STRATEGIC VOCABULARY FOR LEARNING

WHITE PAPER

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The purpose of this research is to create an essential list of vocabulary for learning that honors previous research-based studies regarding core vocabulary for communication. This list aggregates agreed upon core words and combines them with strategically selected fringe words. It also considers another category of words, keywords. For this purpose, fringe words and keywords are combined. In creating this new word list, the focus is on language for learning rather than language selected strictly for communication.

This list is more than developmental in nature. We know that some of the words on the list are used earlier than others in typically developing learners. However, the purpose of the words found on this list is not only for communication, but also for learning. Some learners are chronologically older than the vocabulary they use. For example, consider more mature learners or individuals who participate in a rehabilitation program. Another example might be an individual who is relearning language after sustaining a traumatic neurological event. It is important to have pronouns and articles available so that sentence structure is accessible for modeling. This list is age-agnostic.

Speech-language pathologists and educators fortunately collaborate on service delivery teams for the benefit of the school-age learner's situational needs. They are careful to consider the learning environment and specific conditions when planning vocabulary for learning. Therefore, in communication, words shift from the traditional Core vocabulary list to the Fringe list as appropriate, and vice versa. This new vocabulary for learning approach already combines these previously considered sub-lists.

CORE VOCABULARY

Core vocabulary is composed of fundamental basic words in any language that are needed to communicate. Core vocabulary is based on statistics of the variety of words that are used across a variety of situations and topics.

Among experts there is no definitive agreed upon list that might serve as a universal core vocabulary. In fact, across all lists studied for this research, there isn't even a simple list of words in common. Instead, there is a variable core vocabulary that is contingent on the user and the situation. Regardless of the exact words included on any core vocabulary list, they are simple, general, basic, and rarely contain nouns, other than personal words or names. Each list referenced has been extensively scrutinized.

Therefore, the essential question becomes, how do you decide on the fundamental vocabulary to be used primarily for learning?

FRINGE VOCABULARY

Fringe words are considered the content words in a sentence and are typically nouns. In the sentence, *I like the zoo*, the only fringe word is *zoo*. This word is not frequently used so would not be a core word unless that person works at or regularly visits the zoo. Nevertheless, it is an essential word because it carries meaning.

A fringe word is needed within the context of specific situations and has a lower frequency of use otherwise. Clearly, core vocabulary without meaningful fringe words could be constricting in the learning process.

KEYWORDS

A keyword is a word that is needed which differs meaningfully from the common vocabulary. For example, when revisiting a family vacation or school field trip, the word *beach* or *museum* may well be considered fringe in the common vocabulary. However, among the words needed to retell the story, a more excessive occurrence would be needed. Therefore, it is considered a keyword.

Core, fringe, and keyword vocabularies are measured by frequency of use and not centered on decisions about how suitable or beneficial a word may be.

ACROSS DIFFERENT LANGUAGES

Cross-linguistic studies of first single words or sounds acquired by typically developing children whose families speak different languages indicated noticeable similarities in the first words learned. Inconsistent with core vocabulary research, common nouns were the highest percentage of first words. These include names of animals and the sounds they make, specific food/drink, clothing, vehicles, and toys. Words about people are the next highest percentage of first words. Verbs are the lowest percentage of words typically used.

From a learning perspective, this research-considered article is important because it establishes the need to combine types of words for meaningful understanding of vocabulary application and solidifying new concepts.

EMERGING AAC USERS

Earlier research and contemporary methods in AAC agreed upon by speech-language pathologists indicate that there are three fundamental tactics to selecting vocabulary for children: developmental, environmental, and functional.

The developmental approach uses vocabulary words selected from developmental language inventories that have been created on the basis of language acquisition.

The environmental approach is when precise words appropriate for specific environments are recognized depending upon circumstances, sometimes also called fringe words. These words are typically nouns and are specific to each situation (e.g., cart, list, and specific items for a shopping activity).

In the third approach, functional, vocabulary is selected to facilitate purposes such as agreements or dissentions, greetings, requests, or other comments.

Considering a core vocabulary involves aspects of all three approaches and includes words used by peers who are close in age. A core vocabulary is small in size and does not change across situations. Common words used across all situations include facilitating words (e.g., help, more) that provide a framework for functional word use. Both core and fringe vocabulary plus keywords are important for communication purposes. However, children appear to use core vocabulary more frequently than fringe vocabulary.

CORE, FRINGE, AND KEYWORD PHILOSOPHIES ARE NOT NEW CONCEPTS

The theory of core vocabulary may be comparatively new from a communication perspective. However, vocabulary studies have been around since the 1920s. This list reflects a summary:

- Dolch word list — frequently used words for teaching reading created from the mid 1920s–1936

- First research initially considering the impact on AAC was written in 1960

- First study of language implemented by AAC device users was written in 1984

- First attempt to create a vocabulary list for preschoolers was written in 1992

- First research proving very young children who are emerging users of AAC use a core vocabulary was published in 2003

- Study establishing that core vocabulary is not just spoken but also written published in 2013

- Study establishing the effectiveness of strategically teaching morphology (adding –ing, –ed, or –s to root forms) published in 2012

- Study establishing the effectiveness of pairing of core and fringe vocabulary published in 2013

DOLCH VOCABULARY WORD LIST

The Dolch vocabulary list is the most commonly used set of sight words in the English language, divided by grade level, from prekindergarten to third grade. The list contains 220 "service words" plus 95 high-frequency nouns. Service words must eventually be easily recognized to achieve reading fluency.

These words comprise 80% of the words used in a typical children's book and 50%–75% of the words found in literature and writing for adults. A learner can focus attention on unfamiliar vocabulary once he knows this list of words.

VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT USING STORIES

Vocabulary development is a process of learning new words and the foundation for learning language. Vocabulary development focuses on helping learners understand the meaning of new words and concepts in a variety of contexts and across all academic content areas. When presented with vocabulary development through stories, new words sink in and grammar structures become clearly modeled.

Stories help us to make sense of the world. Stories provide learners with an opportunity to see and hear vocabulary in a meaningful and memorable context. Stories give learners an opportunity to understand meanings of new or unfamiliar words, and help them to develop their vocabulary by making associations between known and unknown words. Listening to language in context facilitates understanding of the meaning of words, especially words with multiple meanings. Stories give learners a great opportunity to infer the meanings of the unknown words from the context incidentally.

Stories engage learners and gain attention. Carefully selected stories can enhance motivation if within their scope of ability. Using appropriate vocabulary is important so that the learner does not become disengaged because the vocabulary is too familiar, nor discouraged because materials contain too many new vocabulary words or unfamiliar language forms. Learners discover which words naturally go together with other words, and see the model of grammatical structure.

Certain patterns and vocabulary words are frequently repeated in stories. When you find specific words popping up again and again at different points in the story, that makes those words easier to remember. This allows learners to be exposed to the language in familiar or predictable contexts. Storytelling as a teaching tool incorporates effective techniques used in vocabulary teaching to make learning fun and interesting.

CORE + FRINGE + KEYWORDS =
MEANINGFUL SITUATIONAL VOCABULARY

We already know that experts do not agree on the exact words for a basic core vocabulary list. However, we also know that the words are simple, generic and essential. Continuing, we know that a core vocabulary without important fringe words is restrictive. The key to building a successful vocabulary for learning is to teach and use core vocabulary to organize language, combined with fringe words to carry essential meaning.

These types of words work together encompass the entire list of words required for an effective learning vocabulary. We recognize core words as generic words that are usable across environments. Fringe words are words that may not be important for most learners, but are necessary for specific learners in a specific situation. Fringe learning vocabulary contains words that do not occur regularly but instead are required for learner activity, interest, environment, and personal circumstances. Fringe words are new words added for specific environments, situations or topics.

All of the unique terminology for a unit of study must be considered when developing vocabulary word lists for learning. For example, when studying the topic of seasons in a science unit, needed fringe vocabulary would include: *winter, spring, summer* and *autumn*. Core vocabulary words anchor down embedded concepts such as *cold* or *hot*. The same core vocabulary words would be needed in a life-skills cooking activity, but not the same fringe words.

Learning requires useful, meaningful vocabulary. Learners must be able to engage in meaningful conversation with teachers and peers about the content, both generally as well as specifically as it relates to learning situations and content.

Learners need the use of core vocabulary to structure discussion, but at the same time, they need words unique to the learning situation to incorporate concepts and content-specific knowledge. There are situation specific words required that define the content in academic and environmental circumstances. If studying a lesson in science on the 5 senses, we must add specific fringe vocabulary for body parts – hear/ear, smell/nose, see/eye, touch/finger/hand, taste/mouth.

Strategic vocabulary for learning must combine core and fringe or keywords in order to be effective. This means, depending on the curriculum, content, situation or circumstances, there can never be an absolute list of vocabulary words needed for learning. However, if contemplated situation by situation, with words added or removed as the circumstances require, it is possible to create a strategic learning vocabulary list.

This Strategic Vocabulary for Learning List should include not only basic agreed upon core vocabulary words. It should also combine fringe words and keywords that are considered essential for building understanding in foundation learning content areas. Educators shine when identifying content vocabulary as guided by mandated curriculum.

Curriculum content vocabulary adds specific nouns as topical key words. Additionally, several categories of content words should constantly be considered on the border between core and fringe, and can be moved fluidly into the core word category, using them as situations require. These categories might include: animal names and the sounds they make (woof for dog); food/drink; clothing; body parts; toys and vehicles. Additional verbs as needed for specific situations.

A FRAMEWORK TO BRING VOCABULARY AND LEARNING TOGETHER: EMERGING LITERACY AND LANGUAGE FOR LEARNING

The book, LANGUAGE AND LEARNING: A FRAMEWORK FOR INCLUSIVE DESIGN (A seven-stage framework for cognitive and language development) is designed in support of learners with cognitive and language delay. It organizes observable, measurable behaviors and skills into a continuum that guides language and learning milestones.

Language for learning evolves. At Stage 1 we are more focused on establishing a reliable behavior for learning. We establish that the environment is effective for learning and that the learner is attending to tasks. Once the learning environment is known to be effective, we then strategically and systematically introduce receptive vocabulary at Stage 2. Learners are not yet expected to make choices within this vocabulary. They are more expected to continue their attention to tasks in this effective learning environment, while the tasks themselves offer rich opportunities to absorb content. Words and concepts are presented through stories, songs, and conversations within the environment. Objects are named, actions are identified, and attributes are described. Patience and consistency are needed throughout Stage 2 as learners take the time necessary to grow conceptual understanding through exposure to carefully selected vocabulary without being asked about that content. It is not until Stage 3 that learners respond to questions about the content that they have been experiencing. All of the rich, carefully selected vocabulary can now become interactive.

Language and literacy learning are ongoing and constant. These are not separate skills related to specific activities. Instead, they are explained and applied across all activities. In short, language and learning cannot be separated. Learners with significant communication challenges need strategic instruction to learn and apply basic vocabulary.

From a learning perspective, it is critical to pair core, fringe, keywords, and Dolch word lists together as a student is developing the vocabulary for meaningful learning. Studies document the impact on literacy. Strategic instruction is known to improve phonemic awareness, decoding, spelling and vocabulary development. Segmenting and blending instruction focused on morphemes have a direct positive impact on meaning and spelling.

Therefore, when selecting vocabulary for learning, it is essential to combine both core, fringe and keywords along with select Dolch vocabulary for meaningful communication about classroom learning.

STRATEGIC VOCABULARY FOR LEARNING

Because this list is created by an educator and its purpose is vocabulary for learning, it incorporates words from all categories. This list strategically aggregates overlapping core vocabulary words from a variety of established, research-based lists into one collection. It also aggregates previously established fringe words and keyword lists into one newly named list now called Strategic Vocabulary for Learning.

These are combined into one master list because it is important to pair the words as learning circumstances dictate. This is imperative for more concrete learners to facilitate purposeful content-driven, meaningful learning interactions.

1. A
2. About
3. Again
4. All
5. And
6. Angry/mad
7. Are
8. Ask
9. Away
10. Baby
11. Back
12. Bad
13. Ball
14. Banana
15. Bath
16. Because
17. Big – bigger
18. Book
19. Boy
20. Brother
21. Busy

22. Bye-bye/goodbye
23. Can – cannot
24. Car
25. Cat
26. Check
27. Clean
28. Cold
29. Color
30. Come
31. Cookie
32. Daddy/Father
33. Day
34. Different
35. Dirty
36. Do
37. Dog
38. Don't/do not
39. Door
40. Down
41. Drink
42. Eat

43. Eye
44. Face
45. Feet/foot
46. Find
47. Finished/all done/all gone
48. Friend/friends
49. Front
50. Full
51. Fun/funny
52. Get
53. Girl
54. Give
55. Go/going/goes
56. Good
57. Grandma
58. Grandpa
59. Hand – hands
60. Happy
61. Hat
62. Have

63. He/him/his

64. Head

65. Hello

66. Help – helps

67. Here

68. Hot

69. House

70. I/me/my

71. In/inside

72. Is

73. It

74. Juice

75. Know

76. Later

77. Like

78. Little/small

79. Look

80. Make/made

81. Me/my/mine

82. Messy/mess

83. Milk

84. Mommy/Mother

85. More

86. Mouth

87. Need

88. No/not

89. Nose

90. Now

91. Off

92. On

93. Open

94. Out/outside

95. Over

96. People – person

97. Pick

98. Play/playing

99. Please

100. Put

101. Read

102. Ready

103. Round

104. Sad

105. Said

106. Same

107. See

108. She/her/hers

109. Shoes – shoe

110. Show

111. Siblings' names

112. Sing

113. Sister

114. Some

115. Stop

116. Sun

117. Take/took – takes

118. Tell

119. Thank you/thanks

120. That

121. The

122. There

123. Thing/things

124. This/these

125. Time

126. Today

127. Turn

128. Under

129. Up

130. Walk

131. Want

132. Water

133. We

134. Wear

135. What

136. When

137. Where

138. Who

139. Why

140. Work

141. Write

142. Yes

143. You/your

144. Yuck

145. Yum – yummy

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