

Article at a Glance

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Ebbers, S., & Denton, C. (2008). A Root Awakening: Vocabulary Instruction for Older Students with Reading Difficulties. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice Learning Disabilities Research and Practice, 23*(2), 90-102.

Purpose of the Article: The purpose of the article is to review and identify the most effective vocabulary instructional strategies, particularly for older students with reading difficulties.

Background Information:

- Insufficient vocabulary is strongly associated with academic failure for students in grades 3-12.
- The best way to support vocabulary development is by teaching students to read at more proficient levels (i.e., to identify words, read fluently, and comprehend what they read).
- Typically developing students acquire vocabulary primarily via independent reading.
- Struggling readers tend to avoid reading, which leads to limited word encounters and inadequate vocabulary growth.
- There is great concern about the implications of the "Matthew Effect", where in the word-rich get richer and poor remain at linguistic disadvantage due to lack of exposure to more complex books.

Key Findings:

These strategies have the best evidence base for teaching vocabulary using explicit instruction.

- *Providing a Rationale for Learning*
 - It is beneficial for older students to know what and why they are learning what they are being taught to help motivate them.

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- *Active Engagement*
 - Provides opportunities for students to be active and not passive as a learner.
 - Have student engaged with making mean of words by discussing, asking questions, and collaborating with peers.
- *Modeling and Teaching*
 - It is useful for the teacher to follow predictable routines that are familiar to the teacher and student.
 - Using this type of framework allows the student to concentrate on the content being taught, and not focusing on what is expected of them.
- *Guided Practice with Timely Feedback*
 - It is best to provide guided practice initially with feedback from the teacher.
 - Students should be given specific positive feedback to confirm correct responses or clear corrective feedback to clarify errors.
 - Independent practice should be used also, with the teacher monitoring to assist as needed.
- *Multiple Exposures to Words in a Variety of Contexts*
 - If you want more than a surface level understanding of a word, you need to provide ongoing exposures in print and speech.
 - Students should have the chance to interact and use the vocabulary while speaking, listening, reading and writing.

Application of Key Findings to Boardmaker Instructional Solutions:

- All Boardmaker Instructional Solutions use the most effective strategies for vocabulary instruction.
- This includes:
 - *Provide a Rationale for Student Learning*
 - All lesson plans provide a rationale for vocabulary learning, as well as all other instructional activities.
 - *Active Engagement*
 - Students are encouraged to actively engage with new words using a predictable vocabulary routine. This routine allows students to think metalinguistically about their knowledge of a word, hear a student

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friendly definition and sample sentence, and then select a method to help them make a work their own.

- Students are also expected to use the new vocabulary in ways that encourage them to integrate the words into their speech and writing.
- *Modeling and Teaching*
 - Teachers are given detailed lesson plans for them to use a predictable routine to preteach new vocabulary. The teacher provides correct pronunciation, a student friendly definition and a sample sentence for the student to hear.
 - Using a blended approach, students are asked to follow along onscreen. They are given the opportunity to see the definitions and sentence again, and then to interact with the word independently.
 - Students can choose to construct a sentence with the word, pick a symbol that helps them remember the word, or to make an audio recording of how this word connects to their own life.
- *Guided Practice with Timely Feedback*
 - When students first encounter new vocabulary, they are guided through the routine by their teacher.
 - As they become more familiar, they have opportunities to engage and use the vocabulary in a variety of contexts including Think-Pair-Share, Graphic Organizers, Games and Writing Activities.
 - There are opportunities for the teacher to provide feedback, as well as onscreen supports for some activities.
- *Multiple Exposures to Words in a Variety of Contexts*
 - Students engage with targeted vocabulary repeatedly and in different activities. They are given opportunities to read, speak and write using the words in a progression of activities throughout a unit.