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**Impact of Direct Vocabulary Instruction**

- Research shows a student in the **50th percentile** in terms of ability to comprehend the subject matter taught in school, with no direct vocabulary instruction, scores around the **50th percentile**.
- The same student, after specific content-area terms have been taught in a specific way, raises his/her comprehension ability to the **83rd percentile**.

Stahl and Fairbanks, 1986

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The mainspring of comprehension is prior knowledge—the stuff readers already know that enables them to create understanding as they read.

Willingham, 2009

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Background knowledge manifests itself as vocabulary knowledge. Words are labels for our knowledge packets; the more words we have, the more packets of knowledge, the more background knowledge.

Marzano, 2004

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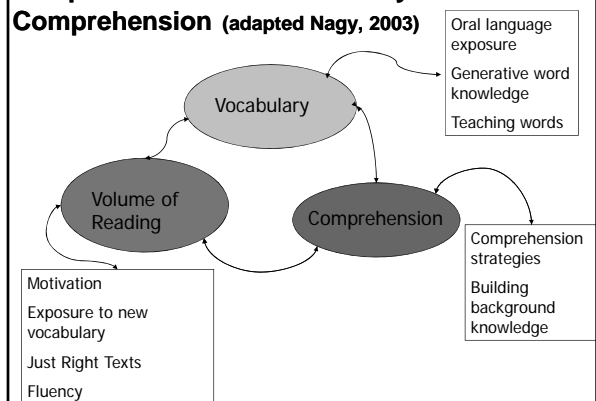
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### Reciprocal Model of Vocabulary and Comprehension (adapted Nagy, 2003)



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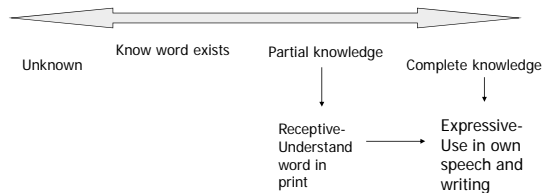
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### What does it mean to know a word?



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## Using Your Background Knowledge to Comprehend

"The Obama administration will announce a new policy Wednesday making it much more difficult for the government to claim that it is protecting state secrets when it hides details of sensitive national security strategies such as rendition and warrantless eavesdropping, according to two senior Justice Department officials."



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## Vocabulary Instruction

Instruction must:

- Start early and be long term
- Include increased exposure to oral language and wide reading
- Increase generative vocabulary as well as specific words
- Be integrated into a rich literacy and content curriculum
- Include academic vocabulary tied to conceptual understanding

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## Academic vocabulary

- Tier 1
  - Words already in children's vocabulary-rarely is instruction needed (baby, walk)
- Tier 2
  - Used frequently by mature language users. More precise way to refer to ideas already known (infant, amble)
- Tier 3
  - Limited to specific content areas. May stand for deeper concept knowledge (precipitation, peninsula)

Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002

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| <b>Choosing Words</b> |   |                |
|-----------------------|---|----------------|
| Word type             | Rationale   | Example        |
| Comprehension         | Essential to understanding a selection or critical to a unit of study | rebel          |
| Specific Academic     | Important concept in that content area                                | habitat        |
| General Academic      | Causes trouble for students lacking school experience                 | in contrast to |
| Generative            | Lead to further word study (e.g. affixes, roots)                      | transportation |

Adapted from Blachowicz, Fisher, & Watts-Taffe, 2005

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**When choosing words**

Think about:

- Is the word critical to understanding?
- Is the word useful?
- Will the word expand background knowledge/conceptual knowledge?

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*The research and theory strongly suggest that teaching vocabulary is synonymous with teaching background knowledge—WHEN done effectively.*

*Building Background Knowledge, Marzano & Pickering, 2005; presented by McGarvey, Marzano & Associates, 2008*

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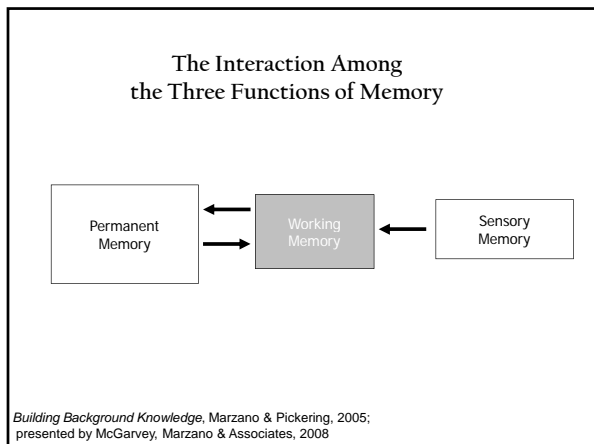
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**Marzano: Keys to Effective Vocabulary Instruction and Development**

- Effective vocabulary instruction does not rely on definitions
- Students must represent their knowledge of words in linguistic and nonlinguistic ways
- Effective vocabulary instruction involves the gradual shaping of word meanings through multiple exposures
- Teaching word parts enhances students' understanding of terms

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**Marzano continued...**

- Different types of words require different types of instruction
- Students should discuss the terms they are learning
- Students should play with words
- Instruction should focus on terms that have a high probability of enhancing academic success

Building Background Knowledge, Marzano & Pickering, 2005;  
presented by McGarvey, Marzano & Associates, 2008

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| <b>Marzano's Six-Step Process</b> |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
|                                   | Description or explanation of term                    |
|                                   | Restate the description in student's own words        |
|                                   | Construct a picture or graphic representation of term |
|                                   | Engage in activities to add knowledge of the term     |
|                                   | Discuss terms with other students                     |
|                                   | Apply terms in learning games                         |

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**Step 1: Provide a description, explanation, or example of the new term**

- Build on experiences
- Tell story that uses term
- Video or computer image
- Current events
- Describe your own mental image of term

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**Step 2: Students restate the description or explanation in their own words**

- Critical to be in their own words
- Students will have multiple opportunities to deepen and refine understanding
- Students may write their descriptions or explanations in vocabulary notebooks

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**Step 3: Students construct a non-linguistic representation of the term or phrase**

- Students may need lots of modeling, especially at first
- Approaches may include:
  - Draw the actual thing
  - Draw a symbol
  - Draw an example
  - Represent the term using graphics
  - Dramatize the term

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**Research on Imagery as Elaboration**

Students who used imagery to learn vocabulary, on average, performed:

|              |                                     |   |
|--------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| # of studies |                                     |   |
| 6            | 37 percentile points higher than... | ...students who kept repeating definitions.         |
| 4            | 21 percentile points higher than... | ...students who were using the terms in a sentence. |

Building Background Knowledge, Marzano & Pickering, 2005; presented by McGarvey, Marzano & Associates, 2008

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**Step 4: Activities that help students add to their knowledge of the terms**

- Make associations
- Compare terms
- Classify terms
- Solve analogies
- Create metaphors
- Identify relationships

\*create opportunities to add to, revise, or revise initial descriptions or representations

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### Teaching word relationships

- Different meanings of one word
- Synonyms
- Antonyms

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### Step 5: Discuss terms with other students

- Partner, small group, whole group
- Share non-linguistic representations
- Share new understandings
- Revise definitions and representations

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### Step 6: Involve students periodically in games that allow them to play with terms

- Vocabulary Charades
- Name That Category (think *\$25,000 Pyramid*)
- Draw Me (think *Pictionary*)
- Jeopardy
- Talk a Mile a Minute (think *Catch Phrase*)

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### What About ELLs?

- Does the child understand the concept but lack the English word for it? Or does the child not understand the concept?
- Though learning tier 1 words (labels) is certainly important, this does not mean that ELLs should not receive systematic instruction in academic vocabulary as well.

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### Consider narrow reading

- "Narrow reading in a theme or single topic increases readers' background knowledge and provides more context for new vocabulary—both of which boost comprehension."

(Hadaway, 2009)

- Example: Plant study
  - *How a Seed Grows* by Helene J. Jordan
  - *Planting a Rainbow* by Lois Ehlert
  - *This Year's Garden* by Cynthia Rylant
  - *From Seed to Plant* by Gail Gibbons
  - *Jack's Garden* by Henry Cole
  - *How Plants Grow* by Time for Kids
  - *A Tree is Growing* by Arthur Dorros
  - *Sunflower* by Miela Ford

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### Marzano's 6 Steps: Modifications for ELLs

- In step one...
  - Find a way to have the term explained in the students' native language and/or pair students with peers who speak at least some English
  - Use non-linguistic representations in teaching the term

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**Marzano's 6 Steps:  
Modifications for ELLs**

- In all steps...
  - Allow/encourage students to discuss the terms in their native language
  - Allow students to complete written explanations in their native language—or at least in their native language to supplement their English explanations
  - Have students work in pairs or triads

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**Some fun books that focus on content**

- Alphabet books
- *Vote* by Eileen Christelow
- *Let's Go Rock Collecting* by Roma Gans
- Authors
  - *Jerry Pallotta*
  - *Gail Gibbons*
  - *Jim Arnosky*
  - *Melvin and Gilda Berger*

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Knowledge of things and knowledge of the words for them grow together. If you do not know the words, you can hardly know the thing.



Henry Hazlitt

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**Resources**

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