3

VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

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LEARNING OUTCOMES

By reading this chapter you will develop your understanding of:

- what children need to know and understand about vocabulary – for language and reading comprehension and as a support for spelling;

- what you need to know as a primary teacher in order to teach the 2014 English National Curriculum;

- the breadth of study of vocabulary teaching and learning;

- approaches to teaching vocabulary within the different areas of vocabulary teaching.

Teachers' Standards

3. Demonstrate good subject and curriculum knowledge:

- have a secure knowledge of the relevant subject(s) and curriculum areas, foster and maintain pupils' interest in the subject, and address misunderstandings;

- demonstrate a critical understanding of developments in the subject and curriculum areas, and promote the value of scholarship;

- demonstrate an understanding of, and take responsibility for, promoting high standards of literacy, articulacy and the correct use of standard English, whatever the teacher's specialist subject.

INTRODUCTION

What is the difference between great and grate; between soul and sole; or the difference between 'A blanket of cloud covered the land' and 'The cloud was like a blanket that covered the land'; or happy, happier and happiest; or bad and atrocious; or your understanding of the word operation – in a maths lesson and when your doctor tells you one is necessary to save your life?

These are all questions of vocabulary. Vocabulary could be described as the often forgotten and unmentioned foundation of literacy teaching and learning. There seemed to be an assumption that because we all use vocabulary as we talk, read and write, teachers did not need to teach it. However, a growing body of research demonstrated the essential role vocabulary has in all learning. The work of Snow *et al.* (2005) demonstrates the essential place vocabulary has in all learning. They identify that vocabulary plays a central role in understanding concepts and also in the way we remember them. Significant for literacy learning is the link between vocabulary knowledge and reading success (Biemiller, 2003) and in particular the links between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension (Cain, 2010). More recently in the Education Endowment Fund 'Preparing for Literacy' (2018) guidance report and the guidance for both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 (2020) vocabulary is identified as a key factor in children's literacy and language development.

This chapter will explore the different elements of vocabulary teaching across the English curriculum and research-based approaches to its teaching.

THE IMPORTANCE OF VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

Children are developing vocabulary knowledge from the moment they are born; they learn from the language in their home environments and in the experiences of the world they are introduced to, and specifically from their parents and carers. There are, however, considerable differences in the rate of vocabulary growth in the early years as well as differences in the range of vocabulary a child acquires. Hart and Risley (2003) identified the gap between the vocabulary knowledge of pre-school children from economically advantaged and economically disadvantaged families. Typically, a high-performing child on entry to school may have a receptive and expressive vocabulary of 7,100 root words in contrast to a lower performing child, with a vocabulary of 3,000 words. This research led to the startling headline figure of a 30 million word gap between higher and lower socio-economic groups. Whilst it is important to note that this was a small scale study and that there have been subsequent criticisms of the research design, similar findings have been reported in other research – see for example the Oxford Language Report: Why Closing the Word Gap Matters (2018) and the Literacy Trust report, Language unlocks reading: supporting early language and reading for every child (2019). The 'word gap' is of significance because being able to communicate is the basis for social interaction, for making friends and for learning. Vocabulary knowledge in the early years is a predictor of a child's developing phonemic awareness (Goswami, 2001) and so later reading success (Block and Mangieri, 2006). Children who begin their school life with low levels of vocabulary knowledge can become trapped in a vicious circle: the lower the levels of vocabulary the less success a child has with reading, and the less success the child has with reading, the less likely they are to read, and the less likely they are to read the

slower their vocabulary growth (Cunningham and Stanovich, 1998). Having difficulties communicating in the school environment can affect children's participation in learning and their behaviour which in turn, impacts on learning. It is hard to find a more significant component of learning.

Because this is rather a vast subject area, for the purposes of this chapter, vocabulary development will be considered in three main areas:

- vocabulary development to support communication and language development;

- vocabulary development to support reading comprehension;

- vocabulary development to support spelling and word investigation – morphology and etymology.

It is important, however, to see each area above as interlinked and interdependent aspects of learning. For example, investigating morphology as part of teaching spelling can support reading comprehension as it explores word meanings; exploring word meanings in a phonics lesson can enable children to develop speed, accuracy and fluency in reading; word play, as part of developing communication and language development, can be an important element of teaching spelling. It is also worth noting that all of these areas combine to support the teaching of writing – where careful vocabulary choice is influenced by what the writer wishes to communicate (language development); knowledge of how other writers use words (reading comprehension); and how to spell the words the writer has chosen to use (morphological and etymological influences).

OVERVIEW OF VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT IN THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

Vocabulary is mentioned in different parts of the National Curriculum. The 'Purpose of Study: Spoken Language' section states *The quality and variety of language that pupils hear and speak are vital for developing vocabulary and grammar and their understanding of reading and writing* (DfE, 2013, p13). It is identified again in the 'Purposes of Study for Reading': *Good comprehension draws from linguistic knowledge (in particular of vocabulary and grammar)* and later in the 'Purposes of Study' when outlining the importance of *reading widely and often* as it *increases pupils' vocabulary because they encounter words they would rarely hear or use in everyday speech* (p14). Vocabulary is identified again in the 'Writing Purposes of Study': *Effective composition ... requires ... an increasingly wide knowledge of vocabulary* (p15). Vocabulary also appears in the 'Spelling, Vocabulary, Grammar, Punctuation' section, which states:

> Opportunities for teachers to enhance pupils' vocabulary arise naturally from their reading and writing. As vocabulary increases, teachers should show pupils how to understand relationships between words, how to understand nuances in meaning and how to develop their understanding of, and ability to use, figurative language. They should also teach pupils how to work out and clarify the meanings of unknown words and words with more than one meaning.

> (p15)

In 2016, children in Year 2 and 6 took the first SATs (Standard Assessment Tests) based on the new curriculum. Outcomes for reading nationally against these new

standards indicated that many children were not meeting the increased demands of the new curriculum standards. One reason for this, which many schools I have been working with identified in their analysis of the returned test papers in Year 6, was the increased demands on children's vocabulary knowledge. This included children's vocabulary knowledge linked to their knowledge of the world and life experiences as well as children's ability to make inferences about vocabulary when they meet new or unusual vocabulary or vocabulary used in a new context. This is another reason why today, in most classrooms, vocabulary will be an important element of the teaching of reading comprehension, writing and as part of cross-curricular learning.

In 2021, the DfE first published the Reading Framework: Teaching the foundations of literacy (updated in 2022) and it has become a focus for both schools' approach to early reading and Ofsted in its inspection of reading in schools. The report highlights the role of language comprehension in early reading and so vocabulary knowledge and the report further embeds the National Curriculum requirements.

The specific programmes of study relating to vocabulary will be further explored in the sections below along with approaches to teaching that can enable children to extend their vocabulary knowledge and so prepare them for the demands of SATs but, more significantly, enable them to engage with the world around them and so embrace life.

VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT TO SUPPORT COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

The National Curriculum

The statutory requirements for Spoken Language require pupils in Years 1 to 6 to be taught to:

- ask relevant questions to extend their understanding and build vocabulary and knowledge;
- use relevant strategies to build their vocabulary.

RESEARCH FOCUS

When identifying in research the range of strategies that support the development of children's expressive and receptive vocabulary, the need to create language-rich learning environments that foster 'word consciousness' (Graves, 2006) is evident. This entails creating spaces in classrooms where purposeful talk is encouraged and facilitated as well as ensuring that the classroom is rich in environmental print that engages children in the environment. A language-rich environment also requires the conscious planning for the introduction of new vocabulary that accompanies learning opportunities across the curriculum. Reading aloud for pleasure and purpose is also a regular feature of a language-rich environment. The Ofsted report *Reading for Pleasure and Purpose* (2004) warns against the reading aloud of texts if the focus is purely the mining of a text for its vocabulary – the interesting adjective or the well-placed adverb – but reminds teachers that a language-rich environment is about developing children's love of reading, interest in the words authors choose and how these words can make us laugh and cry, think and question. There is strong evidence to suggest that reading aloud to children increases children's vocabulary (McQuillan, 2019) and also impacts on later academic achievement (Shahaeian *et al*, 2019). Cremin *et al.*'s (2009) study, *Teachers as Readers*, explores the ways that teachers need to extend their knowledge of and pleasure in reading children's literature so their

enthusiasm for the words of fiction and non-fiction can excite and motivate. This research has had an impact on how teachers understand the central role of reading aloud and details of the research along with practical strategies from teachers across the country. It can be found at the Open University, reading for pleasure website. https://ourfp.org/. What is of particular interest here for student teachers is the way the research evidence has been used and translated into effective practice. Reading aloud introduces children to the vocabulary of these different ideas and situations, and importantly provides a context for the vocabulary. McQuillan's (2019) study demonstrated the effectiveness of simply reading aloud for pleasure and purpose compared to more traditional approaches to vocabulary comprehension. Of course, it is the teacher who is the key to unlocking the word-rich environment, encouraging interest in words, learning new words, playing with words and developing a growing love of language from wherever that language stems.

In addition to reading aloud, the language-rich environment is one that motivates and engages children to be independent readers. Cunningham and Stanovich (1998) used the term 'The Matthew Effect', referring to the Bible passage in the Gospel of Matthew that says *For unto everyone that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath* (Matt.25: 29, KJV), to explain how the more widely and frequently a child reads, the better she becomes at reading and the larger her vocabulary knowledge. This was further explored by Duff et al (2015) more explicitly in relation to vocabulary. Conversely, the less a child reads, the further behind she becomes in terms of her general and vocabulary knowledge, and her skills as a reader. The amount of reading a child does is also a predictor of vocabulary knowledge and subject knowledge, and explained the difference between the vocabulary knowledge

of children who read and those who chose not to or who could not read. Other studies have demonstrated similar findings: that wide reading is the *hallmark of word learning that occurs normally and incidentally during reading* (Blachowicz *et al.*, 2006, p528).

With these studies in mind, it is helpful to plan for the learning environment as well as planning specific vocabulary teaching. The environment includes the nature of the displays, the spaces and opportunities created in the classroom for purposeful interactions and the pedagogic choices made to teach language and literacy. The case studies below, taken from very different schools and year groups, explore how a trainee and teacher planned to create a word-conscious, language-rich learning environment.

CASE STUDY: USING THE ENVIRONMENT

Marianna, a PGCE student on her final placement, began her planning in a reception classroom in an area of high socioeconomic disadvantage by considering how the environment could support the language development, and in particular the vocabulary development of her class. She selected a version of *Jack and the Beanstalk* to read to the class as the context for learning. She practised reading the story aloud to a friend with a focus on how she would read words she had identified for explicit vocabulary teaching. The text included a range of words about the size of different characters and objects within the story: the beans were 'tiny'; the giant was 'enormous' and the beanstalk grew until it 'towered over Jack's little house'. When the words appeared in the text, Marianna used her voice as well as actions to give meaning to the words; she asked questions about how the enormous giant would make the children feel if they met him; she encouraged role play of climbing the 'towering' beanstalk; she planned for the other adults to use the words in the role play area and

she presented the words as a synonym web and then a 'word-cline' (see the word-cline in Figure 3.1) to help children consider the words' 'shades of meaning'. She encouraged children and practitioners to add to the 'word-cline' and used these words on the story map the children had created. She linked the vocabulary to other areas of the curriculum. She modelled, along with other adults in the classroom, using these words across the curriculum – even using the words at fruit time and play time. Children were encouraged to take the book and 'read' the story to each other and Marianna provided lots of opportunities for children to talk about the story, scaffolding talk where appropriate to support children's articulation of their likes and dislikes, things that puzzled them and the connections they made with their own experiences, with other stories and within connections within the story (Chambers, 2011).

Insert Figure

Figure 3.1 Example of a word-cline

Kathryn is a Year 5 teacher in an inner-city school. Her class has large numbers of children for whom English is not their first language. Teaching vocabulary through reading aloud and related word play has been a feature of her teaching for some time. Her school uses the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) 'Book Power' and 'Power of Reading' resources to support planning, and Kathryn chose Siobhan Dowd's book, *The London Eye Mystery*, as the text to read aloud to the class. The main character, Ted, is autistic and sees the world in a slightly different way from his family. The story demonstrates, through the eyes of the character, some of the idiosyncrasies of the English language and this enabled Kathryn to focus on word play with her class, and in particular idioms ('It's raining cats and dogs') and puns

('What did the letter say to the stamp?' 'Stick with me and we'll go places'). The classroom walls became an exploration of idioms, which often cause difficulties in spoken and written language for children who are not English first-language speakers. The children told a 'joke a day' exploring the vocabulary of the pun, although sometimes it took a while for the laughs to come as a discussion was needed about the vocabulary before the jokes made sense.

These examples come from different key stages, but demonstrate the centrality of vocabulary development in the pedagogic approaches of the student and teacher, and a commitment to enriching the spoken language of the children they teach.

CURRICULUM LINK

Puns are often created because the words in question are homophones. Homophones are words that sound the same but are spelt differently – e.g. hear and here; some and sum. The programmes of study for spelling in Years 2 to 6 include reference to the teaching of homophones. The objective in Years 5 and 6 requires children to 'continue to distinguish between homophones and other words which are often confused'. Jokes and games can be an effective and engaging way to teach this sort of language knowledge. There are good resources available on line, or Richard Lederer's book *Pun and Games* (1996) is a useful resource.

ACTIVITY

Audit the classroom in which you work: is the classroom a rich literature environment? Consider the following:

- Are there spaces in your classroom that are conducive to 'book talk'?
- Are books and digital media accessible?

- Are there displays that encourage children to leave comments about and express preferences about books they have read?

- Is new vocabulary linked to classroom reading, displayed and explored?

- Are there opportunities for children to deliberately and purposefully use the vocabulary investigated in texts?

- Are children involved in selecting the book that is chosen as the 'read aloud' text – perhaps through hearing snippets of different books before expressing preferences?

- Is poetry visible in the classroom (a really rich source of language used for different effects on the reader)?

- Are jokes, puns and 'words of the day' activities available?

The National Literacy Trust website (**www.literacytrust.org.uk/**) provides useful audit documents to support the development of rich, literate environments.

VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT TO SUPPORT

READING COMPREHENSION

The National Curriculum

The statutory requirements for reading – comprehension require pupils to be taught the following:

Year 1

Develop pleasure in reading, motivation to read, vocabulary and understanding by:

- listening to and discussing a wide range of poems, stories and non-fiction at a level beyond that at which they can read independently;

- being encouraged to link what they read or hear read to their own experiences;

- becoming very familiar with key stories, fairy stories and traditional tales, retelling them and considering their particular characteristics;

- recognising and joining in with predictable phrases;

- learning to appreciate rhymes and poems, and to recite some by heart;

- discussing word meanings, linking new meanings to those already known.

Year 2

Develop pleasure in reading, motivation to read, vocabulary and understanding by:

- listening to, discussing and expressing views about a wide range of contemporary and classic poetry, stories and non-fiction at a level beyond that at which they can read independently;

- discussing the sequence of events in books and how items of information are related;

- becoming increasingly familiar with and retelling a wider range of stories, fairy stories and traditional tales;

- being introduced to non-fiction books that are structured in different ways;

- recognising simple, recurring literary language in stories and poetry;

- discussing and clarifying the meanings of words, linking new meanings to known vocabulary;

- discussing their favourite words and phrases;

- continuing to build up a repertoire of poems learnt by heart, appreciating these and reciting some, with appropriate intonation to make the meaning clear.

Years 3 and 4

Develop positive attitudes to reading and understanding of what they read by:

- using dictionaries to check the meaning of words they have read;
- discussing words and phrases that capture the reader's interest and imagination.

Key Stage 2 (so across all year groups)

Understand what they read, in books they can read independently, by:

- checking that the text makes sense to them, discussing their understanding and explaining the meaning of words in context.

As you can see, across all year groups the role of vocabulary is highlighted in the 'Programmes of Study' and seen as integral to the teaching of reading comprehension. It is often an area overlooked when teaching reading comprehension but research demonstrates that vocabulary development is an essential component.

RESEARCH FOCUS

Vocabulary knowledge plays a role in language comprehension and language comprehension is a component of reading comprehension ('The Simple View of Reading'). The DfE Reading Framework (2022) highlights the foundational role of language comprehension. When a child decodes a word and knows the meaning of the word she/he has what is known as a semantic representation of that word (Primary

National Strategy, 2006) and based on this, when they encounter similar words, they will use this knowledge to work out the meanings of the new word. This knowledge also provides children with some contextual information about what they are reading and supports the child in the development of a 'situation model' (Kintsch and Rawson, 2005). This model is built, often subconsciously, in the mind as we read. It is almost like a picture being painted, or a film being created, or a mind map being written in the mind of the reader, based on the inferences they are making as the words in the text are read. As the reader reads, they continually add to or take away elements of their developing model, building as they read their understanding of the text. Yuill and Oakhill's (1988, 1991) inference training demonstrated that children could be supported in developing reading comprehension through the explicit and deliberate teaching of inference, including the teaching of vocabulary within texts. Tennent, (2015) notes the importance of repeated exposure to new words so that children have *vocabulary depth*, having met and used new words in a range of contexts and for different purposes. This *depth* is what enables comprehension.

The vocabulary focus as part of reading comprehension can be taught by the intentional teaching of strategies. Pressley (2000), along with many other researchers, identified these strategies as *prediction, questioning, clarifying, imagining* and *summarisation*. These strategies can be used, therefore, to teach vocabulary. Children need to be taught that they should expect what they are reading to make sense, and part of this is understanding what the vocabulary decoded means. This needs to be a feature of early phonics teaching as well – it is essential that children do not experience early reading as merely being able to '*bark at print*'. It is easy to assume that it is the more unusual and complex words that need to be taught as part of reading comprehension, but Cain (1996) identified that poor comprehension was often due to

lack of knowledge of 'local cohesive devices', which means that a reader does not understand the meaning of grammatical function words. So when reading 'Tom walked down the road. He was in a hurry because he was late', the reader needs to infer that 'he' in the second sentence refers to 'Tom' in the first sentence and that the word 'because' is telling the reader that a reason for Tom being in a hurry is about to be given.

This level of vocabulary knowledge enables the reader to make sense of the text as a whole. Deliberately noticing, discussing and mapping words, including those with similar grammatical functions, can support all children, and particularly those where English is not their first language, to develop their use and understanding of vocabulary as well as support their reading comprehension (Conteh, 2012). Tennent *et al* (2016) provide an excellent framework for exploring a text and identifying words to explore and map.

USEFUL STRATEGIES

Before reading

1. Encourage children to predict what the story or non-fiction text might be about with a focus on predicting vocabulary. By activating prior knowledge, children are able to share their knowledge of possible technical vocabulary that might occur in the text as well as language structures and patterns they might expect from a particular genre e.g. 'Once upon a time …'. Record these predictions on post-it notes and return to them as you encounter the words or synonyms for these words in the text.

2. Teach specific vocabulary that you have identified as possibly causing difficulties in terms of decoding or that you know is new for the children. Select words carefully. It is helpful to look at the work of Isobel Beck

(2005), who grouped words into three tiers. The first tier is made up of basic words and they rarely need instruction – e.g. chair, happy, pencil. The second tier of words are often synonyms for the first tier words, and words that are common in academic learning and general communication – e.g. discuss, miserable. These words are most useful for teaching as they are words that children will encounter more frequently in spoken and written language and, if known, enable comprehension. Third-tier words include technical and subject-specific vocabulary – e.g. peninsula – and so are interesting in terms of word study, but are not the most effective words to teach for comprehension. Some schools take a whole school approach to selecting words for teaching for example and approach such as Word Aware http://thinkingtalking.co.uk/word-aware/word-aware-1/. Words for teaching are identified as the 'Goldilocks words' – words that are likely to be encountered again by the child and so are useful to know and words that it would be common, for the average older child, to have a good knowledge of. 'Goldilocks words' also include words that may not be common but are central to the child's understanding of the specific topic being taught and this is really helpful when considering the range and depth of vocabulary that children need in order to address the whole of the curriculum.

During reading

1. Model using the 'Think Aloud' strategy (Israel and Massey, 2005) how you pause having read a word that is new or unusual (or one of the second-tier words you have selected to teach) and share your thoughts with children about how you go about working out what this word means. Model how you can: rerun the sentence; read on in the text and then return to the word; draw

on prior knowledge, looking at the word structure and considering words that share the structure as well as making inferences based on your prior knowledge of the subject area; refer to other sources – a friend, a dictionary or another text and using any illustrations, diagrams, charts or photographs to search for the meaning of the vocabulary. It is important to model this process *after* the word has been read, demonstrating the active construction of meaning and not as the approach to the decoding itself.

2.   The 'Talk for Writing' approach, as described in the *Transforming Writing Evaluation Report* (Rooke, 2013), involves children 'imitating' the text through oral retellings, using story maps or other organisational devices as well as physical actions to accompany grammatical function words. This supports the study of vocabulary within the context of the text and enables children to use the vocabulary repeatedly as they imitate the text in reading and writing.

After reading

1.   Returning to the text following reading to discuss, respond to and explore vocabulary meanings enables children to embed vocabulary learning through active engagement with the text. Using drama, 'Readers Theatre', creating synonym banks, creating 'magpie' word displays and raising questions provides children with multiple exposures to new vocabulary as well as offering opportunities for multiple uses of the new vocabulary.

An active approach to reading comprehension enables children to engage with and respond to a text and, in particular, to explore and make sense of the vocabulary. Opportunities to reflect on an author's language choices are important so that children discuss and analyse as they read. Reading comprehension worksheets and exercises

rarely motivate children and lack real purpose: not surprisingly, they are also not very effective in the teaching of vocabulary. The following case study illustrates how reading comprehension can be both active and purposeful.

CASE STUDY: POETRY

Fazana planned a unit of work reading and writing poetry with a class of Year 4 children. She wanted to combine poetry performance with a focus on vocabulary development. She used the poem 'The Sea' by James Reeves. The poem did not present many vocabulary challenges for children and so enabled Fazana to teach the 'Readers Theatre' approach. Fazana modelled how she created a mental model of the poem. She did this by 'thinking aloud' about the vocabulary. This included modelling how she used her prior knowledge of the sea and of dogs (the metaphor used in the poem) to make connections between the vocabulary. Part of the 'thinking aloud' process highlighted the onomatopoeic words, considering what they meant and how they could be spoken to emphasise both the sound and meaning of the word. She recorded her thoughts on the poem – annotating it with drawings and her ideas. She then used these to reread the poem to the children, using her voice to emphasise the meanings of the words, repeating some and changing her tone and volume. The children then worked in groups to annotate the poem and performed the poem. Following this, Fazana introduced another poem about the sea, 'Dover Beach' by Matthew Arnold. This poem had more challenging vocabulary and ideas, but the children were able to use the model from the poem 'The Sea' to investigate the vocabulary, to explore meanings and so perform the poem.

What was particularly effective about this teaching episode was the clear model given to the children before they began to work on a poem of their own. The

strategies they could use to support comprehension were demonstrated explicitly and they were then able to use this scaffold to structure their investigation of the second poem. It is important that children are given the opportunity to apply their learning independently across the curriculum, using their learning for purpose and pleasure.

CURRICULUM LINK

Cross-curricular opportunities provide a real purpose and context for vocabulary exploration. It is important that strategies to support vocabulary development are used and applied in other areas of the curriculum. Consider the vocabulary demands of a mathematics word problem, the technical vocabulary in a science investigation and the particular range of conjunctions and adverbials used in historical writing.

ACTIVITY: TEACHING STRATEGIES

Look at the following sentences taken from different subject areas. Which words would you teach and which strategies could you use to teach them?

1. There were 7 more girls than boys in the class. There were 33 children in the class. How many were boys and how many were girls?

2. The first settlers landed in Jamestown under the watchful eye of the Native Americans.

3. Penguins are rather cleverly camouflaged and have adapted to the harsh, cold conditions they live in.

4. 'The two executioners stalk along over the knolls,

   Bearing two axes with heavy heads shining and wide'

(taken from Thomas Hardy's poem, 'Throwing a Tree').

   (Possible answers can be found at the end of the chapter.)

Getting to grips with some of these words is about having an understanding of how each word has been built – what the root word is, the prefix and suffix, or where a word originates from. This brings us to the third element of vocabulary development.

VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT TO SUPPORT SPELLING – MORPHOLOGY AND ETYMOLOGY

The National Curriculum

Years 3 and 4

- use further prefixes and suffixes and understand how to add them;
- spell further homophones.

Years 5 and 6

- use knowledge of morphology and etymology in spelling;
- use dictionaries to check the spelling and meaning of words.

You will find further details and a fuller account of how to support children to develop as spellers in Chapter 4, but encouraging curiosity about words has benefits for both vocabulary development and spelling.

RESEARCH FOCUS

Knowledge of prefixes, suffixes and root words, and an interest in the origins of words characterises the child who has an extensive vocabulary. It is often thought that the teaching of morphology (the study and description of how words are formed) and etymology (the study of the historical origins of words) are confined to the teaching of spelling, but knowledge of how words work can unlock meaning for children,

particularly when it is taught alongside comprehension instruction (Baumann *et al.*, 2003). Mann and Singson (2003) suggest that children are naturally curious about words and will hypothesise about morphemes even before any literacy teaching. Word building, where children build words from their constituent morphemes, has been shown to improve spelling and also increase children's vocabulary knowledge (Adoniou, 2013). Adoniou gives the example of the compound word 'breakfast', suggesting that 'if you understand that it means to break a fast after a night of not eating, then you are less likely to spell it as "brekfast"'. She goes on to explore how an understanding of morphemes can help with widening vocabulary, understanding the way that words work enables a transfer of knowledge from one word to another. Adding *-ian* to a word can change *magic* into *magician* and so change an object to a person. This can then be transferred to *electric (electrician)*.

In the same way, an awareness of the history of a word, of its origins, can excite and motivate children to explore vocabulary. Different languages favoured different combinations of letters; so Norse spelling used *sk* while *sc* is more often used in the French or Greek. The letters *gh* were introduced by the Dutch – think about Vincent Van Gogh.

English is a rich and diverse language, which also means there is always more to learn. Morphology and etymology, in particular, can challenge a student teacher's subject knowledge.

CASE STUDY: MORPHOLOGY

Dean, a PGCE student, on placement in a Year 5 class was aware that his own knowledge of morphology and etymology was weak. He decided to use 'word work' as starter activities during register time every day for a few weeks. Each morning he prepared a 'word web' as a model for children and provided a range of words for

children to investigate in the same way. In the first week, he used words that were familiar to children, as in the 'word webs' in Figure 3.2 opposite.

Insert Figure

Figure 3.2 Examples of 'word webs'

In the second week, Dean showed children the programme *Call my Bluff* on which unusual words were defined by a panel of three different people, with only one definition being correct. He gave children the correct definition of some words but challenged them to make up plausible alternative definitions based on their knowledge of morphology and etymology. One child made up a definition of 'morphology': 'Morphology is the study of plasticine. Plasticine is able to be moulded and changed or morphed, which means the making of smooth changes. "ology" means the study of a subject and so morphology is the scientific study of the changing shapes of plasticine figures and can be seen in films such as *Wallace and Gromit* with the filmmakers being experts in the area of morphology.' Not a bad definition when considering the meanings of the morphemes in the word – albeit an inaccurate one.

In order to develop your subject knowledge, pause every now and again when you read and consider the words you are reading in relation to morphology and etymology; a good dictionary will give you some analysis of words, and there are many online etymological dictionaries that can be very helpful.

ACTIVITY: ETYMOLOGY

Can you identify the country of origin for each of these words? What clues did you use?

skirt	buffet	fjord	sky	cello

| soprano | rhythm | rhetoric | maisonette | crescendo |

(Answers can be found at the end of the chapter.)

Vocabulary development touches all aspects of teaching English and more significantly has implications for the way we teach in other subject areas. Vocabulary development needs to take place in a language-rich environment that encourages children's natural curiosity in the words that surround them. Alongside this, teachers need to provide structured exploration of vocabulary in context through the deliberate teaching of word comprehension strategies and investigation of morphology and etymology.

AND FINALLY . . .

There is perhaps one missing section in this chapter: the National Curriculum has a whole section for each year group in which vocabulary is clearly relevant, in the section titled 'Vocabulary, Grammar and Punctuation'. The vocabulary highlighted here addresses two distinct areas. It refers to terminology – so the specific vocabulary that names, defines and categorises the English language – e.g. the noun, verb and adverb – and also the content vocabulary that can be identified in a grammatical 'category' – e.g. dog, bottle and paper – are nouns. This later area is further expanded in the details of the programmes of study where it outlines how, when teaching writing, teachers should highlight vocabulary choice in relation to structure, organisation and content. It identifies the need to discuss vocabulary choice, considering clarity and cohesion, so drawing children's attention to the need to consider the purpose and audience of the writing.

This is a vast, varied and interesting aspect of vocabulary teaching and so has been addressed in Chapter 7 (Grammar and Punctuation), Chapter 9 (Poetry) and Chapter 11 (Writing), but it inevitably comes into many of the other chapters as well.

LEARNING OUTCOMES REVIEW

You should now know:

- what children need to know and understand about vocabulary – for language and reading comprehension and as a support for spelling;

- what you need to know as a primary teacher in order to teach the 2014 English National Curriculum;

- the breadth of study of vocabulary teaching and learning;

- approaches to teaching vocabulary within the different areas of vocabulary teaching.

Self-assessment question

1. What is meant by a language-rich classroom environment?

2. What is the link between reading comprehension and vocabulary development?

3. Why are the spelling objectives in the National Curriculum important as part of vocabulary teaching?

ANSWERS TO ACTIVITIES

Teaching strategies: possible answers

1. There were 7 more girls than boys in the class. There were 33 children in the class. How many were boys and how many were girls?

Vocabulary to teach: 'more than', 'how many more?'.

Strategies for teaching: highlighting or underlining the key words in the problem; using the words in another sentence linked to a different context.

2. The first settlers landed in Jamestown under the watchful eye of the Native Americans.

Vocabulary to teach: 'settlers', 'landed', 'watchful eye', 'Native Americans'.

Strategies for teaching: reading on in the sentence to infer the meaning of 'landed'; referring to prior knowledge, perhaps to learning about Vikings or other invaders and settlers; investigating the word 'settlers': settling, settle, the suffix -er; 'watchful eye': considering times in children's lives where they have watched something, thinking about why they were watching and linking this to why the Native Americans might have wanted or needed to 'watch' the settlers. Refer to other sources to consider the relationship between settlers and Native Americans, and use this to infer what 'watchful eye' might mean.

It is also interesting to look at place names – 'Jamestown': King James was on the throne when the settlers arrived in America, hence the naming of the town they established as 'Jamestown'.

3. Penguins are rather cleverly camouflaged and have adapted to the harsh, cold conditions they live in.

Vocabulary to teach: 'rather cleverly camouflaged', 'adapted', 'harsh', 'conditions'.

Strategies for teaching: exploring the phrase 'rather cleverly camouflaged', referring to prior knowledge of the word 'camouflage' and, where appropriate, a dictionary. The word 'cleverly' suggests there may be something unusual about the camouflage and referring to another source will tell the reader that penguins are black on top so that when in the sea they are camouflaged against the dark waters when

viewed from above and white underneath so that when viewed from below the sea they are hard to see against the light when looking up.

4.   The two executioners stalk along over the knolls,

Bearing two axes with heavy heads shining and wide

Vocabulary to teach: 'executioners', 'stalk', 'knolls'.

Strategies for teaching: 'executioners' – referring to children's prior knowledge about executions, perhaps thinking about learning about the Tudors, for example. Returning to the title of the poem and reading on to the end of the verse to infer what sort of executioners the two people in the poem might be and what they have come to execute.

'Stalk' – inferring that the word here is probably talking about the way the executioners are walking, using the grammatical construction of the sentence to work out that this word is a verb. Referring to prior knowledge: we talk about a cat stalking a bird and a lion stalking its prey – how can this help us infer what the word stalk means?

'Knolls' – rereading the sentence and studying the words before the word 'knolls'. 'Stalk along' and 'over' suggest the executioners are walking over undulating land, 'along' and 'over' suggest possibly walking over hills. A 'knoll', we might infer, is a hill. It might be a good word to look up in a dictionary to confirm the inference.

Etymology

Skirt	Buffet	Fjord	Sky	Cello
Scandinavian – the clue is in	French – the clue is in the	Scandinavian – the clue is in	Scandinavian – the clue is in	Italian – the clue is the –

the *sk*	pronunciation of the *et*	the *fj* together	the *sk*	*o* ending
Soprano Italian – the clue is the –*o* ending	Rhythm Greek – the clue is in the *rh*	Rhetoric Greek – the clue is in the *rh*	Maisonette French – the clue is in the *ai* sound and the –*ette* ending	Crescendo Italian – the clue is the –*o* ending

FURTHER READING

For a helpful overview of strategies and some background research read:

DCSF (2008) *Teaching Effective Vocabulary: What Can Teachers do to Increase the Vocabulary of Children who start Education with a Limited Vocabulary?* Nottingham: DCSF Publications. Available at: **http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/TEV_A4.pdf** (accessed 17 January 2014).

For a practical handbook (although be aware that it is an American publication) with a focus on strategies particularly helpful for children learning English as an additional language read:

Sinney, R and Velasc, R (2011) *Connecting Content and Academic Language for English Learners and Struggling Students*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin/Sage.

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