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Judith A. Scott
Education Dept University of California, Santa Cruz
1156 High St,
Santa Cruz, CA 95064
(831) 459-2239
jascott@ucsc.edu

William E. Nagy
Seattle Pacific University
School of Education
3307 Third Avenue West
Seattle, WA 98119-1950
wnagy@spu.edu

Susan Leigh Flinspach
Education Department University of California, Santa Cruz
Santa Cruz, California 95064
flinspac@ucsc.edu

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Chapter 8

More Than Merely Words: Redefining Vocabulary Learning in a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Society

Judith A. Scott, William E. Nagy, and Susan Leigh Flinspach

Imagine this scenario: Huron, a 6th grader, sits down to work on his vocabulary assignment. On the worksheet in front of him are 15 words: *parcel, monstrous, brood, anxiety, defense, vacant, thorough, observations, leisure, remedy, cunning, numerous, lecture, tart, and gloomy*. His task is to identify synonyms for these words and to match them to appropriate sentences. He sighs, picks up his pencil, and starts guessing. He only recognizes one of the words from the 10-minute discussion about the words given at the beginning of the week.

Huron is unlikely to develop a good understanding of the meanings of the assigned words from this exercise. He may be able to recognize the words or identify their definitions on the Friday quiz, but he probably won't use them in his writing or understand texts containing them any better. Vocabulary tasks like Huron's are pervasive in North American schools. Words are introduced with little or no context and with no apparent connection to one another. It is assumed that students will be able to draw on their background knowledge or on brief word introductions by teachers to complete the task. Recently, there has been an outpouring of material on vocabulary learning, too much of which re-creates the scenario above for students across many different grade levels in many different schools.

Vocabulary researchers have attempted to identify the attributes of vocabulary instruction that produce reliable gains in the comprehension of text containing instructed words through meta-analysis (Stahl & Fairbanks, 1986), narrative reviews of the literature on vocabulary instruction (e.g., Graves, 1986; Mezynski, 1983), and studies contrasting specific types of instruction (e.g., McKeown, Beck, Omanson, & Pople, 1985). More recently, the National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000) singled out the following best practices:

- Vocabulary should be taught both directly and indirectly.
- Multiple exposures to vocabulary items are important.
- Learning in rich contexts is valuable for vocabulary learning.
- Vocabulary tasks should be restructured when necessary.
- Vocabulary learning should entail engagement in learning tasks.
- Computer technology can be used to help teach vocabulary.
- Vocabulary can be acquired through incidental learning.
- How vocabulary is assessed and evaluated can have differential effects on instruction.
- Dependence on a single vocabulary instruction method will not result in optimal learning.

These are valuable guidelines. However, we consider them to be only a partial characterization of what is needed for effective vocabulary instruction.

Most vocabulary instruction and research have been informed by cognitive linguistics and psychology with little regard for the social or cultural aspects of the learning environment. Cognitivists focus on word learning at the level of the individual learner, studying whether particular strategies or factors help students learn a particular set of words. Sociocultural theorists, on the other hand, tend to investigate language learning in a community, looking primarily at social interactions, context, and power relationships that influence learning and use. Like Pearson (2004), we prefer a balanced approach to literacy, which calls for multiplicity and complementarity in research and in instructional methods. As he says, “The problems we face are too vexing to limit ourselves to a single methodology or epistemology” (p. 244). We believe that a blended perspective that considers both cognitive and social aspects of learning can enhance vocabulary instruction in schools. Indeed, we believe that such multiplicity is necessary as teachers deal with the complexity of teaching students who come to us from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Our chapter draws on both sociocultural theory and on cognitive and linguistic ideas about vocabulary instruction. The sociocultural perspective on literacy learning emerges from Vygotskian theory (Vygotsky, 1978, 1934/1986; Wertsch, 1991), which sees language as a tool of the mind, working in a milieu in which action is mediated by others, inseparable from sociocultural factors. In this sense, word learning or vocabulary

acquisition in academic settings is a socially negotiated phenomenon; it is part of learning a new Discourse for many students such as Huron. Gee (1996) identifies Discourse, with an uppercase *D*, as ways of being in the world that “integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes” (p. 127). From a sociocultural perspective, promoting vocabulary growth in schools is a matter of encouraging students to become part of the Discourse of the classroom community, embracing its academic words and language without rejecting the linguistic and cultural identities they bring with them from home. From the viewpoint of functional linguists and psychologists, teachers also need to recognize that word learning is a complex cognitive task and that metalinguistic attention to elements of the task is necessary (Carlisle, 2003; Halliday, 1987, 1989, 2004; Nagy & Scott, 2000; Schleppegrell, 2004). We maintain that both the sociocultural and the cognitive perspectives are necessary to facilitate academic success for students who are traditionally underserved by schools.

The divide between these theoretical frameworks and disciplinary priorities is wide, and so we narrow our discussion in this chapter to just two strands from a much larger web of ideas about effective vocabulary instruction: (1) metalinguistic awareness, that is, explicit and purposeful reflection on elements of academic language, and (2) the development of a literate identity that values academic language. We do not consider either of these strands to be novel, or even controversial. In other literacy domains, they have been discussed, examined, and implemented extensively, yet applying either of them in any depth to vocabulary instruction would result in a substantial shift from conventional practice. We intend to show how the research behind these strands can be seen as complementary and how, when they are combined, they provide a more balanced approach to vocabulary instruction. As we begin to sketch out how these two theoretical strands come into play when teaching vocabulary, we will reflect on how teachers might use this knowledge to help students like Huron.

Academic Language

A balanced approach to vocabulary instruction rests with how teachers teach academic language—the dominant Discourse in schools. Academic language draws on “a different constellation of linguistic resources from what is typical or expected in everyday conversation” (Schleppegrell, 2004, pg. 9). It is a register of English that has distinctive

lexical, morphological, syntactic, and stylistic features. Although people sometimes speak it in educational or other prestigious contexts, academic language is most often written. Learning to use academic language is one of the greatest challenges of schooling.

The academic register is not just talk written down. Developing mastery of academic forms of writing and speaking involves movement away from narrative forms of writing and speaking. Horowitz and Samuels (1987), for example, identify the hedges, vagueness, and redundancies typically found in conversation as defining characteristics of weak writing. An adult familiar with the academic genre of science texts may combine six propositions into one sentence containing a single clause (e.g., “Aluminum, an abundant metal with many uses, comes from bauxite, a clay-like ore.” [Hunt, 1977, p. 95]). A fourth grader, on the other hand, using language more typical of a conversational register, might express the same content using several sentences (e.g., “Aluminum is metal, and it is abundant. It has many uses, and it comes from bauxite. Bauxite is an ore and looks like clay.” [Hunt, 1977, p. 95]). Learning to write and read successfully in the academic register requires an understanding of how information can be packed into each clause, how logical relationships are presented, and how to use an expanded vocabulary to convey meaning (Fang, 2008). Although academic language can easily become unnecessarily obscure, at its best it allows for a compact expression of complex ideas.

Word choice is a critical element of academic language. Success in conversation depends heavily on attention to nonlinguistic clues—not just intonation, gesture, and facial expression, but even more on sensitivity to what one knows about the attitudes, beliefs, and purposes of one’s interlocutors. In school texts, on the other hand, the nonlinguistic clues available in conversation are absent, and the reader is reliant on the language of the text itself. In written language, and in academic and literate language in particular, word choice plays a far more important role than it does in conversation. Precise choice of words is perhaps the single most powerful tool available to the writer. For students to be motivated to learn vocabulary in school, they need to have some sense of the power that precise word choice offers.

In academic circles, including classrooms, academic language has higher status than other English registers. Yet treating the distinction between academic language and other registers primarily as a matter of power and prestige is missing an important dimension. A conversational register and the academic register differ in the functions for which they

are suited. A form of conversational English is better suited for carrying on conversations, and academic language is better suited for communicating certain types of information to a nonpresent audience or, as in lectures, to audiences where opportunity for immediate feedback is limited. Thus academic language is not a substitute for other varieties of English; academic language is a form that needs to be added to students' already formidable linguistic repertoires.

The Metalinguistic Nature of Learning Academic Language

Metalinguistic awareness is the ability to reflect on and manipulate features of language (Tunmer, Nesdale, & Wright, 1987). Although some word learning, especially in early childhood, may occur without reflection, word learning in school is fundamentally a metalinguistic task, requiring students to reflect on various aspects of language and text (Nagy, 2007; Nagy & Scott, 2000).

Metalinguistic awareness is a central component of word consciousness, and researchers generally agree that word consciousness is key to promoting students' vocabulary growth (Anderson & Nagy, 1992; Blachowicz & Fisher, 2006; Graves & Watts-Taffe, 2002; Johnson, von Hoff Johnson, & Schlichting, 2004). Word consciousness is an interest in and awareness of words. Graves and Watts-Taffe (2002) explain:

Students who are word conscious are aware of the words around them—those they read and hear and those they write and speak. This awareness involves an appreciation of the power of words, an understanding of why certain words are used instead of others, a sense of the words that could be used in place of those selected by a writer or speaker, and cognizance of first encounters with new words. It involves an interest in learning and using new words and becoming more skillful and precise in word usage. (p. 144)

One of the ways that word consciousness contributes to vocabulary learning is by helping students pay attention to words they encounter within the community of the classroom and during their independent reading. Though vocabulary instruction is important, much vocabulary growth occurs as students gradually gain more information about words through repeatedly encountering them in context (Sternberg, 1987).

One way of fostering word consciousness is calling students' attention to specific instances of the effective use of language. Because words are

around us all the time, asking students to look closely at words is akin to asking a fish to examine water. Stepping back from the flow of language to look closely at words is a foreign concept to many students. The practice of noticing allows students to become aware of words in their environment on a different level. Scott, Skobel, and Wells (2008) compared this type of word awareness to music or art appreciation. For example, it is easy to enjoy good music without metacognitive reflection on the elements involved. However, when listeners have knowledge about how the elements have been combined by the musician to create a song, they develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of the composition. An awareness of talk and of text that enables a parallel deeper understanding and appreciation of words is central to word consciousness.

Teachers help students become aware of what is worth noticing about words. They can guide students' exploration of how published authors use words effectively to convey their ideas or visual images. In particular, teachers can make a practice of noting and expressing their appreciation of well-crafted sentences or phrases when reading to and with students. Johnston (2004) quoted a teacher who asked students to "Write down a line you wish you had written" (2004, p. 16). Scott, Skobel, and Wells (2008) called attention to Gifts of Words, phrases that express an idea exquisitely. They also suggested that students catch words (or record them) in a word-catcher mitt, share the words with one another, and make the words available to scaffold each other's writing.

Providing opportunities to focus on word choice within social situations where there is an authentic task, such as writing for a real audience or giving directions, helps students see the value of using precise language. One of us observed a teacher who asked her first-grade students to write down all the rules and equipment necessary to play their favorite playground games, for example, foursquare. She warned them that when they got to the playground, they would be held to what they had written: "If you don't write down that we should bring a ball, you won't get to use a ball." The intent was to help the students understand the need to be explicit—one of the key ways that academic language can differ from conversation. Students benefit from authentic tasks that help them hone their metalinguistic awareness.

To successfully read academic texts, students also need to have strategies for dealing with new words—and for dealing with familiar words used in unfamiliar ways. No matter how large their reading vocabularies, students will routinely encounter words that they have never seen before in print. Even the most conservative estimates of students' word

knowledge suggest that average students add at least 1,000 words per year to their reading vocabularies (Anglin, 1993; Goulden, Nation, & Read, 1990). Students starting with smaller-than-average vocabularies need to learn words at an even greater rate to catch up with their peers..

One important goal of vocabulary instruction, therefore, must be to increase students' rate of vocabulary growth. For instruction in word strategies to be as effective as possible, two kinds of reflectiveness must be cultivated in students. First students must reflect on the language of the text—often more intensively and in more detail than they are accustomed to do. Second they must reflect on the process of word learning, which requires the flexible orchestration of information from multiple sources (Berninger & Nagy, 2008). To put it in slightly different terms, both strategic knowledge (What do I do when I come across a word I don't know, and how do I integrate the various types of information that may be available?) and metalinguistic awareness (What aspects of language and text structure do I need to be aware of to learn what this word means?) are fundamental aspects of word learning. We'll look next at some specific types of metalinguistic awareness that contribute to independent word learning, and what it means for students to be able to apply this awareness strategically.

Word Learning Strategies

Morphological awareness. Morphological awareness is the ability to reflect on and manipulate meaningful subparts of words. Although young children can manipulate some aspects of the morphological structure of words, for example, creating novel compounds and suffixed words (Clark, 1982), much of children's knowledge of morphology develops in the mid-elementary grades and later (Anglin, 1993; Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2008; Nunes, Bryant, & Bindman, 1997) as they come into contact with the increasingly complex language of school texts. There are substantial individual differences in students' abilities to use such information (Carlisle, 2000, 2003; Freyd & Baron, 1982; Tyler & Nagy, 1989, 1990), and morphological awareness has been found to be highly correlated with both vocabulary knowledge and with reading comprehension (Nagy, Berninger, & Abbott, 2006; Nagy, Berninger, Abbott, Vaughan, & Vermeulen, 2003).

The majority of new words that students encounter can be broken into meaningful subparts (prefixes, roots, and suffixes) that give information about the meaning of the word (Nagy & Anderson, 1984). However there

are also countless examples of cases in which word parts are uninformative and even misleading—for example, *casualty* has nothing to do with being casual. Thousands of websites repeat the question “Why do we drive on a parkway and park on a driveway?” Students need to recognize that word parts are usually helpful, but not universally so.

In many cases, the connection between the word parts and the meaning of the whole word may be clear enough once it has been explained, but it might not be helpful to a person encountering a word for the first time. Knowing that the Latin root *struct* means “to build” is unlikely to help a reader unfamiliar with the word *obstruct* infer its meaning; but if one is told that the Latin parts of the word mean “to build against,” this might serve as a helpful mnemonic.

There are numerous resources providing detailed information about teaching word parts (e.g., Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2008; Henry, 2003; Nunes & Bryant, 2006). We recommend that instruction in word parts include two facets that cannot always be done at the same time: first, modeling and applying the use of word parts as a strategy while reading, and second, gaining a better understanding of how word parts work. The first type of instruction would be most likely to take place in the context of reading a text, where the main purpose is comprehension and learning about word parts is a secondary goal. The other type of instruction would be more likely to take place apart from reading a specific text, when there was time to explore the creative potential of word parts (How many words can you make by adding prefixes and suffixes to the word *act*?), to compare and contrast different possible meanings of word parts (*unhappy* versus *untie*), and to consider multiple examples of a word part (How many words can you think of that end in *-ness*? What do they have in common?).

Context and syntactic awareness. If, as is widely believed, much of students’ vocabulary growth comes from encountering words repeatedly in context while reading, it would follow that improving their ability to use context could produce gains in vocabulary. Though long-term effects of instruction in using context have not been demonstrated, a number of studies have shown that students can be taught to be more effective in using context (Fukkink & de Glopper, 1998).

Numerous studies have shown that the ability to infer the meanings of words from context is highly related to reading ability (McKeown, 1985; Sternberg & Powell, 1983; van Daalen-Kapteijns & Elshout Mohr, 1981). To some extent, the effect of reading ability can be traced to the fact that

when trying to infer the meaning of a new word, less-able readers are less likely to know the meanings of the other words that occur in the context (Shefelbine, 1990). However there are also great individual differences in students' understanding of how the context constrains the meaning of a new word (McKeown, 1985; Goerss, Beck, & McKeown, 1999).

The metalinguistic skill most directly related to effective use of context is syntactic awareness, the ability to reflect on the structure of sentences. Syntactic awareness is not formal knowledge of grammar, but rather sensitivity to how words are combined. It includes knowing that a particular word is, for instance, a noun or a verb by its position within a sentence. Performance on cloze tasks—trying to decide what word would fit in a blank replacing the word originally in the text—depends on syntactic awareness (Lesaux, Rupp, & Siegel, 2007).

As with morphological awareness, there are two different instructional situations in which students could be helped to develop the sensitivity to sentence structure necessary to make effective use of context. Obviously it is essential that teachers model the use of context for students and give students scaffolded experiences in using context while reading texts. However research indicates that some students would benefit from more intensive and specific attention to how a text constrains the possible meanings of new words through the use of activities specifically tailored to this goal (Goerss et al., 1999). Modeling and discussing hypotheses for words in cloze tasks can help students reflect on the use of context to constrain their guesses.

Dictionary use. The dictionary is a traditional tool for learning new words. Teachers often teach alphabetization and use of guidewords to locate a definition in a dictionary. Aside from the question of whether these skills are still necessary in light of the availability of electronic dictionaries, it is important to recognize that these skills are insufficient for effective dictionary use. It is when the student has located the definition of a word that the hardest work begins—integrating the information in the definition with the information in the text containing the word in question.

This task is not an easy one for upper elementary-grade students (Scott & Nagy, 1997). The metalinguistic demands of using a dictionary are considerable. The learner must have a concept of what constitutes a possible word meaning (Nagy & Scott, 1990). The learner must also have some familiarity with the conventions of dictionaries—knowledge that is still developing in elementary school (Watson, 1985; Watson & Olson,

1987) and beyond. In addition, the working memory demands of the task are enough to make it challenging (Miller & Gildea, 1987). Students must hold in mind both the definition of the new word and the context in which it occurs, and if multiple definitions are offered, as is often the case, their work is even more complicated. To integrate the information provided by a definition with the text in which the new word occurs, the learner must also have the metalinguistic abilities associated with effective use of context.

It is likely that both the importance and difficulties of dictionary use are widely underestimated. The advent of online dictionaries may reduce or remove the need to learn some of the mechanics of dictionary use, but the difficulty of taking the information provided to construct a meaning for the text containing the new word still remains. We believe that the use of definitions as a tool for understanding text containing unfamiliar words should be treated as an essential but difficult cognitive strategy. It is important, therefore, that teachers apply what is known about effective strategy instruction to the teaching of dictionary use—a point we will return to shortly.

Learning about polysemy. For most commonly used words, polysemy (multiple meanings) is the norm. Examination of any dictionary of substantial size reveals that words with just one meaning, though plentiful, are almost always low-frequency technical terms or words derived from more familiar words by affixes or compounding. Since the most common words in the language are those with the greatest number of meanings, most students already have, in principle, the tacit ability to cope with polysemous words. Nevertheless multiple meanings can pose a serious problem for learners.

Given their pervasiveness, multiple meanings, figurative language, and idioms are essential to developing the metalinguistic foundations necessary for proficient word learning and reading. Perhaps the most fundamental instructional step for developing students' ability to cope with multiple meanings is calling their attention to words used with figurative or otherwise nonprimary meanings.

Carlo et al. (2004) included work on polysemy in their vocabulary intervention that was found to have a variety of benefits both for English learners and for students who spoke only English. Although the design of the study did not make it possible to determine the effectiveness of teaching about polysemy, their intervention offers an example of how

polysemy can be addressed as one component of a multifaceted approach to promoting vocabulary growth.

Strategic Application of Metalinguistic Awareness

Word learning strategies, in addition to being important for students to learn, also pose some serious metacognitive difficulties. Morphological awareness can be deceptive; *shiftless* does not mean “unchangeable” or “having an automatic transmission.” Context and syntactic structure do not always supply helpful information about the meaning of a new word (Beck, McKeown, & McCaslin, 1983). Learners must simultaneously generate hypotheses about the possible meanings of new words based on the word learning strategies they know and evaluate the plausibility of these hypotheses.

Because of the limitations of each potential source of information about a new word, learners must be able to apply word learning strategies in combination. The meaning a student derives from word parts must be tested against context. Likewise if a dictionary supplies multiple definitions for a word—as is usually the case—the learner must decide on the basis of context which of these meanings fits. Skills related to polysemy are also required in using word parts because in many cases the addition of a prefix or suffix requires students to focus on a specific meaning of a word, often a less frequent one. For example, *divisive* builds on the non-mathematical, rather than the mathematical, sense of *divide*; *considerate* focuses on a very specific sense of *consider*.

Because word learning strategies supply partial information about the meaning of a new word, students must learn to be flexible and reflective in their use. When students encounter an unfamiliar word in a text, the question is not whether they can come up with a definition for that word, but whether they know enough to continue reading with an adequate level of comprehension. Thus word learning strategies must be coordinated with a sophisticated level of comprehension monitoring

Therefore word learning strategies cannot be treated as simple, mechanical skills (e.g., when you come to an unfamiliar word, reread the sentence and see if you can find a context clue, or if you come across a new word, see if it contains any familiar parts that might give a clue to its meaning). Such skills are part of what a proficient word learner knows, but proficient word learning requires far more: the integration of multiple sources of information, the evaluation of their plausibility, and the orchestration of word learning strategies with comprehension monitoring and other higher-level skills required to construct a coherent

meaning from a text. In other words, word learning needs to be taught as a set of complex metacognitive and metalinguistic strategies, not as a set of skills.

A good deal is already known about what kind of instruction is necessary to foster the development of metacognitive strategies—explicit explanation of why, when, and how to use a strategy; modeling of the strategy; gradual transfer of responsibility to students; and prompting and encouraging application of the strategy across the curriculum (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). Word learning strategies are in fact complex and demanding cognitive strategies. Teaching them well means that teachers apply the principles of effective strategy instruction thoroughly.

A crucial component of strategy instruction is the gradual transfer of responsibility for using the strategy to the students. We would like to emphasize the importance of the word *gradual*, which implies that substantial scaffolding be available and not be removed too quickly. In the teaching of any word-learning strategy, whether it involve the use of dictionaries, context, or word parts, there should be opportunities for scaffolded practice in which students have opportunities to receive support from one another and from the teacher. Working together may help students deal with the complexity of integrating, evaluating, and orchestrating the information at hand to develop plausible hypotheses for new words. Through careful instruction about word-learning strategies and the cultivation of students' word consciousness, teachers can guide students toward the challenging goal of becoming strategic independent word learners.

The Social Nature of Learning Academic Language

Teaching the metalinguistic knowledge and skills needed to master academic language is one strand of successful vocabulary instruction, but one that unfolds in the sociocultural environment of classrooms and schools. All teaching and most learning are social activities set in particular cultural contexts. We contend that vocabulary instruction should teach metalinguistic strategies for learning words in contexts that build on the social and cultural lives of the students.

Language Acquisition Through Social Relationships

Verbal activities, including word learning, are socially organized and embedded within cultural systems of meaning. Words are not learned in isolation but in the process of acquiring knowledge of the language

practices within particular sociolinguistic environments (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). In general, “children come to share the world view [and social practices] of their community through the arrangements and interactions in which they are involved, whether or not such arrangements and interactions are intended to instruct them” (Rogoff, 1990, p. 98).

Much of children’s initial language learning comes from the caregivers in their society, most often their mothers, during interactions in which children come to understand the communities of practice in which they live. However the normative style of mother–child conversations varies across sociocultural groups and from situation to situation (Heath, 1983; Hoff-Ginsberg, 1991; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). In these conversations, social cues and social intent have been found to influence word learning in young children (Bloom, 2000; Tomasello & Farrar, 1986). Tomasello and his colleagues (Tomasello & Farrar, 1986; Tomasello & Todd, 1983) provided some of the first indications that the way mothers interacted with their young children influenced vocabulary growth. When mothers’ conversations with their children followed and extended the child’s interest and attention, there was a positive effect on vocabulary growth. When mothers took a more directive approach, without consideration of the child’s focus of attention, word learning suffered (Tomasello & Farrar, 1986). Not surprisingly, the type of social situation in which conversations occur influences both the type and form of conversations (Fivush, Haden, & Reese, 2006; Hoff-Ginsberg, 1991). Mothers tend to keep to a minimum the variety of words used as a child gets dressed, to use mostly directive statements during toy play, and to talk more with their children using a variety of words with extended discourse when they read together (Hoff-Ginsberg, 1991).

The function of interpersonal communication with children is tied to particular intents or purposes within particular sociocultural frameworks. For instance, during mealtime conversations, the frequency, length, and kind of narratives and explanations found among families vary across cultures, across language groups, and as a function of social class (Snow & Beals, 2006). While narratives told at American dinner tables recount events that are out of the ordinary (e.g., Josh threw up today), narratives in Norwegian homes report everyday events (e.g., Sara wore a blue sweater). Israeli conversations often feature reminiscing, while Americans tend toward explanations of events. What warrants the conversational floor is specific to each culture (Snow & Beals, 2006).

Extending this to classrooms, Wilkinson and Silliman (2000) state, “to a great extent, the language used by teachers and students in

classrooms determines what is learned and how learning takes place” (p. 337). What counts as knowledge and appropriate discourse in any classroom is shaped, to a great extent, by the questions teachers ask, their response to students, and the type of dialogue allowed within the class (Applebee, 1996; Nystrand, 2006). However, within the discourse frame of classrooms, students rarely engage in the activities that could improve vocabulary learning (Scott, Jamieson-Noel, & Asselin, 2003; Watts-Taffe, 1995). Scott, Jamieson-Noel, and Asselin (2003) found that, on average, 6% of school time was devoted to the development of vocabulary knowledge in sixth-grade classrooms, with only 1.4% devoted to vocabulary development in academic subjects (math, science, art, social studies) other than language arts. In their observation of 61 preschool teachers for over 500 minutes, Dickinson, McCabe, and Clark-Chiarelli (2004) found that intentional talk about words never occurred in 90% of the classrooms.

All language learning—including mastery of academic language—is situational and interpersonal. To learn vocabulary, students must have opportunities to read it, hear it, and use it to communicate with others. Context and communicative intent play a central role in vocabulary instruction.

Identity and Academic Language

Students quickly become aware of the differences between academic language and other language registers with which they are likely to be far more familiar. Their motivation to learn the vocabulary of academic English depends, in part, on their home literacy practices, their introduction to academic language at school, and the attitude they have toward these differences. This section discusses the literature that lays the foundation for two conclusions about students who want to learn the words of academic English. First, students who feel that the literate identities they are already forming in their homes and communities are respected and reinforced at school are ready to expand on those identities; and second, students need to see themselves as full participants in the classroom community in which academic language functions as a powerful tool (Dutro, Kazemi, & Balf, 2005; Gee, 2004).

Students’ identities as readers or as word learners depend on the literacy practices of the communities with which they identify. Gee argued that the more aligned a child’s home literacy experiences are with school experiences (teacher-type questioning and social interactions about texts, familiarity with academic language, similar literacy events), the easier

it is for the child to maintain and nurture a literate identity at school. Thus white, middle class children, many of whom have alignment in their home-school language and literacy experiences, tend to enter the classroom with an advantage (Gee 2001, 2004). There is ample evidence that the benefits of this alignment extend to familiarity with words found in an academic environment (Chall, Jacobs, & Baldwin, 1990; Hart & Risley, 1995; White, Graves, & Slater, 1990).

What teachers believe and do when their students lack the benefits of this alignment is critical to their students' mastery of vocabulary and of all elements of academic language. The literature on the social foundations of education documents a long and continuing history of educators whose view of students as having deficits in academic English leads to instruction that devalues, rather than maintains and builds on, the students' language and literacy practices from home and community (see Erickson, 1987; Heath, 1983; and Michaels & Collins, 1984 for early examples, and Davidson, 1996; Hermes & Uran, 2006; Lee & Oxelson, 2006; and Valdés, 1998 for more recent discussions). Literacy scholars from Heath (1983) to Gee (2004) have underscored that students who enter school with little knowledge of academic language are still likely to have a literate identity forged at home and that it discriminates against the child when teachers fail to respect this identity. Purcell-Gates, Jacobson, and Degener (2004) noted that literacy instruction that honors and builds on the student's existing literacy experiences is more successful:

There is no reason to continue to believe that all children or adult literacy learners will enter the classroom door with the same notions of what literacy is, what and who it is for, who engages with it, where, and when. What little data we have to date suggest that print literacy instruction that builds on the literacy worlds and practices of the learners stands a much better chance of succeeding than that which does not. (p. 163)

Multicultural approaches enable teachers to address home and community literacy practices in ways that can enrich traditional teaching or even disrupt the hegemony of academic language in classrooms (Banks, 2001; Sleeter & Grant, 2007). In one multicultural approach, funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992), teachers assume the role of researcher to learn about students' literacy worlds firsthand. Following a series of home research visits, for instance, one elementary teacher designed an interdisciplinary unit around candy that included candy labels in Spanish and in English

as texts and drew on the candy-making expertise of one mother (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992). Because students begin to form literate identities in the home and community, incorporating vocabulary, texts, and interlocutors from those domains into the classroom reinforces students' literate selves. Teachers who recognize and value students' exposure to diverse literacy experiences draw on such resources to assist students with the acquisition of academic language and literacy.

Even for many white, middle class children, schooling presents a situation in which they must master new forms of language, new types of texts, and new types of interactions around disciplinary knowledge. Sociocultural theorists regard academic language as a resource residing in the academic or classroom community rather than being the property of individual learners (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Gee, 2001). Students who want to identify as members of the academic community learn academic language to communicate with other community members. They learn the vocabulary, along with the grammar and stylistic elements of the academic register, through social interactions, that is, through oral and written communication with others (Purcell-Gates, Duke, & Martineau, 2007; Purcell-Gates, Jacobson, & Degener, 2004). Students who do not identify with the classroom and its society (Gallas, 1992), or who find that academic language does not serve their communicative needs (Au, 1993, 1998; McCarthey, 2001) have little reason to become proficient in academic language.

Literacy is a social practice, so students learn academic vocabulary through social interactions as members of a learning community. Teachers who develop a community of learners that is inclusive and that regularly engages students in conversations and written exchanges about new words and texts help students' literate identities expand. They facilitate students' socialization into academic language learning (Gee, 2001). To do this, they embrace students' home speech and literacy practices, de-center their own role, and rely on pair or small-group activities, peer-led discussions, and literature circles to create social interactions around texts and words. Gallas (1992) presents a powerful example of an entire class that, over the course of a year of sharing stories, became a learning community that was appreciative of multiple literacies. A key figure in Gallas' account was an African American girl, Jiana, whose academic identity and enthusiasm for narratives fluctuated with her alignment with the classroom community. After four months of sharing haltingly about small objects and reacting to other students' stories, Jiana's level of learning and sense of belonging led her to begin relating personal narratives

to the class. She then introduced fictional storytelling at sharing time but was rebuked by the teacher for her inappropriate story. The next month, following a public apology by the teacher and a class decision to include fictional stories in sharing time, Jiana took the lead in developing fantasy narratives that used multiple dramatic techniques and continually reinforced community bonds by incorporating other students, with their permission, as characters in her stories. Through sharing time structured this way, Jiana gained greater narrative fluency, exercised her growing vocabulary, and built a respected place in the classroom community. Like Jiana, students' desire to belong to a classroom community of learners can support their identification with academic language and literacy.

These types of literacy practices can heighten student motivation, participation rates, and academic achievement (Nieto, 2002; Rueda & Moll, 1994). Teachers who foster an inclusive academic word-learning community in their classrooms and who incorporate language and literacy practices from the home and community into literacy instruction are changing norms and reallocating power to reaffirm underserved students' literate identities.

Teaching Academic Language Through a Blended Approach

What would practice that blends the cognitive or metalinguistic and the sociocultural strands of learning academic vocabulary look like? How can teachers develop instruction that draws on both? We begin this discussion by reconceptualizing Huron's experience in the classroom:

Huron, a 6th grader, takes out his writing assignment. As he begins to write a narrative about his cousin arriving from Mexico, he pulls out his word catcher booklet, where he has stored words and phrases that help him express his ideas. When he finishes his first draft, he goes with a friend to a "shades of meaning" tree on a bulletin board to look for more powerful language for their stories. Together they find the word *monstrous* on a leaf with other words for *BIG* and they find *gloomy* for *SAD*. They discuss whether or not these words would fit into the narrative and whether *monstrous* is related to *el monstruo* in Spanish. When he completes his narrative, Huron reads it aloud to the class, and his classmates ask questions about both his cousin and his writing.

Huron's vocabulary learning in this scenario differs radically from his experience at the start of the chapter. In this scenario, Huron sees himself as a writer who has something interesting to say; he has confidence that other classmates will help him prepare his piece and will want to hear what he has to say. The assignment has personal meaning for him; he does not perceive it as busywork. He is engaged and excited. He is word conscious and understands that word choice is a tool to communicate ideas. He has sources of support for making more sophisticated word choices in his writing: the word catcher, the shades of meaning tree, and the discussions with his classmate. The words he is learning are in context, and he is being asked to draw on his personal background knowledge to complete the task.

Huron's teacher uses complementary epistemologies to engage students in activities that foster their identities as authors, their familiarity with academic language, their metalinguistic awareness, and their explicit and purposeful attention to words. These types of activities are not mutually exclusive. The work of Beck and her colleagues (e.g., Beck, Perfetti, & McKeown, 1982; McKeown, Beck, Omanson, & Pople, 1985) and the meta-analysis of vocabulary instructional studies by Stahl and Fairbanks (1986) show that teaching children the definitions of words is not enough.

To have an impact on reading comprehension, vocabulary instruction must include (among other things) tasks that cause depth of processing—mental effort and creativity and the establishment of connections between new and familiar information (Stahl, 1986; Stahl & Fairbanks, 1986). This depth of processing is most likely to be achieved in tasks that students experience as authentic. And researchers as diverse as Delpit (1995) and the New London Group (1996) agree that authenticity—actual reading and writing for real audiences and real purposes—is critical.

The results of a recent study by Purcell-Gates, Duke, and Martineau (2007) empirically support the theoretical claim that language forms are best learned in the context of authentic use. They identified authentic reading and writing activities along a continuum according to the purpose or function of the literacy activity and the nature of the text being read or written. An authentic purpose or function was defined as one that serves a social communicative purpose, such as reading for information that one wants or needs to know or writing to provide information for others. This was contrasted with school-only tasks such as completing worksheets, spelling lists, or lists of sentences to punctuate, which are used primarily for the purpose of learning or improving