

## **The importance of vocabulary**

David Wilkins:

‘We can communicate little without grammar. We can communicate nothing without vocabulary.’

Stephen Krashen:

‘When students travel they don’t carry grammar books, they carry dictionaries.’

## **Some thoughts about vocabulary teaching and learning**

- 1) Differentiate between active and passive vocabulary
- 2) If you want students to remember vocabulary, recycle again and again
- 3) Word formation and ‘systems’ of vocabulary are incredibly useful
- 4) Giving a list of vocabulary is not the same as teaching vocabulary
- 5) You don’t learn vocabulary by magic
- 6) Vocabulary teaching can be fun

## **Class vocabulary cards**

What are they?

- Sheets of A4 paper cut into eight
- The teacher writes all new words/phrases/expressions/collocations taught in class that he/she wants the students to remember actively (both from the textbook and otherwise)
- The words are kept together by the teacher and are taken to each class
- The stack of words is ‘non-transferable’, i.e. it is to be used by just one group of students one particular year

Why use them?

- a) They help you, the teacher, know what words exactly you have taught to a particular class.
- b) They encourage students to keep their own record of new vocabulary.
- c) They are visible and tangible signs of learning and progress.
- d) They are an immediate source of relevant words for vocabulary recycling activities and games and so ensure that exposure is frequent and followed up.

## **Practical activities:**

### **DIY Word Searches and Crosswords**

You can find empty grids in many places, for example:

<http://www.studenthandouts.com/Assortment-01/Graphic-Organizers/Blank-Word-Search-Puzzle-Grid.html>

Students can use the grids to make their own word searches or crosswords, recycling vocabulary you have taught them.

### Alphabet cards

- 1) Distribute the cards between the students. Then dictate a word and students, if they think they have a letter in your word, come out to the front of the class. Then they organize themselves to spell the word to the rest of the class. The rest of the class have to say if they think the word is spelled correctly.
- 2) Category scramble. Students stand in a circle. The cards are scattered randomly on the floor. You give a category of words, e.g. countries. The students have to scramble quickly and find a letter for a word in your category starting with that letter. So, if it's countries, they could pick up A for Austria, or D for Denmark. The last person to pick up a card loses a life. If you pick up a card, but then can't make a word, you also lose a life.

### Word stress columns

Have columns with different words stress patterns (e.g. Oo/oO/Ooo). Students work in pairs and put a set of vocabulary into the correct columns, according to where the stress is in each word.

### Spell forwards, backward and in the air

### The A - Z of .....

Give students a category (e.g. professions, adverbs, irregular past forms..) and ask them, in pairs, to think of a word in the category for each letter of the alphabet. E.g. *Professions – Architect, Banker, Chemist, Dentist....* If a letter is particularly difficult they should leave it and carry on. How many words can they think of?

### Vocabulary tennis

The students are in two teams. Each team nominates a captain. The teacher gives a category of words to revise, e.g. furniture, words containing negative prefixes, compound adjectives... In turn, each team, via its captain, says a word in the category. When a team cannot think of another word, or says an incorrect word, or repeats a word, they lose the point. The score works the same as in tennis. The teacher 'serves' new categories until one team wins the match.

### Swat the word!

Write up on the board about twenty words you've presented recently. The class are in two teams. One student in each team comes to the blackboard. Give each student a fly-swatter. Define one of the words on the board. The first student to hit the word on the board wins a point. Thanks to Alina Popov for suggesting this activity on the Gateway Facebook page! Go to <http://www.facebook.com/macmillangateway>

