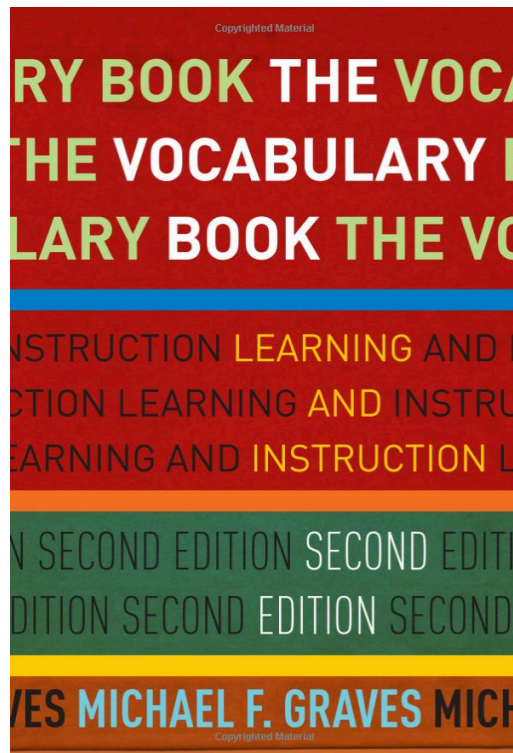


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Review of *The Vocabulary Book: Learning and Instruction* By Michael F. Graves

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In the opening chapter of his book, *The Vocabulary Book: Learning and Instruction*, Michael F. Graves (2016) encourages the reader to reconsider the old adage, “Sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me” (p. 1). Graves (2016) argues that words – both their presence and their absence – can have a powerful effect, especially on less linguistically- advantaged children. According to Graves (2016), vocabulary knowledge is an essential aspect of a successful literacy program, so any time that teachers devote to vocabulary instruction is time well-spent.

Chapter 1 provides the reader with a succinct summary of findings from vocabulary research over the past 100 years, including, but not limited to, the importance of vocabulary knowledge in verbal ability, phonological awareness, word recognition, reading comprehension, as well as the influence of vocabulary difficulty on the readability of text. Graves reveals the following major factors motivating him to write a new edition of *The Vocabulary Book*, which is part of the acclaimed Language and Literacy Series: significant advancements in the field of vocabulary learning and vocabulary instruction; the implementation of Common Core State Standards that highlight the importance of reading complex text containing complex vocabulary; the marked increase in the number of English Language Learners (ELLs) in school with smaller vocabularies (resulting in a separate chapter specifically on instruction for ELLs); and increased awareness of importance and challenges of selecting words to teach. Graves describes three critical facts about vocabulary that he asks readers to keep in mind as they read this book and plan vocabulary instruction. First, students’ reading vocabulary increases at a rate of 3,000 to 4,000 words each year, accumulating a reading vocabulary of approximately 25,000 words by the end of

elementary school and approximately 50,000 words by the end of high school. However, according to Graves (2016) and other scholars (Becker, 1977; Fernald, Marchman, & Weisleder, 2013, Hart & Risley, 1995; Rodriguez & Tamis-LeMonda, 2011; White, Graves, & Slater, 1990) the reading vocabularies of ELLs and children raised in poverty are much smaller than those of their middle-class and native English-speaking classmates. Although there are far more words to be learned than one can possibly teach, Graves advocates that both instruction on individual words and instruction that promotes students’ ability and proclivity to learn words on their own are still meritorious. Graves segues into a brief discussion of a four-part program for vocabulary instruction from kindergarten through high school, which is broad enough to instruct students who enter school with small vocabularies, adequate vocabularies, and exceptional vocabularies. The four components of Graves’ vocabulary program include: (1) frequent, varied, and extensive language experiences; (2) teaching individual words; (3) teaching word-learning strategies; and (4) fostering word consciousness. Chapter 1 concludes with an overview of the remainder of the book, which consists of seven chapters and an afterword, each of which will be further discussed in this review.

Chapter 2, “Words and Word Learning,” is the most ‘theoretical’ chapter in the book. Graves starts with a discussion and review of the literature on the vocabulary-learning task that K-12 students face and then moves to a discussion and review of the literature on vocabulary instruction. Essentially, the studies conducted over the past 50 years provide a consistent portrait of the vocabulary instruction (or lack thereof) that typically takes place in K-12 classrooms. Graves reports minimal vocabulary instruction is being implemented in core reading (basal) programs and classrooms;

the vocabulary instruction is generally thin, weak, and not based on current research that constitutes effective vocabulary instruction.

In Chapter 3, “Selecting Vocabulary to Teach,” Graves provides suggestions for the often overwhelming task of choosing which vocabulary words to teach through direct instruction. Graves begins by describing an instructional strategy that he developed called *Selecting Words from Instructional Text (SWIT)*, which aims to better equip teachers to choose the most important words for instruction from texts the students are already reading in class. SWIT involves classifying unfamiliar words into one of several categories (i.e., Essential, Widely Useful, More Common, and Imported) and determining the level of instruction for each of the identified words (i.e., powerful, introductory, glossary/handout, or ignore). Graves provides two examples and a supporting graphic organizer of SWIT in action, though this strategy would have also benefited from clearly defining the levels of instruction. For example, ‘what does Powerful versus Introductory instruction look like?’ or ‘Why choose to ignore a word rather than adding it to a glossary?’ In addition, it would be helpful for teachers who are new to SWIT (or, new to focused vocabulary instruction in general) to have clear guidelines as to what constitutes an “Essential”, “Widely Useful”, “More Common”, and “Imported” word. While examples are provided for each type, there is the potential for overlap among the categories, and therefore, a list of criteria would be useful.

The next section of Chapter 3 offers descriptions of several word lists because, as pointed out by Graves, word lists can complement the words teachers have selected to teach from classroom texts. The word lists presented range from the primary grades through high school, and includes *The First 4,000 Words* (Graves, Sales, &

Ruda, 2008) and the *Academic Word List* (Coxhead, 2000). Each word list description includes a table of sample words and examples of how it could be used in the classroom. The final section of the chapter discusses instruments that could be used to assess the size of students’ vocabularies and the words they have learned. Included in this somewhat insufficient list of instruments are commercially-produced tests, like the *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test* (Dunn & Dunn, 2007), teacher-made tests (e.g., yes/no, multiple choice), and student self-assessments. The discussion of assessment is a fitting way to close the chapter because in order to provide effective direct instruction of vocabulary, teachers need to have a means of knowing where students are before and after instruction. Notwithstanding, the contents of this chapter were insufficient; it is not clear whether this is due to the fact that current methods for assessing vocabulary are still inadequate, invalidated and “grossly undernourished” (Pearson, Hiebert, & Kamil, 2007, p. 282). Missing from this chapter is vocabulary assessment research, computer-based vocabulary assessments, and vocabulary assessments for non-native speakers of English.

Graves’ (2016) four-part approach to vocabulary acquisition consists of the following components: Frequent, Varied, and Extensive Language Experiences; Teaching Individual Words; Teaching Word-Learning Strategies; and Fostering Word Consciousness. Chapter 4 begins with an explanation of Graves’ first component: ‘Frequent’, ‘Varied’, and ‘Extensive Language Experiences’. Information on indirect word learning comprises the first third of the chapter. Graves relates this particular word-learning endeavor across the listening, reading, discussing, and writing areas of development within the context of the classroom. He provides worthwhile instructional practices relevant for all grade levels. One such

recommendation is through student listening; Graves' suggests for teachers to be intentional in the vocabulary that is utilized to communicate within the daily routines of the classroom. Graves proposes that such vocabulary be "new and somewhat-challenging" (p.71). The next portion of the chapter lends itself to oral language development, specifically for primary-grade classrooms. He furnishes a detailed description of one such practice, which he referred to as 'Interactive Oral Reading'. He presents a vast repertoire of other research-based approaches to interactive oral reading and highlights two in particular for his readers: *Words in Context* (Biemiller, 2001, 2009; Biemiller & Boote, 2006) and *The First 4,000 Words* (Fehr et al., 2011; Graves, Sales, & Davison, 2009; Graves et al., 2008; Sales & Graves, 2009b), to which Graves himself was a significant contributor. He closes the chapter with ideas for primary grade teachers to establish and nurture children's natural curiosity about word learning, which he referred to as "Word-Consciousness." Even though Graves' ideas could be emulated across all grade levels, the resources he highlighted in this chapter were predominately focused on early childhood; perhaps his focus on early childhood was due to the urgency of vocabulary instruction in this critical stage of development.

In Chapter 5, "Teaching Individual Words," Graves describes the second part of the four-part program and shares a number of effective ways to teach individual words. The first section of the chapter discusses several preliminaries to teaching individual words. These include the number of words students must learn, levels of word knowledge, the various word-learning tasks that different words represent, providing student-friendly definitions, and some general principles of vocabulary instruction. The second, extensive section of the chapter presents detailed descriptions and examples of

procedures for accomplishing the various word-learning tasks, which include but are not limited to: teaching new words representing new concepts using procedures such as the Frayer Method (Frayer, Frederick, & Klausmeier, 1969), Focused Discussion (Nagy, 1988), and Semantic Mapping (Heimlich & Pittelman, 1986). Three content-specific methods (i.e., Social Studies, Science, Math, and Literature) for teaching individual words are also presented; namely, The Six-Step Procedure (Marzano, 2004), Examining Conceptual Networks (Pearson, 2009), and Rich Instruction (Beck, Perfetti, & McKeown, 1982; Beck et al., 2002, 2013; McKeown & Beck, 2004). The fourth and final section stresses the critical importance of repetition and review of newly learned words, and describes the following time-efficient procedures for reviewing words students have already been taught: Anything Goes (Richek, 2005), Connect Two (Blachowicz, 1986; Richek, 2005), and Word Wizard (Beck, Perfetti, & McKeown, 1982). Graves (2016) concludes the chapter with the following list of inappropriate approaches for vocabulary instruction:

...give students words out of context and ask them to look them up in the dictionary; have students do speeded trials with individual words; have students complete word mazes; teach words as though they were merely new labels for existing concepts when in fact they represent new and challenging concepts; teach spelling when you meant to be teaching vocabulary; and assume that context will typically yield precise word meanings. (p. 116)

Due to the sheer volume of words students acquire as they progress through school, Graves' four-part vocabulary program highlights the importance of students' independent use of word-learning strategies. In Chapter 6,

“Teaching Word-Learning Strategies,” Graves discusses six strategies that can be used to help all students become independent word-learners. He begins by describing the components of a general strategy-instruction model, *Balanced Strategies Instruction* (Graves, 2012), and thoroughly explains why and how teachers should teach the meanings of *strategies* and *inferences* before beginning word-learning strategy instruction. He then discusses each of the following six strategies: (1) using word parts; (2) using context clues; (3) using the dictionary; (4) recognizing and dealing with multi-word units; (5) developing a strategy for dealing with unknown words; and (6) adopting a personal approach to building vocabulary. The first two strategies include suggested lesson plans for the K-2 and 3-5 grade bands, as well as helpful examples and figures. Here, Graves recommends that informal instruction should begin in kindergarten and formal instruction should begin in grade 3. The other four strategies are not described in a way that’s quite as detailed as the first two strategies (i.e., Graves deems the first two strategies as needing more instructional time), but do contain helpful tips for teachers (e.g., recommended online dictionaries). The chapter concludes by delineating when vocabulary instruction should occur over the course of a student’s school career. In particular, Graves recommends grades 3-5 as the grade band for formal strategy vocabulary instruction; however, other than a reference to the Common Core standards, a solid rationale is not presented.

Chapter 7, “Promoting Word Consciousness,” delves into the notion of word consciousness, which Graves defines as having a deep appreciation and value for words. According to Graves, word consciousness is a recently articulated concept that does not have an extensive research base, but it is an integral and necessary part of an effective vocabulary

program. Word consciousness incorporates metacognition about words, increases students’ motivation to learn words, and extends their metalinguistic awareness of words. Graves explains how to nurture a community of learners who are curious and interested in words. Readers are met with a plethora of activities, which range in implementation complexity from meager preparation and ease to substantial planning and scaffolded modeling. Throughout this chapter, Graves infuses theory into practice quite effortlessly; any primary educator would be confident in employing any of the activities discussed with the likelihood of success. Graves concludes the chapter with a hefty compilation of word play book recommendations that would be appropriate across all grade levels, as well as sound advice for educators. The urgency of the matter of vocabulary instruction coupled with Graves’ apparent affection for the subject was readily apparent throughout the chapter.

Chapter 8, “Special Considerations for English Learners,” begins by reminding readers of the general attributes of good teaching. Graves gathered what he calls “traditional and instructional principles” from research and theory over the last 30 years. He presents recommendations from experts in the field, such as Goldenberg, August, Mancilla-Martinez, Delpit, as well as his own. These suggestions appear to be sound advice for any educator to implement in any classroom for all students. He allocates the next part of the chapter to the four-part vocabulary program and demonstrates how it can be modified to meet the needs of ELLs. He finalizes the chapter with a comprehensive discussion related to supporting students’ reading experiences with a practice that he devised and termed as, *Scaffolded Reading Experience*. This particular experience appears to have been designed with ELLs at the forefront of the model, as it offers experiences

unique to this type of learner, such as pre-teaching vocabulary and/or difficult concepts, utilizing students' native languages, and connecting the reading experience to the students' lives. Graves allows the reader to delve deeper by outlining the intricacies of an example of a *Scaffolded Reading Experience* lesson. Even though Graves' readers will surely be able to extrapolate learning from this chapter, the idea that good teaching will encompass all learners resonated throughout the reading experience.

In concluding his book, Graves restates his belief in the importance of the four parts in his vocabulary program – Providing Rich and Varied Language Experiences, Teaching Individual Words, Teaching Word-Learning Strategies, and Fostering Word Consciousness – and he offers advice as to how much classroom time to allocate to each of these parts. In addition, the importance of long-term vocabulary instruction and differentiated instruction is mentioned. Perhaps a future edition of the book will include an example of a differentiated vocabulary instruction lesson plan or a description of how vocabulary instruction would look in a Response to Intervention (RTI) model, which is a multi-tiered approach that supports research-based instruction and interventions focused specifically on individual student difficulties. It would be helpful to know which vocabulary instruction strategies and interventions would be most appropriate for Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 instruction as part of a RTI approach.

Finally, Graves discusses the need to teach for generalization, specifically how to foster high-road transfer so that students can successfully employ word-learning strategies upon encountering an unfamiliar word.

Discussion

Overall, we felt that Graves' second edition of *The Vocabulary Book* is a timely, valuable, language-friendly, and compact resource for K-12 teachers. Many strategies and suggestions were provided with enough detail so that teachers could immediately begin to use them with their students. Critical issues of oral language, motivation, and finding time to provide vocabulary instruction were aptly addressed. Explicit connections to the Common Core State Standards were made, and the inclusion of a chapter exclusively dedicated to ELLs certainly warranted a new edition. In future editions, we look forward to the possible inclusion of other pertinent topics, such as vocabulary interventions within RTI models for linguistically disadvantaged and at-risk students, technology-enhanced vocabulary instruction, professional development/suggestions for teacher preparation programs, and a separate chapter devoted to disciplinary literacy. A future edition of this book might also include case studies, vignettes from the classroom, links to supplementary materials (i.e., QR codes), or a DVD resource that shows teachers providing vocabulary instruction to students so that readers have concrete examples available at their fingertips.

In conclusion, vocabulary knowledge is an essential aspect of a successful literacy program, so any time that teachers devote to vocabulary instruction is time well-spent; Graves' *The Vocabulary Book* (2nd ed.) can help teachers maximize the effectiveness of their vocabulary instruction.

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