not likely to generate accurate academic responses using sophisticated syntax and vocabulary without some coaching. We can scaffold this process by providing two or three sentence-starters to frame their response in academic

* *The Aiming High publication distributed in October included an overview of teacher preparation for vocabulary instruction and information about how to select the words to teach.*

Vocabulary Knowledge Rating Sheet

High Knowledge

4 = I could easily teach it to the group.

3 = I think I know what it means.

Low Knowledge

2 = I have seen it or heard it before.

1 = I have no idea what it means.

Word	What I think it means before instruction	My rating before instruction	My rating after instruction
factory, n.			
poverty, n.			
wage, n.			
to inform, v.			
information, n.			

discourse. For example, if students are exploring the effects of a fast-food diet on adolescent development, the teacher could introduce relevant academic terms—impact, health hazard, consume—and offer these two sentence-starters to elicit thoughtful and complete statements:

One serious impact of a regular fast-food diet on adolescent health is ...

Consuming fast food regularly has numerous health hazards, including ...

Students should also be taught communicative strategies to engage in academic discussions in the classroom. Academic discussions require a more formal style of language than students are accustomed to, so certain language functions must be explicitly taught. For example, if students are reporting what a classmate told them during a small group exercise, ask them to use a verb other than “said.” They can say, “My partner shared with me” or “So-and-so pointed out to me.” These are verbs they’ll need when they report on someone’s ideas in academic writing or in the workplace.

Even if students *are* using academic language in class discussions, teachers need to create a context for them to *listen* to each other. This is also part of their accountability for learning. Two techniques that can help with this are described below.

- Have the students write down an answer first, then give them a sentence-starter. If they get the sentence-starter first, they’ll be preoccupied with writing one perfect sentence rather than brainstorming and getting their thoughts down.
- If you give the sentence-starter and go around the room to have students share examples, by the time you come to the sixth person, his or her example may already have been mentioned. That student shouldn’t get off the hook just by saying, “Everyone took my ideas.” The student can explain how his/her idea is similar or related to what another student has reported by saying, “My idea is similar to Ramon’s. I also think that”

Language Strategies for Active Classroom Participation

<p>Expressing an opinion I think/believe that... It seems to me that... In my opinion...</p>	<p>Paraphrasing So you are saying that... In other words, you think... What I hear you saying is...</p>
<p>Asking for clarification What do you mean? Will you explain that again? I have a question about that.</p>	<p>Offering a suggestion Maybe we could... What if we... Here’s something to try.</p>
<p>Individual reporting ___ shared with me that... ___ pointed out to me that... ___ indicated that...</p>	<p>Disagreeing I don’t agree with you because... I got a different answer than you. I see it another way.</p>

The value of generative assessments

Another way to get students to learn and interact with academic words is to create more generative assessments. Unlike short-answer or multiple-choice assessments, generative assessments require profound understanding of the word and its creative application.

For example, if you teach the words “perspective” and “priority” one day and the words “comparison” and “impact” a few days later, you can ask students to take out their notebooks at the beginning of class and do two things: 1) complete the template sentences on the board using the appropriate word, and 2) discuss their sentences with a partner to see if their use of the words makes sense.

I don’t tell my students to put the words in an original sentence because I know they learn best from templates. They are not memorizing my sentences. They are using critical thinking to work with the templates. It’s an opportunity for them to review, rehearse, and think about the words.

If you’ve just taught seven words, have a couple of them on the board the next day in incomplete sentences. After students complete the sentences and explain them to their partners, go around the room or call on individuals to share.

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The strategies outlined here are geared to maximize English Language Learners' exposure to and mastery of the academic vocabulary they'll need to be successful at the high school and college levels. Providing the necessary academic language foundation for under-

Students do not acquire academic language simply by listening to literate presentations by teachers.

prepared students is the work of *all* teachers—at all grade levels and in all subjects. It is a shared responsibility that, when worked at consistently and collaboratively, is certain to help narrow the language divide among our students. ♦

- ▼ *Our next Aiming High Resource will highlight a focused approach to English Language Development, based on a presentation by Susana Dutro.*

Para-educators and academic vocabulary instruction

Recognizing the important role para-educators play in schools with second language learners, SCOE hosts an annual professional development institute for K-12 para-educators who work with English Learners. This year's **Para-Educator Institute** will provide four full days of training—December 5-6, 2005 and February 7-8, 2006—and highlight practical information about what works in the classroom, focusing in particular on vocabulary and math.

One featured presenter at the December meetings is herself a local para-educator. Glorianne Naughton is an EL assistant at John Reed School in Rohnert Park. She will discuss strategies for a vocabulary lesson from the para-professional's perspective, using a literature selection from Houghton Mifflin Reading called *A Famous Bus Ride*. She'll guide participants through a process for developing learning activities that engage students in thinking about new words by using their own life experiences.

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EL assistant Glorianne Naughton works with a student at John Reed School.

The strategies highlighted by Naughton will include: talking about words, explaining words in a student-friendly manner, helping students get meaning from text, making word associations, and completing ideas.

This vocabulary-focused presentation is just one part of the four-day institute, which has been offered in Sonoma County for 15 years now. It's not too late for the para-professionals at your school to enroll in the training and broaden their ability to support effective academic vocabulary instruction. Registration is available online at www.scoe.org/training or by calling SCOE's ELL Services department at (707) 522-3151. ♦