Reviewed work:

Teaching and Learning Vocabulary: Bringing Research to Practice. (2005). Elfrieda H. Hiebert & Michael L. Kamil (Eds.). Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. http://www.erlbaum.com/ Pp. 288. ISBN 0-8058-5286-7. $39.95

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Teaching and Learning Vocabulary: Bringing Research to Practice edited by Hiebert and Kamil is a collection of twelve chapters dealing with vocabulary instruction for a variety of student populations such as young children, English language learners, and young adolescents. The book's core chapters are contributions from presenters at the 2003 Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL) forum, which focused on vocabulary. To illustrate the relationship between vocabulary and literacy, all authors in the volume describe work showing that vocabulary experiences support conceptual learning and comprehension of text. The main feature of this book is that virtually all chapters draw implications for vocabulary instruction from research.

After introducing the origin and purpose of the book in the preface, Kamil and Hiebert start the volume with a chapter on perspectives and persistent issues on teaching and learning vocabulary. After the introductory chapter, the eleven remaining chapters comprise three sections: first, Chapters 2 through 4 deal with issues related to how words are learned and taught as a function of word features, content areas, and developmental levels; second, Chapters 5 through 9 deal with how vocabulary interventions differ from different age groups and content areas; and finally, Chapters 10 through 12 deal with word selection for vocabulary instruction (p. ix).

In Chapter 1, Kamil and Hiebert emphasize that among different components of reading (e.g., phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension), vocabulary takes a special role in reading comprehension. They introduce a review of fifty vocabulary research studies that the National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000) identified, and then discuss concluding remarks about vocabulary instruction in light of the complexity of determining what it means to know a word. Additionally, they present four persistent issues on the teaching and learning of vocabulary: 1)

the number of words that should be taught; 2) the particular words that should be taught; 3) the needs of English learners and potential at-risk students; and 4) the role of independent reading in vocabulary learning.

The first section opens with Chapter 2 in which Nagy discusses the complexity of the causal relationships between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension. Based on this complexity, he argues for the establishment of a comprehensive and long-term program which includes rich and multifaceted vocabulary instruction. According to him, such instruction should increase not only students' individual word knowledge, but also their generative word knowledge as students are exposed to rich oral language as well as wide reading (Graves, 2000).

In Chapter 3, Cunningham points to the importance of exposure to written language in children's vocabulary development. However, a child's limited ability to read texts makes it difficult to find appropriate reading materials. This would also limit the opportunity for young children to be exposed to written texts. Therefore, he suggests that reading aloud to children is the most important activity for developing the knowledge that is necessary to succeed in reading (Backer, Scher, and Mackler, 1997). Reading aloud to young children who are not independent readers can expand their vocabulary beyond everyday conversational language. Knowing words before reading them in print facilitates vocabulary learning prior to reading the words in texts, and this will lead to positive and enjoyable reading experiences in the long run.

In Chapter 4, Scott provides a literature review regarding vocabulary learning through reading texts with discussion of the implication of this research for teachers, publishers, and researchers. She argues that, because words are unique, a variety of instruction techniques should be implemented in classrooms, especially for academic discourse. She pinpoints necessary steps to promote vocabulary learning: designing materials intentionally, teaching word knowledge in conjunction with world knowledge and recognizing those words that are likely to be learned incidentally in texts and those that need more active instruction.

Part Two starting with Chapter 5 addresses the manner in which instruction is implemented. In Chapter 5, Stahl discusses four problems of teaching word meaning: the sheer number of words to be learned; the gap in word knowledge among children; early differences in vocabulary knowledge among children; and problems with traditional instruction. He then points out common characteristics of how to integrate vocabulary learning into a knowledge curriculum: 1) frequent reading aloud to children; 2) the use of different methods to teach different kinds of words; 3) point of contact teaching (i.e., pointing out unknown words with their synonyms); 4) extensive teaching to ensure that word meanings "stick"; 5) teaching complex concepts; and 6) concerted efforts to help children acquire an appreciation for the power of words.

Chapter 6 by Calderón, August, Slavin, Duran, Madden and Cheung and Chapter 7 by Carlo, August and Snow summarize empirical studies that deal with Spanish speakers learning English as a Second Language (ESL). The purpose of the research by Calderón and colleagues was to evaluate an intervention (e.g., cooperative learning plus extensive teaching of vocabulary strategies) for children transitioning from Spanish to English reading. The results indicate the importance of explicit vocabulary instruction on word knowledge consisting of phonemic and phonological awareness, and understanding the multiple meanings of words as a part of a

comprehensive language/literacy program. In Chapter 7, Carlo et al., present the benefits of the Vocabulary Improvement Project (VIP) curriculum which uses second language learners' linguistic knowledge of their first language (i.e., Spanish) as a starting point of instruction. Their data driven evaluation shows the positive aspects of the program on improving second language children learners' knowledge of and about words.

Chapters 8 and 9 continue to present instructional interventions at two ends of the developmental continuum. In Chapter 8, Schwanenfluegel, Hamilton, Bradley, Ruston, Neuharth-Pritchett and Restrepo address the requirements of vocabulary programs with preschoolers. They also discuss the success of the program, PAVEd for Success (Phonological Awareness and Vocabulary Enhancement), which was designed to improve the vocabulary of prekindergarten children. Chapter 9 by Baumann, Font, Carr Edwards and Boland presents two studies which examine the effectiveness of the teaching word-part and context clues to fifth grade students in promoting word knowledge. They also provide useful information regarding different types of strategies that teachers can utilize to expand students' reading vocabulary in the middle grades and beyond. According to them, in order to read the many rare words occurring in different content area texts, students need to use strategies and skills like figuring out word meaning based on how affixes affect root word meaning. They illustrate four sequenced sample lessons which reflect their empirical explorations and the strategies and guidelines they recommend for teaching students word-part and context clues.

Part Three deals with more challenging issues which address domains of words that students need to learn. It starts with Chapter 10, in which Beck and Kucan propose three principles for choosing words to teach: usefulness of the word; the relatedness with other vocabulary; and the contribution of the word in understanding reading text. In Chapter 11, Biemiller reviews a number of studies which conclude that every learner from different populations (e.g., normative-English speaking, advantaged, and ESL) acquires new vocabulary in a predictable order. Thus, he argues, it is important to fill in the words that have been partially learned by students. In Chapter 12, Hiebert suggests the underlying principles for identifying an effective and efficient component of vocabulary curriculum for first through fourth grade students. According to her, effective vocabulary curriculum refers to a curriculum that supports students to be ready for a significant portion of texts in Grades 5 and beyond by acquiring the foundational vocabulary that accounts for a substantial portion of academic, written discourse. Additionally, vocabulary curriculum can be efficient by addressing words that have the widest possible application within texts, such as words that are in semantic families with many members.

Teaching and Learning Vocabulary: Bringing Research to Practice provides a rich overview of previous research for effective vocabulary instruction and policy making in the school system. The strength of the book is that it presents scientific evidence from a variety of leading research programs that address perennial issues regarding the role of vocabulary in text comprehension. The supportive empirical data for the success of certain vocabulary instruction programs bridge research and practice in vocabulary instruction. However, from a researcher's perspective, the various studies presented in this volume are not discussed precisely enough to gather information regarding the validity or reliability of the research.

This volume tries to reach a broad audience including researchers, publishers, in-service reading specialists, and curriculum directors who deal with vocabulary learning and instruction as a vital component of reading proficiency. However, children are the target learners that most chapters focus on. Therefore, if one attempts to implement any of the program policies or lessons presented in the volume to educational settings for different groups of learners, special attention would need to be paid to learner-specific factors. The volume presents second language-related issues only in Chapters 6 and 7; however, guidance from the rest of the chapters can be easily transferable to second language learners. For instance, reading aloud to children who are limited in word recognition in English will also be beneficial to second language learners who have limited vocabulary and word recognition skills in terms of providing rich opportunities for exposure to the target language in context.

In sum, this book provides an instructional framework for both young first-language and second-language English learners. The authors successfully address the critical role of vocabulary in reading texts and their reciprocal relationship. The discussions of the instruction and interventions that enhance vocabulary presented in Part Two provide useful examples of vocabulary programs. Furthermore, the authors' suggestions about adjusting the programs or instructions seem helpful for those who might wish to implement them in different settings. I recommend this book as a guide for designing vocabulary programs or instruction; as a resource for teaching vocabulary for reading comprehension; and as a detailed discussion of previous research based in school settings. The volume is scholarly and inviting and conveys a great respect for the powerful teaching of vocabulary that is needed to comprehend written texts.

References

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