

Excerpt—pages 68-80

<https://www.heinemann.com/products/e04920.aspx>

Cobb, C. and Blachowicz, C. 2014. *No More "Look Up The List" Vocabulary Instruction*, 6th ed. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

## **"And Now for Something Completely Different": Engaging Review**

Something that crosses all the components of a comprehensive approach is keeping words visible and involving students in engaging and pleasurable review. In our summative qualitative research on our four years of work with teachers and students (Blachowicz, Bates, and Ciepły 2013) and in our coaching development work (Blachowicz and Cobb 2007), one aspect of our process that was singled out by both teachers and students as valuable and important was recording and review.

### *Semantic Word Walls*

Keeping words visible in the classroom makes a vital contribution to developing both word knowledge and word consciousness. That's why we see so many words walls as we visit classrooms around the country. But *having* a word wall and *using* a word wall can be entirely different things (Harmon et al. 2009).

We discussed the various research bases for repetition and word choice in Section 2. MCVIP teachers review between eight and fourteen word wall words a week as "everybody words"—all students are responsible for being able to use them in writing and discussion. Though there was some grumbling when this policy was introduced, both teachers and students now agree that this ritual is important to their word consciousness. Most teachers use some form of tally board, either with or without a point system, as a means for students to report instances of seeing, hearing, or using the week's focus words.

### *Be a Mind Reader*

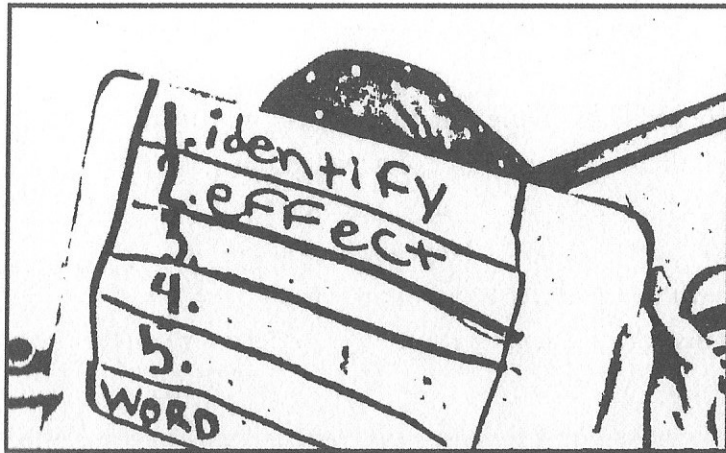
To review words, you can choose from among a number of quick and playful activities (Be a Mind Reader, Connect Two, Hot Seat, and others). Be a Mind Reader (Cunningham 2008) is a favorite. It takes about five minutes to prepare and five minutes to carry out in the classroom. Choose a "mystery" word from among the weekly vocabulary words and prepare a set of five clues that, by process of elimination, will reveal the word. Have students number their papers from 1 to 5. Read each clue, writing or displaying it as you do so. Students write a word from the list that fits each clue and the preceding clues. When the fifth clue is revealed, all students should be able to solve the "mystery" word.

The weekly word review chart in Kelly's third-grade classroom displays these words:

tissue	reveal	assembly	committee
exchange	assume	static	enthusiasm
council	defeated	identify	effect

She asks students to take out their whiteboards and number from 1 to 5 (see Figure 3–15).

**Figure 3-15** Be a Mind Reader Whiteboard



Then they listen to Kelly's five clues in an attempt to determine the mystery word Kelly is thinking of:

Clue 1: [this should always be the first clue]: "It's a word on our chart."

Clue 2: "It's a noun."

Clue 3: "It has more than two syllables."

Clue 4: "It's related to the word *energy*."

Clue 5: "If you back our team, the Thunderbirds, you have plenty of this."

[Answer: *enthusiasm*]

Games like this allow students to review the week's words, their features and definitions, in a playful way. The clues often contain significant metalinguistic terms (*syllable, vowel, prefix, root word, synonym, antonym*), thus giving students another opportunity to review and use these words. After students are familiar with the process, student teams can be challenged to create the mind-reader clues and lead the activity. (Students love this and other word games, so always prepare three or four for the weekly review or those other 3 x 5 moments!)

Students became so attuned to the words that they often blurt out, "That's one of our words," when they came across them during class or even on standardized tests. To encourage this kind of paying attention while minimizing interruptions, you can ask students to use the V (for vocabulary) hand sign more commonly known as "V for victory," whenever they notice a word they've studied.

Our classroom observations prove that word consciousness is flowering. Several teachers have told us that their students remind them that Friday is almost over and they haven't yet had their vocabulary review. One teacher being so reminded turned around to find the weekly chart and, turning back, discovered students lined up, word-bearing sticky notes in hand, ready to talk about the words they had seen, heard, and used that week. Weekly review usually turns out to be a surprising hit with teachers and students alike and a great help in making students word-conscious learners.

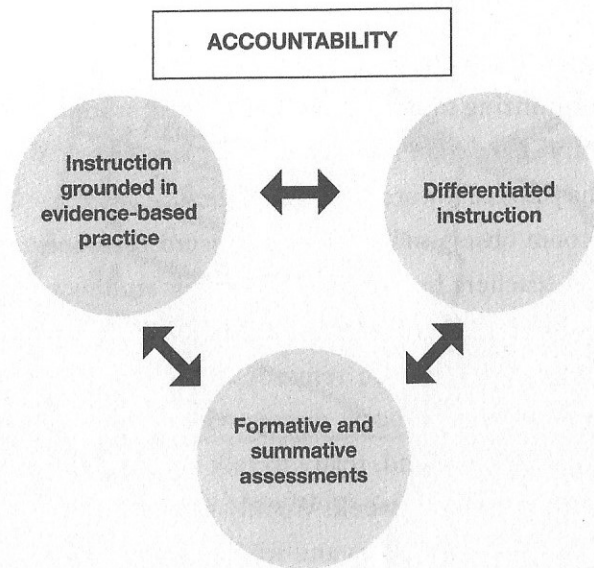
## **Being Accountable**

As we related in Section 1, vocabulary assessment is an ongoing issue for teachers. However, we believe that vocabulary assessment must be situated within the larger picture of accountability. Figure 3-16 is a graphic representation of the three interactive components of accountability that we feel are essential for building an effective program of vocabulary instruction. The three components include evidence-based instructional practice, differentiated instruction, and both formative and summative assessments.

### *Components of Accountability*

Providing instruction that is grounded in evidence and best practice ensures that you take responsibility for your teaching and for students' learning. Differentiating your instruction allows you to meet the needs of all students, including English language learners and at-risk

**Figure 3-16** The Three Components of Accountability



students. Establishing formative and summative measures that accurately show student growth in vocabulary knowledge lets you share this growth with both students and parents. It's important to remember that these components are flexible and interactive. Each component relies on the others to create a system of instruction that meets the needs of all students.

### *Defining the Role of Assessment*

Assessment is one component of accountability. Fundamentally, assessment provides information you need to help students. Formative assessment is sometimes viewed as assessment for learning. Regular and engaging review, as used by teachers in the MCVIP study to ensure student accountability (see Section 2), is a type of formative assessment. Students are able to “show what they know” through writing and oral presentations. The teachers can then use this information to determine the next steps for instruction or plan for additional small-group instruction.

Summative assessment is sometimes referred to as “assessment of learning.” Summative assessment is used at the conclusion of a unit to determine whether your students have reached the expected levels of proficiency. It can be used in connection with grading and reporting. Rubrics assessing personal word books or content dictionaries provide an example of meaningful summative assessment that can be used for reporting purposes.

Assessments must be useful for both you and your students. Students need to understand the expectations for learning as well as the criteria you will use to judge successful achievement. Assessment should not be a guessing game you and your students play. Assessment should also be followed by feedback and corrective instruction. Later in this section we will share examples of both formative and summative assessments of vocabulary knowledge. In every case, assessment, whether it is formative or summative, should not mark the end of learning but rather be a checkpoint for the level of learning as well as a guide to what needs to happen next.

### *Evaluating Your System of Accountability*

In Section 2, Camille provided a wealth of information on instruction that is grounded in research and best practice. Earlier in this section, we provided strategies that allow for differentiation. The Flood, Fast, Focus framework supports highly effective vocabulary instruction. Implementing it requires planning and commitment, along with accountability. Planning ensures that your work is both intentional and purposeful. Commitment enables you to honor your pledge to effect change. Accountability provides the data you need to monitor, measure, and make informed decisions regarding your instruction and your students' learning. As you begin planning and make the commitment to change, consider these questions to provide data for accountability.

**For background on why assessment is important**

see Section 2, page 40

- What research and evidence am I using to ground my instruction?
- How do I use instructional strategies to differentiate instruction?
- Is both formative and summative assessment part of my instructional planning?

While it is certainly possible to develop a plan on your own, doing so with one or more “critical friends” has many benefits. Dialogues with other educators about teaching and learning vocabulary stimulate professional growth. Grappling with issues related to selecting words, promoting student independence, finding time for vocabulary instruction in the classroom day, and assessing student learning are less daunting when colleagues share their knowledge and expertise. Using the checklist in Figure 3–2 to rate your school’s vocabulary environment is the first step in the planning process.

Deciding on which words to teach, determining available resources, and establishing schedules for vocabulary instruction can also be a collaborative effort. A planning grid like the one in Figure 3–17 will help you get ready by specifying the words you have selected and the methods of instruction you have chosen.

As you begin to implement the framework, collaborative celebrations of successes and responses to challenges can help you keep on track. Working in a supportive environment strengthens your commitment to continue. Hearing about what works in other classrooms gives you ideas to incorporate into your own instruction. Sharing struggles and frustrations with colleagues creates a support system that helps you examine and improve your practice. Now let’s move on to some strategies for formative and summative vocabulary assessments.

### Assessment Strategies

Teacher-constructed, criterion-referenced assessments (Bean and Swan Dagen 2006) are an alternative to standardized vocabulary tests. These criterion-referenced assessments include a variety of formats—

**Figure 3–17** Planning Grid for Word Selection and Instruction

**CHOOSING WORDS and PLANNING INSTRUCTION—FAST, FOCUS, FLOOD**

Unit Name \_\_\_\_\_ Topic/Big Idea \_\_\_\_\_

<b>STUDENT STRATEGY words:</b> <i>words students will figure out using the context or with other strategies; teacher scaffolding as needed</i>	<b>ESSENTIAL FOR UNDERSTANDING</b>	<b>NICE TO KNOW</b>
<b>FAST words:</b> <i>key vocabulary that the teacher teaches using Fast synonym, Teaching Individual Words (TIW) model, or other brief instruction</i>		
<b>FOCUS words:</b> <i>key vocabulary for which teacher uses an “AEIOU” “all the way through” method with vocabulary frame to support students</i>		
<b>FLOOD words:</b> <i>additional vocabulary for word wall, wordplay, building relational sets</i>		

multiple-choice items, cloze procedures, requests for target words in a constructed response. Below are some examples in the context of a unit on the westward movement:

- **Multiple-Choice Item**

Manifest Destiny was about [choose the best answer]:

- A. Abolishing slavery
- B. Expanding territories
- C. Maintaining freedom of religion
- D. Choosing a new form of government

- **Cloze Procedure**

In 1803, the United States acquired a large portion of land from \_\_\_\_\_. This was called the \_\_\_\_\_ and included land that was west of the \_\_\_\_\_ River.

- **Constructed Response**

The area between the Mississippi River and the Pacific Ocean was explored by \_\_\_\_\_.

Students can also identify words on the basis of their parts or define word parts based on a series of provided words.

The type of assessment used depends on the purpose. What type of information are you trying to gather about student learning? As Camille mentioned in Section 2, a multiple-choice objective test provides a fairly low-level assessment of vocabulary. Using a cloze or constructed response assessment adds some context, but still does not provide an opportunity to assess depth of word knowledge. These types of criterion-referenced assessments can be used. However, there are other ways to think about vocabulary assessment.

**Student Writing.** Student writing is rich source material for formatively assessing students' knowledge of vocabulary. Response journals, quick-writes, and extended responses to reading can all inform your vocabulary instruction. Questions and prompts that lead students to reflect on and include selected vocabulary in their written responses

make them conscious of words. They begin to understand that words are not meant to be learned one time, for one unit or subject, but rather that words are gateways to expressing ideas and helping them become better readers and writers. Here are two sample prompts for written responses:

- **Response journal.** From your vocabulary journal this week, select a word that you have used at least once outside the classroom. Explain the situation and why you selected this word to use.
- **Quick-write.** What is the relationship between acute and obtuse angles? Explain the features of each in your response.

**Presentations.** Student presentations in both language arts and content areas should be assessed in terms of how well students use vocabulary to present information. The Common Core speaking and listening standards include comprehension and collaboration as well as presentation and knowledge of ideas. Oral presentations should be assessed using rubrics (as mentioned earlier) that include features of both delivery and content. You should always share these rubrics with students in advance so they are aware of the expectations. Including student use of vocabulary in the rubric gives students another way to show their level of growth in word learning.

**Discussion.** You can also assess vocabulary while observing small-group and whole-class discussions. Anecdotal records of students' use of academic vocabulary in posing and responding to questions, stating ideas, and summarizing provide valuable information. For example, because Lupe wants to check how and when her students use academic vocabulary during discussions in her fourth-grade geometry unit, she uses an observation form to record student responses, selecting only the words she feels are essential (see Figure 3-18).

**Figure 3–18 Math Vocabulary Used in Class Discussions During a Geometry Unit**

	<b>Ann</b>	<b>Jorge</b>	<b>Paul</b>	<b>Kim</b>	<b>Maya</b>	<b>Cole</b>
<i>segments</i>	PR	R		PR		
<i>lines</i>	R			PRS	PRS	
<i>angles</i>	RS	PRS	R	PRS	PR	
<i>parallel</i>	RS			PR		PRS
<i>rays</i>	R	PR			PR	R
<i>perpendicular</i>	P		PR			PR

P = posing questions  
R = responding to questions  
S = stating ideas/summarizing

**Content Assessment.** You can also integrate vocabulary assessment with content assessment. If you have introduced students to the reading strategy of analyzing character traits, you might say, “Think about the words we’ve been using to describe character traits in our literature circle books. We’ve talked about characters who are ingenious, selfless, and ambitious, among other traits. I would like you to think about some of the people we’ve been learning about in social studies as we’ve studied the westward movement. Select two people and describe their character traits. Be sure to provide evidence for your thinking by citing examples from our social studies text.” This type of writing aligns with the expectations of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.3/CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.3).

Some vocabulary strategies lend themselves to both formative and summative assessments. In the earlier example, Lupe uses Fast teaching of word sorts as a formative assessment. As students group and categorize words, she notes student understanding and uses this information to guide and drive further instruction. These word sorts are

not graded. At the completion of the geometry unit, Lupe asks her students to sort the words again (see Figure 3–19). This time she provides categories based on what she expects them to have learned and asks them to explain their thinking in writing—to demonstrate their understanding of the concepts taught within the unit. This is a summative assessment that can be graded.

**Figure 3–19 Word Sort Used as a Summative Assessment**

<b>Directions: Sort these words according to the headings listed below the words. After sorting the words, write a paragraph for each heading explaining why you included those words.</b>		
<i>rhombus</i>	<i>obtuse</i>	<i>rays</i>
<i>rectangle</i>	<i>parallel</i>	<i>quadrilateral</i>
<i>acute</i>	<i>right</i>	<i>perpendicular</i>
<i>segments</i>	<i>square</i>	

Two-Dimensional Figures	Angles	Lines
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The knowledge-rating chart John uses in his science class is another example of formative assessment. It allows John to measure his students’ knowledge of specific content words. John doesn’t grade the knowledge rating but uses the data to group students and plan instructional activities. At the conclusion of the unit, rather than give students a multiple-choice or matching vocabulary test, John uses another knowledge-rating chart as a summative assessment (Figure 3–20). Students demonstrate their learning by defining, contextualizing, or illustrating their understanding of the essential vocabulary.

**Figure 3–20 Knowledge-Rating Chart Used as a Summative Assessment**

<b>Directions: Here are words we've been learning in our science unit. For each word, explain what you know. This can include a definition, an example, and/or a diagram with labels.</b>	
<b>Word</b>	<b>What I know about this word</b>
<i>membrane</i>	
<i>nucleus</i>	
<i>mitochondrion</i>	
<i>ribosome</i>	
<i>cytoplasm</i>	
<i>vacuole</i>	
<i>protoplasm</i>	
<i>organelle</i>	

### **Next Steps**

*One must be drenched in words, literally soaked in them, to have the right ones form themselves into the proper pattern at the right moment.*

—Hart Crane, American poet (1899–1932)

Part of the joy of teaching comes from an awareness of how much there is to learn and how worthwhile the learning is. Just as word learning is incremental, so is learning about vocabulary instruction. Word learners need repeated and varied exposures to a word. Teachers need repeated and varied exposure to research, best practice strategies, and fellow practitioners. This deepens our knowledge and moves our practice from novice to expert. Wherever you are on your journey, we hope that you will consider the research and strategies we've shared with you. We encourage you to take the next step. We hope that you will invite someone else to come along with you!