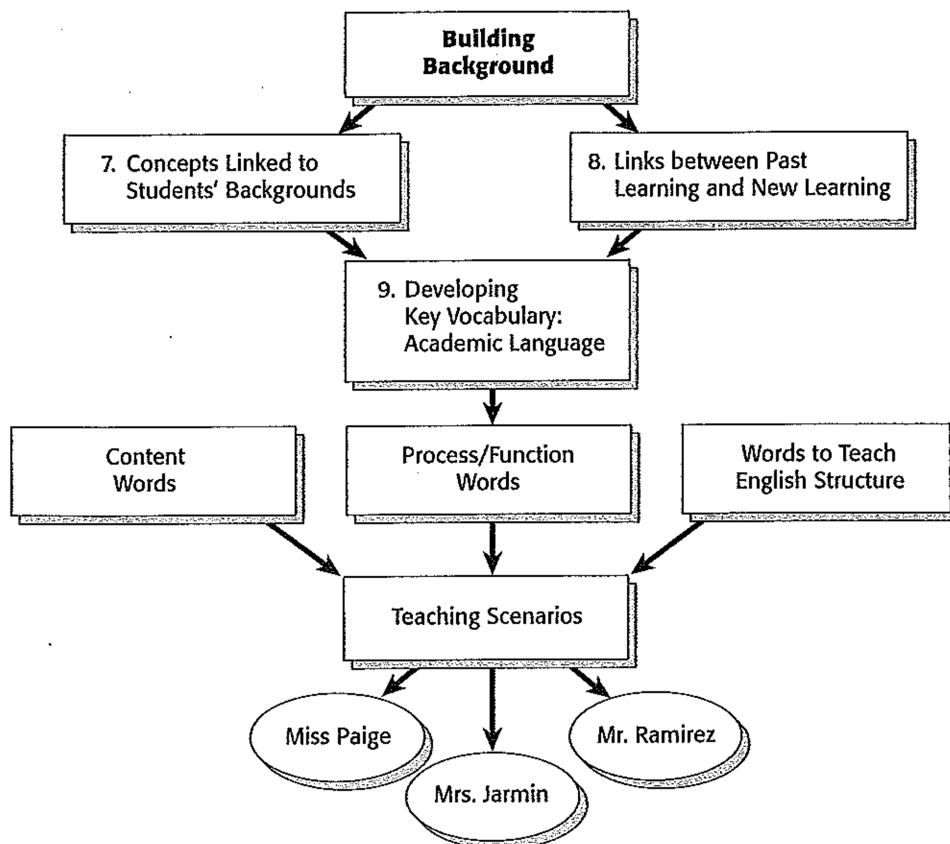
chapter 3

Building Background



Objectives

After reading, discussing, and engaging in activities related to this chapter, you will be able to meet the following content and language objectives.

Content Objectives

Identify techniques for connecting students' personal experiences and past learning to lesson concepts

Define the key elements of academic language (content words, process/function words, and words to teach English structure) and tell why it is so important to teach them to English learners (ELs)

Language Objectives

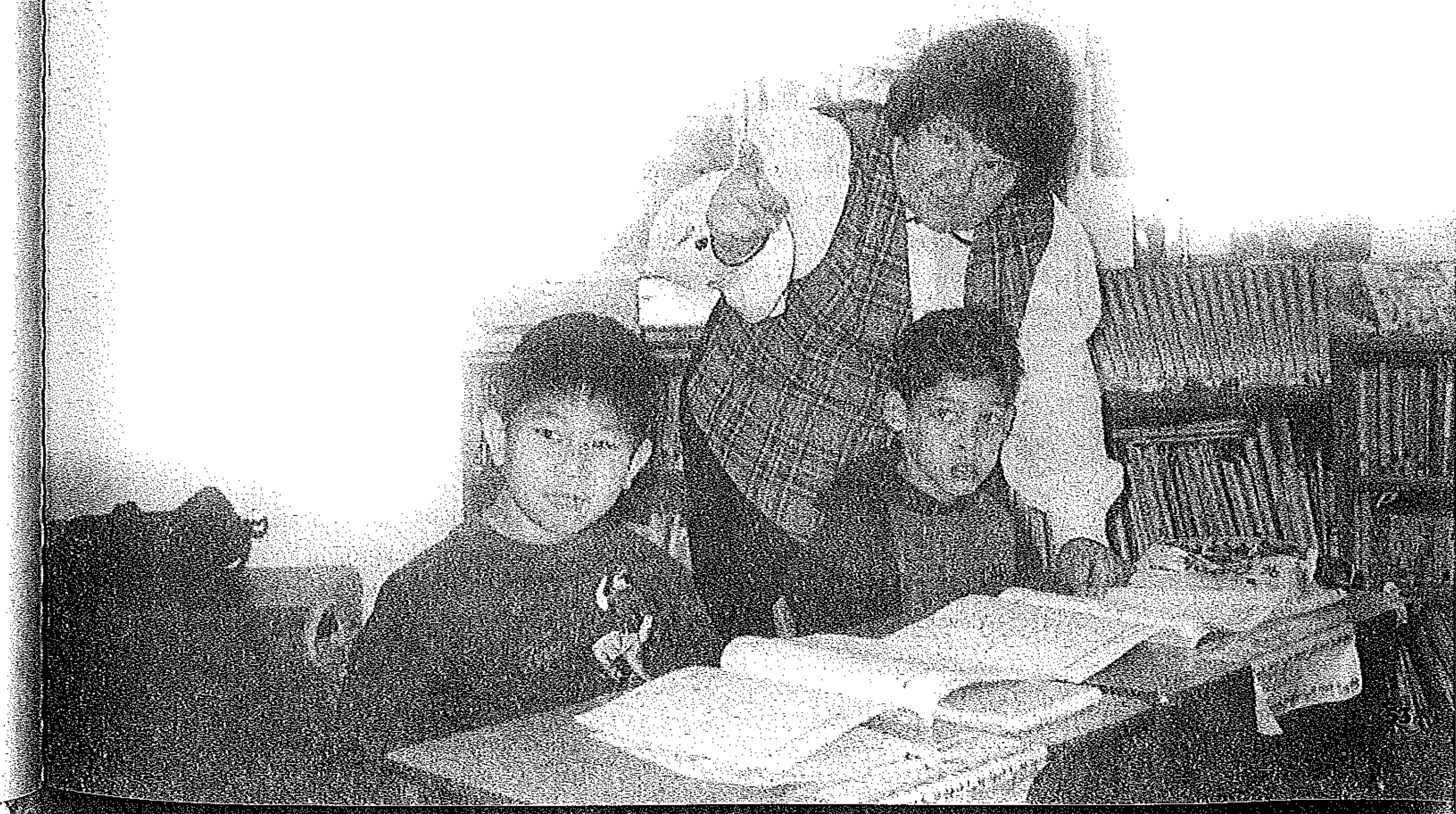
Write a lesson plan incorporating activities that build background and provide explicit links to students' backgrounds, experiences, and past learning

Identify the academic language in a SIOP® lesson and select key vocabulary words to emphasize

Background

Have you ever been teaching a lesson that you carefully prepared but with which your students cannot connect? As you are explaining new concepts, you observe confused faces, off-task behaviors, and maybe some students mumbling to each other. While there may be several reasons why your students don't understand what you are explaining, one common cause is a mismatch between what your students have learned and experienced, and the concepts that you're teaching. English learners, in particular, are frequently disadvantaged because their schooling experiences (whether they have had little schooling or exceptional schooling) may be considerably different from U.S. educational contexts. For example, the K–12 curriculum may be quite different from country to country, and depending on circumstances, some students may have experienced interrupted schooling, especially if they have been refugees. Further, English learners may not have learned the academic language and key vocabulary necessary for understanding content information. It is important that we not assume that all students lack knowledge of academic language; some students may know academic language well in their native language, but not in English.

Effective teaching takes students from where they are and leads them to a higher level of understanding (Krashen, 1985; Vygotsky, 1978). Students learning English must have ample opportunity to use the target language (English); to hear and see comprehensible English; and to read, write, and speak the new language within the context of subject matter learning. But there is a caveat to this: *the language must be meaningful.* It is not only the amount of exposure to English that affects learning, but the quality as well.



As we will discuss in the next few chapters of this book, effective sheltered teachers present information in a way that students can understand, bearing in mind their language development needs and any gaps in their educational experiences. New information is tied to students' background and experiences, and strategies are used to scaffold students' acquisition of knowledge and skills (see Chapter 5 for a detailed discussion). All students benefit from scaffolded instruction, but it is a necessity for English learners. This chapter focuses on *Building Background,* which is closely tied to Lesson Preparation and the teacher's assessment of the students' knowledge of and experience with the topic at hand.

SIOP® FEATURE 7: Concepts Explicitly Linked to Students' Background Experiences

During the past three decades, researchers have investigated how highly proficient readers and writers process new information (Carrell, 1987; Dole, Duffy, Roehler & Pearson, 1991; Banman, 2005). It is a widely accepted notion among experts that a reader's "schemata"—knowledge of the world—provide a basis for understanding, learning, and remembering facts and ideas found in stories and texts. Individuals with knowledge of a topic have better recall and are better able to elaborate on aspects of the topic than those who have limited knowledge of the topic (Chiesi, Spilich, & Voss, 1979; Vogt, 2005).

The importance of background experiences are expressed in the following ways:

> Schemata are the reader's concepts, beliefs, expectations, processes—virtually everything from past experiences—that are used in making sense of things and actions. In reading, schemata are used in making sense of text; the printed work evoking the reader's associated experiences, and past and potential relationships. (John McNeil)
>
> When reading, the learner forms meaning by reviewing past experiences that given images and sounds evoke. (Edmund Huey)

Christen & Murphy (1991) suggested that when readers lack the prior knowledge necessary to read, three major instructional interventions need to be considered: (1) teach vocabulary as a prereading step; (2) provide experiences; and (3) introduce a conceptual framework that will enable students to develop appropriate background information.

In this chapter we present ideas for teaching vocabulary before and during a lesson. Some studies suggest that a limited number of words should be taught per lesson or per week, and those words should be key words in the text (Beck, Perfetti, & McKeown, 1982). Others recommend teaching ELs the meanings of basic words, such as those that native English speakers know already (Diamon & Gutlohn, 2006; Stahl & Nagy, 2006). In SIOP® lessons, teachers select words that are critical for understanding the text or material and provide a variety of ways for students to learn, remember, and use those words. In that way, students develop a core vocabulary over time (Blachowicz & Fisher, 2000; Graves & Fitzgrald, 2006).

The second intervention is to provide meaningful experiences for students. In this chapter you will see how a teacher used a videotape to develop background knowledge before students read a challenging, grade-level novel. Connecting students' experiences to a text, developing background knowledge, and teaching key vocabulary are all

effective ways to increase comprehension and achievement (Biemiller, 2005; Echevarria, Short, & Powers, 2006; Stahl & Nagy, 2006).

A third intervention is to provide a way for students to build background for themselves. This can be accomplished by teaching techniques such as graphic organizers and chapter previews. As students begin to develop a conceptual framework for their own learning and understanding, they build a repertoire of background experiences from which to draw.

One of the challenges of teaching English learners is that students in the same class vary in the amount of prior knowledge they possess related to a topic. Christen and Murphy (1991) suggest that students generally fall into three categories: much, some, or little prior knowledge. Based on students' levels, the teacher makes specific instructional decisions and differentiates instruction for each level. Some ideas for differentiation include using and teaching superordinate concepts, definitions, analogies, and linking words for students who have much prior knowledge; using and teaching examples, attributes, and defining characteristics for students who have some prior knowledge; and using and teaching associations, morphemes (e.g., base words and word roots), sound-alikes, and firsthand experiences for students who have little prior knowledge.

Children from culturally diverse backgrounds may struggle with comprehending a text or concept presented in class because their schemata do not match those of the culture for which the text was written (Jiménez, Garcia, & Pearson, 1996; Anderson, 1984). In the United States, most school reading materials, such as content area texts, rely on assumptions about students' prior knowledge, especially related to curriculum. Many ELs emigrate from other countries and bring an array of experiences that are quite different from those of the majority culture in the United States, and some have gaps in their education. Even for those students born in the United States, culture may have an impact on reading comprehension. As a teacher reads, "The man walked briskly down the dark alley, glancing from side to side," do all children get a sense of fear or danger? Anderson (1994) questions whether we can assume that "when reading the same story, children from every subculture will have the same experience with the setting, ascribe the same goals and motives to characters, imagine the same sequence of actions, make predictions with the same emotional reactions, or expect the same outcomes" (pp. 480–481).

To see an example of the importance of building backgrounds, please view the corresponding video clip (Chapter 3, Module 1) on the accompanying CD.

An actual example of cultural mismatch of schemata occurred in a middle school's self-contained special education class with a small group of English learners. The teacher was participating in a project using instructional conversations, an approach that explicitly links students' background to text (Echevarria, 1995a). The teacher read a passage from a grade-level novel about a young man, Mike, who was reading a magazine (his favorite subscription) while riding a public bus home. He left the magazine on the bus and as he exited, he spoke a quick Russian greeting to some passengers whom he had overheard speaking Russian. The story continues that Mike had learned a few phrases from his brother-in-law who is Russian. After Mike got off the bus, he noticed the bus make its next stop with quite a commotion. He turned to see the Russians running toward him with guns! After taking a circuitous route home, he got to his second-floor apartment, breathing a sigh of relief. He had no idea why the Russians were so angry with him, but he was relieved that he had lost them. A half-hour later he heard a noise outside, looked out the window, and saw the Russians coming into his building.

At this point, the teacher paused and asked the students how the Russians could possibly have found where Mike lived when the story made it clear that he had lost them. The teacher expected that the students would remember that Mike had left the magazine, with his address label on it, on the bus. However, one student volunteered that the Russians found Mike by asking his brother-in-law. The teacher admitted that she found the answer to be "out in left field" and would ordinarily have tactfully asked someone else for the answer. But the nature of instructional conversations is to discuss ideas, drawing out students' thoughts and linking them to the text. So the teacher asked the student to elaborate. He explained that in their community, which was 99 percent Latino with a small population of Samoans, if he needed to know where a certain Samoan person lived, he'd simply ask someone from the Samoan neighborhood.

The teacher admitted that she had learned an important lesson: the students' schemata were different from hers yet just as valid. Moreover, she nearly dismissed the student's excellent contribution because she was looking for a specific answer that matched her schemata. In reality, none of the students in her group had any idea about magazine subscriptions and address labels. In the student's experience, if one wanted a magazine, one merely walked to the store and bought it.

This example clearly demonstrates that the student and teacher had very different ideas and assumptions about the characters and events in the story and a different "magazine" schema. Some of the differences might be attributed to cultural variation and a difference in home environments.

Teachers of English learners need to be aware that what may appear to be poor comprehension and memory skills may in fact be a lack of experience or a failure to activate background knowledge assumed by a message or a text (Bransford, 1994). Through the SIOP® Model, we urge teachers to activate students' background knowledge explicitly and provide linkages from their experiences to the key concepts. The interactive emphasis of the SIOP® Model (see Chapter 6 for specific features) enables teachers to elicit students' prior knowledge and discuss ideas, issues, concepts, or vocabulary that are unfamiliar to them, in order to develop necessary background information.

Instructional Implications

As you begin to write SIOP® lessons with techniques to develop students' background knowledge, reflect on the following questions:

- What is meant by activating prior knowledge?
- What is meant by building background?
- How do they differ instructionally?

In the past, we have used the terms "activating prior knowledge" and "building background" somewhat synonymously. However, we now believe there are some instructional differences that need to be considered when teaching English learners. All students have prior knowledge, gained from schooling and life experiences, and teachers can informally assess what students know and can do, as well as any mismatches in schemata through

brainstorming, structured discussion, quick-writes, and techniques such as the familiar KWL (Ogle, 1986).

However, if some ELs have little or no prior knowledge about a content topic (e.g., the American Revolutionary War), brainstorming about it may not be helpful because the brainstormed terms, names, and places will probably be unfamiliar. If students are from countries where there have been revolutions, they may know something about them, but not about the American Revolutionary War. Therefore, it is of critical importance that teachers build background using techniques that fill in the gaps, and help students connect what they do know with what is being taught. And when teachers' explanations are made more concrete with supplementary materials (e.g., photos, models, illustrations, etc.), students are more likely to make the appropriation connections.

To see an example of activating prior knowledge, please view the corresponding video clip (Chapter 3, Module 2) on the accompanying CD.

Additional activities that activate prior knowledge and/or build background include

Read a story, article, play, or picture book about the topic;

View a video related to the topic;

Use the Insert Method (adapted from the RWCT Project of the International Reading Association; Vogt & Echevarria, 2008). This activity is appropriate for grades 3–12 and all subject areas. First, duplicate a nonfiction article on the topic you're teaching, one per student. In partners, students read the article. While reading, they insert the following codes directly into the text:

- A check mark (✓) indicates a concept or fact that is already known by the students.
- A question mark (?) indicates a concept or fact that is confusing or not understood.
- An exclamation mark (!) indicates something that is unusual or surprising.
- A plus sign (+) indicates an idea or concept that is new to the reader.

When the partners finish reading and marking the text, they share their markings with another pair of students. If any misconceptions or misunderstandings are cleared up, then the question mark is replaced with an asterisk (*). When groups finish working, the whole class discusses what they have read and learned with the teacher;

Pretest with a Partner (Vogt & Echevarria, 2008). This activity is helpful for students in grades 2–12 and is appropriate for any subject area. The purpose of Pretest with a Partner is to allow English learners the opportunity to preview at the beginning of a lesson or unit the concepts and vocabulary that will be assessed at the conclusion of the lesson or unit. Distribute one pretest and pencil to each pair of students. The pretest should be similar or identical to the posttest that will be administered later. The partners pass the pretest and pencil back and forth between one another. They read a question aloud, discuss possible answers, come to consensus, and write an answer on the pretest. This activity provides an opportunity for students to activate prior knowledge and share background information, while the teacher circulates to assess what students know, recording gaps and misinformation.

SIOP® FEATURE 8: Links Explicitly Made between Past Learning and New Concepts

It is also important for teachers to make explicit connections between new learning and the material, vocabulary, and concepts previously covered in class. Research clearly emphasizes that in order for learning to occur, new information must be integrated with what students have previously learned (Rumelhart, 1980). The teacher must build a bridge from previous lessons and concepts to today's lesson. Many students do not automatically make such connections, and all students benefit from having the teacher explicitly point out how past learning is related to the information at hand (Tierney & Pearson, 1994).

Explicit links between past learning and new learning can be made through a discussion—such as, "Who remembers what we learned about _____? How does that relate to our chapter?"—or by reviewing graphic organizers, previously used class notes, transparences, or PowerPoint slides related to the topic. By preserving and referring to word banks, outlines, charts, maps, and graphic organizers, teachers have tools for helping students make critical connections. This is particularly important for ELs who receive so much input through the new language. A review of prior lessons focuses on the key information they should remember.

SIOP® FEATURE 9: Key Vocabulary Emphasized (e.g., introduced, written, repeated, and highlighted for students to see)

Vocabulary development, critical for English learners, is strongly related to academic achievement (Saville-Troike, 1984; Hart & Risley, 2003; Biemiller, 2005; Manzo, Manzo, & Thomas, 2005). In addition, for over eighty years, we have known of the powerful relationship between vocabulary knowledge and comprehension (Baumann, 2005; Stahl & Nagy, 2006). According to Graves & Fitzgerald (2006, p. 122) systematic and comprehensive vocabulary instruction is necessary for English learners because

- content area texts that students must read include very sophisticated vocabulary;
- reading performance tests given to English learners rely on wide-ranging vocabulary knowledge;
- English learners' vocabulary instruction must be accelerated because ELs are learning English later than their native-speaking peers;
- English learners' acquisition of deep understandings of word meaning is very challenging.

Academic Language

Many English learners who have been educated in their native countries, come to school in the United States with well-developed vocabularies and an understanding of academic language. Currently, the term "academic language" is being widely used to describe

vocabulary and language use in U.S. classrooms, though Stahl & Nagy (2006) refer to it as "literate English." Within the SIOP® Model, we refer to academic language as having three key elements:

1. **Content Words**: These are the key vocabulary words, terms, and concepts associated with a particular topic being taught (e.g., for the American Revolutionary War: *Redcoats, democracy, Patriots, freedom of religion, Shot Heard 'Round the World, Paul Revere*, etc.);
2. **Process/Function Words**: These are the words that have to do with functional language (e.g, how to request information, justify opinions, state a conclusion, etc.), language used in the classroom for processes and tasks (e.g., *share with a partner, discuss, line up, graph, list, classify*, etc.), and language processes (e.g., *scan, skim, question, debate, argue, summarize*, etc.). Other kinds of words that are included in this category include transition words (*therefore, in conclusion, moreover, furthermore*, etc.), and sequence words (*first, then, next, finally, at last*, etc.);
3. **Words and Word Parts that Teach English Structure**: These are words that enable students to learn new vocabulary, primarily based upon English morphology. Biemiller (2004) suggests students in grade 12 know about 175,000 words with roots; of these, about 15,000 are known by a majority of students. Additionally, students through grade 6 acquire approximately 800–1,200 root words per year. These estimates are based upon *The Living Word Vocabulary* by Dale & O'Rourke (1981). There is no way that English learners can realistically learn all the words they need to know through instruction and memorization. Therefore, all teachers, elementary and secondary alike, must help students learn that many English words are formed with roots and base words joined to prefixes and suffixes. For example, if a science teacher is teaching photosynthesis, he can help students learn the meaning of *photosynthesis* by introducing the meaning of the root, *photo-* (light). By comparing the words *photosynthesis, photocopy, photograph, photography, photoelectron, photofinish*, and *photogenic*, students can see how these English words are related by both spelling and meaning (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2004).

To assist with teaching English word structure, especially for those who are not English or language arts teachers, we include in Figure 3.1 some of the most common Latin roots that are found in thousands of English words. The fourteen roots with asterisks provide the meaning of over 100,000 words! By adding suffixes to many of the words that are included with each root (e.g., *disrespectful, extraction, informed*), you can increase further the number of words on this list.

We urge caution about sharing this list with students. It is not included here as a list for having students memorize roots, words, and their meanings. Instead, use what students already know about words: If they know how the words *import, export, portable, transport*, and *porter* are all related (they all have to do with carrying something), they can transfer that knowledge to learning the meanings of *important* (carrying value) and *unimportant* (not carrying value). These roots and words should be used for your reference and for helping students understand how roots work in the English language. (For more information about word parts—morphemes—and English structure, see Bear et al., 2004, and Bear, Helman, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2007).

FIGURE 3.1 *Common Word Roots*

There are hundreds of Latin word roots that are used frequently with prefixes and suffixes. This is only a partial list of the most frequently used roots. The roots with asterisks (*) are the fourteen roots that provide clues to the meaning of over 100,000 words.

Port: to carry
Import, export, portable, transport, porter, deport, report, support, portal, important, importantly, unimportant

Form: to shape
Reform, deform, inform, information, transform, conform, formula, formal, informal, formality, informative

Rupt: to break
Rupture, disrupt, disruptive, disruption, abruptly, bankrupt, corruption, erupted, eruption, interrupt

Tract: to draw or pull
Tractor, attract, abstract, contract, retract, contractual, detract, distract, extract, subtract, tractable, intractable, traction, protract, protractor

*Scrib or script: to write
Scribble, ascribe, describe, description, conscript, inscribe, inscription, superscription, prescribe, prescriptive, script, scripture, transcribe, transcript, transcription

*Spec or spect: to see, watch, observe
Spectator, spectacular, spectacle, respect, spectrum, specter, disrespect, inspect, inspector, retrospective, species, special, specimen

Stru or struct: to build
Structure, structural, construct, construction, destructive, reconstruct, instruct, instructor, obstruct, instrument, construe

Jac or jec or ject: to throw, lie
Dejected, rejection, adjective, conjecture, eject, injection, interjection, object, objective, project, rejection, adjacent

Dic or dict: to say, tell
Dictate, dictator, predict, diction, dictation, contradict, contradictory, edict, indicate, indict, indictment

Flect or flex: to bend
Flex, flexible, flexibility, deflect, inflection, reflect, reflexive, reflective, reflector, circumflexion

Ped or pod: foot (*ped* is Latin; *pod* is Greek)
Pedestrian, pedestal, podium, pedometer, centipede, pedal, expedition, impede, podiatry, podiatrist

*Mit or miss: to send
Mission, missile, missive, admit, admission, commit, dismissed, emissary, intermission, intermittent, remiss, remit, remittance, submit, submission, transmit, transmission, emit, permit, permission, permissive

*Tend or tens or tent: to stretch, strain
Intend, intention, intently, extended, tense, intense, pretense, tension, intensity, attention, inattention, unintentionally, distend, detention, détente

*Ten, tent, or tain: to have, hold
Tenant, tenable, tenacity, tenacious, contents, contended, discontented, contentment, intent, maintain, retain, retentive

*Plic or ply: to fold
Implicit, implicitness, explicit, explicate, implication, replicate, complicated, application, ply, apply, imply, reply

*Fer: to bring, bear, yield
Refer, reference, confer, conference, inference, suffer, transfer, defer, differ, difference, fertile, fertilize, fertilization, circumference, odoriferous

Aud: to hear
Visual, visa, visor, vision, visible, visitor, visitation, visualize, invisible, evident, provide, providence

Cred: to believe
Credit, credential, credible, incredible, creditable, accredit, credence, incredulity

*Duc, duce, or duct: to lead
Conduct, deduct, educate, induce, introduction, produce, reduce, reduction, reducible, production

Pel or puls: to drive, push, throw
Impulse, compel, compulsion, expel, propel, dispel, impulsive, pulsate, compulsive, repel, repellent

*Fac, fact, fic, or fect: fact, manufacture, faculty, facility, facile, facilitate, satisfaction, factor, beneficiary, amplification, certificate, confection, affect, defective, disinfect, efficacy, magnificent, personification, proficient, sufficient

Vert or vers: to turn
Convert, convertible, revert, reversible, extrovert, introvert, divert, avert, aversion, aversive, vertigo

FIGURE 3.1 *Continued*

Capit or capt: head, chief, leader
Capital, decapitate, capitol, capitalize, captain, caption, recapitulate

*Cept, cap, ciev, or ceit: to take, to seize, to receive
Capable, capsule, captive, captor, capture, accept, deception, exception, intercept, conception, receptable, susceptible, perceptive, precept, receive, receipt, deceive, deceit

Pend or pens: to hang
Pendant, suspend, suspense, pendulum, pending, dependent, perpendicular, appendix

*Pos, pon, or pose: to put, place, set
Compose, composite, dispose, disposable, oppose, component, postpone, proponent, deposit, compound, depose, proposal, preposition, disposal, exposition, exponent, expose, impose, suppose, opponent, proposition, position

*Sist, sta, or stat: to stand, endure
Persist, consistent, consist, desist, assist, resist, assistant, insist, stamina, constant, circumstance, distant, obstacle, standard, substance

Greek Combining Forms

Beginning: auto, phono, photo, biblio, hydro, hyper, hypo, tele, chrom, arch, phys, psych, micro, peri, bi, semi, hemi, mono, metro, demo

Ending: *graph, gram, meter, *ology, sphere, scope, crat, cracy, polis

Examples: photograph, microscope, hemisphere, telegram, chronometer, physiology, metropolis, perimeter, archeology, bibliography, democracy, autocrat

Compiled by M.K. Henry, 1990.

Academic Word List

Another helpful source of words for teachers of English learners, especially those in middle and high school, is the Academic Word List, developed by Averil Coxhead (2000) at Victoria University, Wellington, New Zealand. The list, originally developed for ESL university students, contains 570 word families (or "headwords") contained in four disciplines (arts, commerce, law, and science). Words are listed by the headwords, rather than common roots as in Figure 3.1. They also reinforce for English learners the spelling/meaning connection in thousands of English words, and they provide useful information about which words provide the best academic return for students. In Figure 3.2, you will see examples from Coxhead's Academic Word List. The complete list of 570 headwords and approximately 3,000 words can be found (at the time of this writing) at *www.uefap.com/vocab/select/awl.htm*. (Note that many of the words on the list have British rather than American spellings; these have been changed in Figure 3.2). There are also many other Web sites related to the Academic Word List that you can find using your search engine.

A third source of words for teaching vocabulary is found in a scheme designed by Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002). They describe three Tiers of words often taught in U.S. schools:

1. Tier One words are common words, such as simple nouns, verbs, high-frequency words, and sight words. Most students know these words conversationally, and it is usually isn't necessary to focus on them, except for young children who are learning to read. While Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002) recommend teachers focus primarily on Tier Two words in their vocabulary lessons, we urge a caution. Teachers of English learners need to be careful that they not assume their students know the Tier One words; newcomers and emergent speakers especially may need explicit instruction and practice with these words. Depending on their ages, they are likely to know the Tier One words in their native language, but they'll most likely need help in learning them in English.

FIGURE 3.2 *Academic Word List Examples*

Accurate: accuracy, accurately, inaccuracy, inaccuracies, inaccurate

Adjust: adjusted, adjusting, adjustment, adjustments, adjusts, readjust, readjusted, readjusting, readjustment, readjustments, readjusts

Analyze: analyzed, analyses, analyzing, analysis, analyst, analysts, analytic, analytical, analytically

Category: categories, categorization, categorize, categorized, categorizes, categorizing

Coincide: coincided, coincides, coinciding, coincidence, coincidences, coincident, coincidental

Constitute: constituencies, constituency, constituent, constituents, constituted, constitutes, constituting, constitution, constitutional, constitutionally, constitutive, unconstitutional

Demonstrate: demonstrable, demonstrably, demonstrated, demonstrates, demonstrating, demonstration, demonstrations, demonstrative, demonstratively, demonstrator, demonstrators

Estimate: estimated, estimates, estimating, estimation, estimations, over-estimate, overestimate, overestimated, overestimates, overestimating, underestimate, underestimating, underestimated, underestimates, underestimating

React: reacted, reacts, reacting, reaction, reactionaries, reactionary, reactions, reactive, reactivate, reactivation, reactor, reactors

Structure: restructure, restructured, restructures, restructuring, structural, structurally, structured, structures, structuring, unstructured

Vary: invariable, invariably, variability, variable, variables, variably, variance, variant, variants, variation, variations, varied, varies, varying

Coxhead, 2000.

2. Tier Two words can be equated with many of the words in the Academic Word List. They are commonly found in school texts but not in general conversation. Stahl & Nagy (2006) refer to them as "Goldilocks words—words that are not too difficult, not too easy, but just right" (p. 133). These are also considered to be the words students need to know for comprehending schools texts and achieving academically, and they should be taught explicitly to English learners, and most native-speaking students.
3. Tier Three words are uncommon words, found rarely in school texts except in particular contexts, such as a discussion of a specific content-related topic. While these words may be interesting, fun to know, and unique to a particular topic, it is recommended that teachers not spend a great deal of time on these words. When a Tier Three word is included only once or twice in a story, for example, it's fine to mention the word in its particular context, but then move on.

With all this serious discussion about words and vocabulary development, it's very important to remember that learning about words and playing with words can be great fun, for English learners and native speakers alike. Stahl & Nagy (2006) discuss the importance of developing students' "word consciousness." Word consciousness "is a phrase used to refer to the interest in and awareness of words that should be part of vocabulary instruction. In other words, motivation plays an important role in vocabulary learning, as it does in any other kind of learning" (p. 137). Activities in which students manipulate words, sort words, laugh and giggle about funny words, and choose words they want to know about are as important for vocabulary growth as the more scholarly aspects of vocabulary teaching and word learning. For example, see if you don't chuckle or eye-roll with the following (Stahl & Nagy, 2006, pp. 147–148):

- A bicycle can't stand alone because it is two-tired.
- Time flies like an arrow. Fruit flies like a banana.
- A chicken crossing the road is poultry in motion.
- Those who get too big for their britches will be exposed in the end.

And how about some of these homographs:

- We polish the Polish furniture.
- He could lead if he would get the lead out.
- The present is a good time to present the present.
- I did not object to the object.

Vocabulary Instruction

In a synthesis of twenty years of research on vocabulary instruction, Blachowicz & Fisher (2000) determined four main principles that should guide instruction:

1. *Students should be active in developing their understanding of words and ways to learn them.* Such ways include use of semantic mapping, word sorts (see Figure 3.3a and 3.3b, pp. 64–65), p. 67 Concept Definition Maps (see Figure 3.4), and developing strategies for independent word learning.
2. *Students should personalize word learning* through such practices as Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy (VSS) (Ruddell, 2005), mnemonic strategies, and personal dictionaries.
3. *Students should be immersed in words* by rich language environments that focus on words and draw students' attention to the learning of words. Word walls, personal word study notebooks and dictionaries, and comparing/contrasting words with the same morphemic element (e.g., photograph, photosynthesis, photogenic) aid students in recognizing and using the words around them.
4. *Students should build on multiple sources of information to learn words through repeated exposures.* Letting students see and hear new words more than once and drawing on multiple sources of meaning are important for vocabulary development.

There is little benefit to selecting twenty-five to thirty isolated vocabulary terms and asking ELs to copy them from the board and look up their definitions in the dictionary. Many of the words in the definitions are also unfamiliar to these students, rendering the activity meaningless. Although using the dictionary is an important school skill to learn, the task must fit the students' learning needs. The number of terms should be tailored to the students' English and literacy levels, and they should be presented in context, not in isolation. The *Oxford Picture Dictionary for the Content Areas* and related books (Kauffman, & Apple, 2000) are excellent resources for contextualizing terms. For students with minimal literacy skills, using the dictionary to find words can serve to reinforce the concept of alphabetizing and it familiarizes them with the parts of a dictionary; however, defining words should not be the only activity used. Effective SIOP® teachers support the understanding of dictionary definitions so that the task is meaningful for students. In fact, many effective teachers introduce dictionary skills to students by using words that are already familiar to them.

There are a myriad of meaningful and useful ways that vocabulary can be taught to English learners. The following section describes approaches to vocabulary development and word study that are especially helpful to ELs. When used regularly, they provide students with multiple exposures to key language and vocabulary through meaningful practice and review.

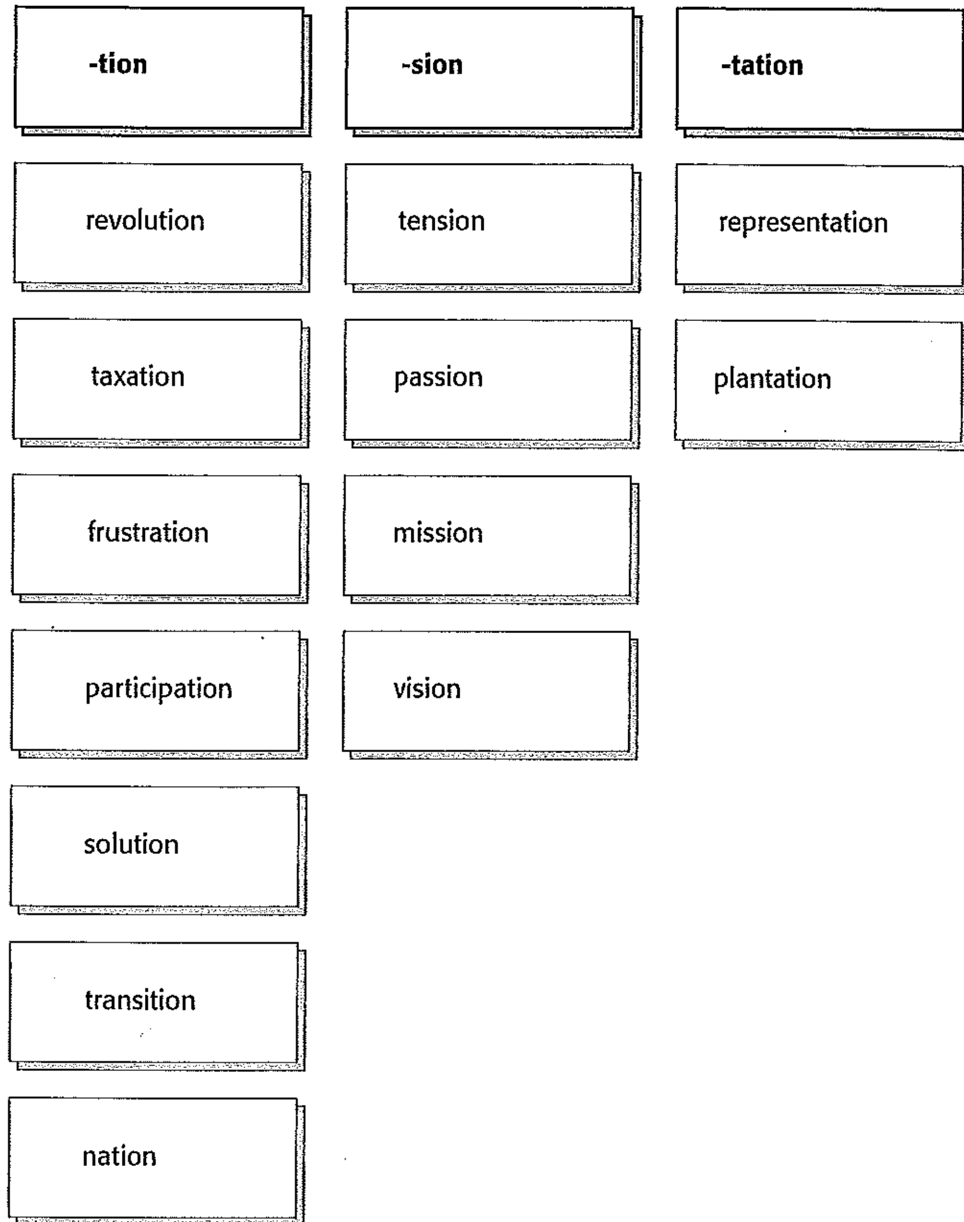
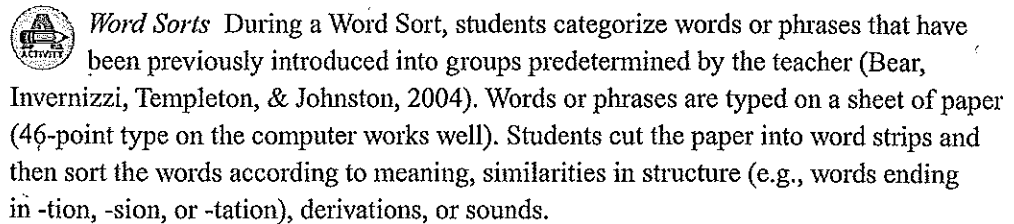


FIGURE 3.3a *Word Sorts: American Revolution–Example 1*



Word Sorts During a Word Sort, students categorize words or phrases that have been previously introduced into groups predetermined by the teacher (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2004). Words or phrases are typed on a sheet of paper (46-point type on the computer works well). Students cut the paper into word strips and then sort the words according to meaning, similarities in structure (e.g., words ending in -tion, -sion, or -tation), derivations, or sounds.

For example, words related to the American Revolution are listed in mixed order on a sheet of paper: revolution, tension, frustration, taxation, representation, vision, plantation, mission, participation, solution, passion, transition, nation, and so on. After you discuss the meanings of the words, have students cut out each of the words and sort them according to

People	Weapons	Issues
George Washington	muskets	right to bear arms
Thomas Jefferson	rifles	taxation
Thomas Paine	knives	self-governance
King George	bayonets	freedom of religion
Paul Revere	cannons	democracy

FIGURE 3.3b *Word Sorts: American Revolution–Example 2*

spelling pattern (see Figure 3.3a). The objectives here would be twofold: to introduce words related to content concepts and to reinforce spellings and word structure.

Another example of a Word Sort for the American Revolution might involve words and phrases related to content concepts such as right to bear arms, muskets, George Washington, rifles, Thomas Jefferson, democracy, Thomas Paine, knives, taxation, King George, bayonets, freedom of religion, Paul Revere, self-governance, cannons. After students cut apart the words and phrases, they sort them into groups and identify an appropriate label for each (e.g., People, Weapons, Issues) (see Figure 3.3b).

Contextualizing Key Vocabulary SIOP® teachers peruse the material to be learned and select several key terms that are critical to understanding the lesson's most important concepts. The teacher introduces the terms at the outset of the lesson, systematically defining or demonstrating each and showing how that term is used within the context of the lesson. Experienced SIOP® teachers know that having students understand the meaning of several key terms completely is more effective than having a cursory understanding of a dozen terms.

One way of contextualizing words is to read with students in small groups and, as they come across a term they do not understand, pause and explain it to them, using as many examples, synonyms, or cognates as necessary to convey the meaning.

Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy (VSS) Following the reading of a content text, according to Ruddell (2005), students self-select several words that are essential to understanding content concepts. Words may be selected by individuals, partners, or small groups, and they are eventually shared and discussed by the entire class. A class list of vocabulary self-collection words for a particular lesson or unit is mutually agreed on by the teacher and the students, and these are reviewed and studied throughout. They also may be entered into a word study notebook, and students may be asked to demonstrate their knowledge of these words through written or oral activities. Ruddell (2005) has found that when students are shown how to identify key content vocabulary, they become adept at selecting and learning words they need to know, and, given opportunities to practice VSS, comprehension of the text improves (Shearer, Ruddell, & Vogt, 2001; Ruddell & Shearer, 2002; Stahl & Nagy, 2006).

The VSS is an effective method for teaching and reviewing content vocabulary because students learn to trust their own judgments about which content words are the most important to learn. This approach is most appropriate for students who are high-intermediate and advanced English learners, and for middle and high school students.

Personal Dictionaries Similar to VSS, personal dictionaries are created as an individual vocabulary and spelling resource for students at all levels of English proficiency, and are generally used with students who have intermediate and advanced English proficiency. ELs read together in partners or small groups and write unknown words they encounter in their personal dictionaries. The teacher works with each group and discusses the words students have written in their dictionaries, providing correction or clarity as needed.

Word Wall During a lesson, key vocabulary is reviewed with a word wall where relevant content vocabulary words are listed alphabetically, usually on a large poster, sheet of butcher paper, or pocket chart (Cunningham, 2004). Originally designed as a method for teaching and reinforcing sight words for emergent readers, word walls are also effective for displaying content words related to a particular unit or theme. The words are revisited frequently throughout the lesson or unit, and students are encouraged to use them in their writing and discussions.

Cunningham (2004) recommends that teachers judiciously select words for a word wall and that the number be limited to those of greatest importance. We would add that teachers should resist the temptation to have multiple word walls in one classroom because the walls quickly become cluttered with words that are difficult to sort through, especially for ELs. One word wall, carefully maintained and changed as needed, is what we recommend. Some teachers, with students' input, regularly remove words from a word wall to keep the number of words reasonable. Every Friday, or every other Friday, for example, the students jointly decide which words they no longer need on the wall. Word wall posters can also be kept and stored for later reference or review.

Concept Definition Map The Concept Definition Map is a great way to learn and remember content vocabulary and concepts (Buehl, 2001). Even though it is a simple graphic, it can be used to discuss complex concepts. For example, a class is studying the American Revolution in social studies. To clarify the meaning of "revolution," the class could complete a Concept Definition Map, as shown in Figure 3.4. The Concept

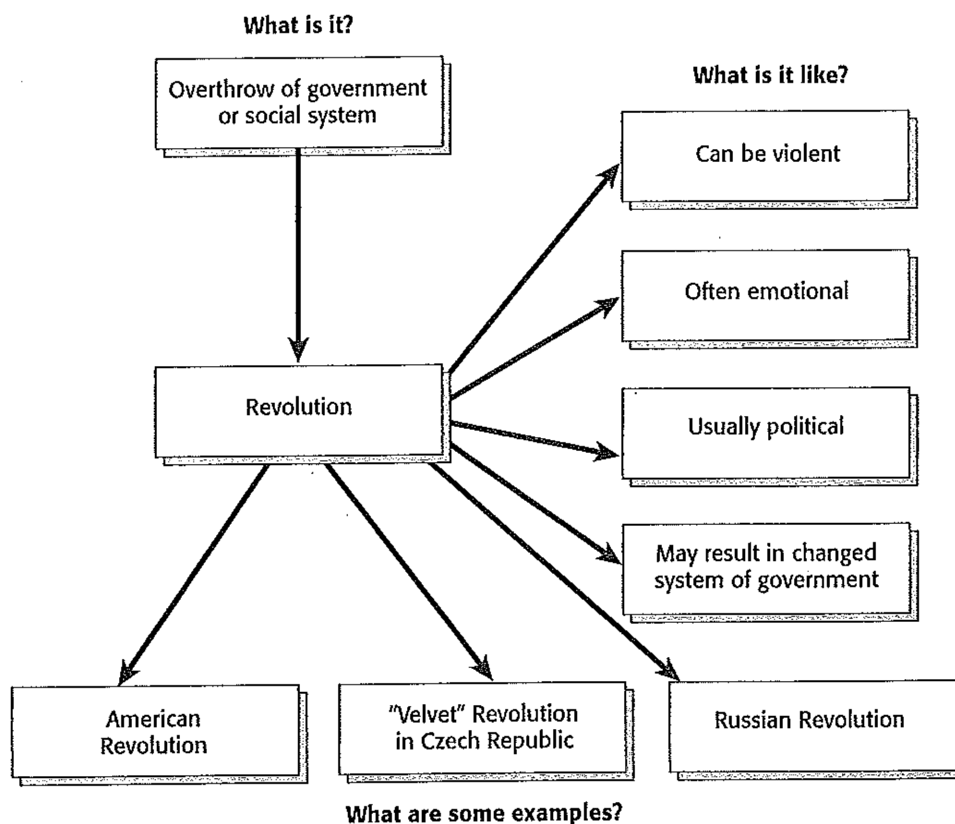
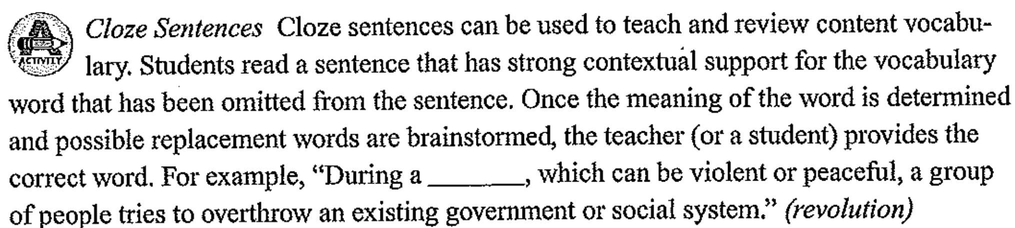
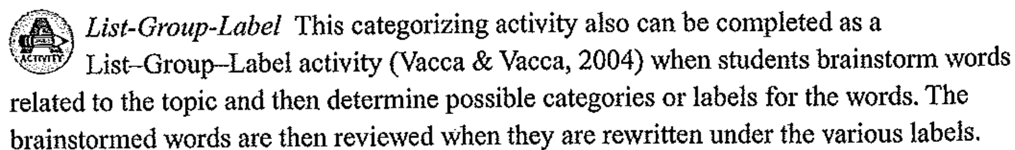


FIGURE 3.4 *Concept Definition Map*

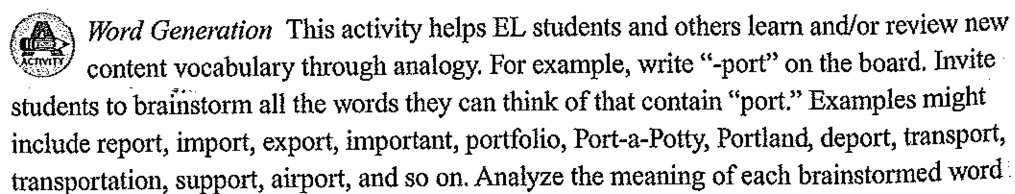
Definition Map is also an excellent prewriting activity for summarizing. Students can begin the summarizing process by organizing content concepts in the graphic organizer. Then sentences can be created from the information in the Concept Definition Map and subsequently written into paragraph form.



Cloze Sentences Cloze sentences can be used to teach and review content vocabulary. Students read a sentence that has strong contextual support for the vocabulary word that has been omitted from the sentence. Once the meaning of the word is determined and possible replacement words are brainstormed, the teacher (or a student) provides the correct word. For example, "During a _______, which can be violent or peaceful, a group of people tries to overthrow an existing government or social system." *(revolution)*



List-Group-Label This categorizing activity also can be completed as a List–Group–Label activity (Vacca & Vacca, 2004) when students brainstorm words related to the topic and then determine possible categories or labels for the words. The brainstormed words are then reviewed when they are rewritten under the various labels.



Word Generation This activity helps EL students and others learn and/or review new content vocabulary through analogy. For example, write "-port" on the board. Invite students to brainstorm all the words they can think of that contain "port." Examples might include report, import, export, important, portfolio, Port-a-Potty, Portland, deport, transport, transportation, support, airport, and so on. Analyze the meaning of each brainstormed word

and ask students to figure out what words containing "-port" might mean ("to carry"). If they cannot figure it out, it's fine to tell them the meaning. Then go back and revisit each word to see if the definition "to carry" has something to do with the word's meaning. Note that we did not define "port" first; rather, we recommend that students generalize meanings of content words from words that they already know that contain the same syllable or word part. Many of roots found in Figure 3.1 can be used for Word Generation.

Word Study Books A Word Study Book is a student-made personal notebook containing frequently used words and concepts. Bear et al. (2004) recommend that the Word Study Book be organized by English language structure, such as listing together all the words studied so far that end in -tion, -sion, and -tation. We support this notion and believe that Word Study Books can also be used for content study where words are grouped by meaning.

Vocabulary Games Playing games like Pictionary and Scrabble can help students recall vocabulary terms. Word searches for beginning students and crossword puzzles for more proficient students are additional vocabulary development tools. Software programs are available for teachers or students to create crossword puzzles.

Self-Assessment of Levels of Word Knowledge (Diamond & Gutlohn, 2006, p. 5) As English learners are acquiring vocabulary, it may be helpful for them to self-assess their knowledge of new words. Dale (1965) described four levels of word knowledge that can be used to describe the extent of a person's understanding of words:

1. I've never heard or seen the word before.
2. I've seen or heard the word before, but I don't know what it means.
3. I vaguely know the meaning of the word, and I can associate it with a concept or context.
4. I know the word well.

With effective vocabulary instruction and repeated exposures to unfamiliar vocabulary, knowledge of the words increase and they move up the levels from 1 to 4. When teachers introduce the four Levels of Word Knowledge to students, they can self-assess their word knowledge as words are introduced and studied.

The Lesson

UNIT: *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* (Sixth Grade)

The lessons described in this chapter take place in an urban middle school with a large population of ELs. The number of ELs in this school enables classes to be grouped homogeneously by student's English proficiency levels. Students in all three classes described here are a heterogeneous mix of native English Speakers and ELs with varied levels of English proficiency. Many of the ELs emigrated from rural areas in Latin America and have low literacy levels due to interrupted schooling experiences.

As part of a literature course, Miss Paige, Mrs. Jarmin, and Mr. Ramirez are required to teach a variety of American literature. The first book in the series is *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*, and the

teachers will spend one week to ten days on the unit. The story is about Mrs. Frisby, a field mouse, who is worried about her younger son, Timothy. He has had pneumonia and is too weak and frail to be moved. But if the Frisbys don't move immediately, they'll all be killed. Mrs. Frisby hears about the wonderful Rats of NIMH who are strong, smart, and able to do almost anything. The story chronicles the adventures of the family and the Rats of NIMH.

The goals for this unit include 1) students will read an extended text, and 2) students will use their prior knowledge as a tool for understanding the text. Although these may seem somewhat vague, the teachers felt strongly that these students need to have the experience of reading an extended text, even a challenging one, since materials written at their literacy levels tend to be short, simple stories. They believe that with appropriate instruction, the ELs will be able to participate in reading the novel. The teachers are planning to introduce the novel by showing the video version of the story. Seeing the video prior to reading the text will provide students with an overall understanding of the story and will provide exposure to new vocabulary associated with the text. Following the viewing of the video, the teachers will introduce the text, which the class will read together. The teachers may provide activities of their choosing to reinforce the concepts and vocabulary covered in the story.

Teaching Scenarios

The teachers have prepared their own plans for teaching the unit on *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*. Their individual approaches to teaching the unit and SIOP® ratings are described below.

Miss Paige

Miss Paige began the first lesson of the unit by asking, "Have you ever seen a rat?" and showing the class a picture of one. The students were quite interested in this topic and readily shared their experiences. She then talked with the students about how in some stories and novels, animals take on human characteristics, such as in *Charlotte's Web* (E.B. White, 1974), a book many students had read or listened to in grade 4. She asked students for other examples of stories or books that had animals who behaved like humans. Two students, both English learners, mentioned books they had read in their native languages before moving to the United States. Miss Paige then introduced a semantic map that had the word "survival" written in the center. She asked, "What are some words and ideas you can think of that have to do with survival?" As students orally provided their ideas, she clustered them on the chart: *Survivor TV show, escaping a tsunami, September 11, earthquakes, animals' need for food and water*, and so forth. She then asked students to discuss with a partner the following question: "What would you do if a member of your family was very ill, but you had to move in order to survive?" The students and Miss Paige had a brief and lively discussion about what students thought they would do. Miss Paige then introduced *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*, written by R.C. O'Brien & Z. Bernstein (1986). She told her students that in this book a family of rats who behaved like humans would face the problem of survival. She then began showing the video of *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*.

After watching the video, Miss Paige showed a transparency listing ten key terms from the story that she was certain some students would not know. As she pointed to each word, she asked the class if they knew what the word meant. At least one student knew the meaning of two of the ten vocabulary terms, indicating that Miss Paige had done an

adequate job of selecting key vocabulary words for which the students needed direct instruction. She discussed each term and wrote a brief definition next to the word on the transparency. Next, Miss Paige began reading the first chapter of the book with her students. While reading chapters in the book throughout the course of the unit, she made it a practice to pause every few paragraphs to check for understanding, elaborate, define words, and paraphrase parts of the story. Occasionally she reminded students of something they had discussed in another lesson. For example, when Mrs. Frisby is described as a widow, Miss Paige said, "Who remembers what a widow is? We talked about that word when we read *The Witches* by Roald Dahl. Remember the grandma who was a widow? What does that mean?" Then Miss Paige wrote the word on a piece of chart paper that she continued to use as a word wall throughout the unit, adding words the students identified as unfamiliar throughout the course of the unit.

On the SIOP® form in Figure 3.5, rate Miss Paige's lesson for each of the Building Background features.

Mrs. Jarmin

At the beginning of the first lesson of the unit, Mrs. Jarmin began by telling the class that they would be reading an interesting book in which the main characters were rats. Then Mrs. Jarmin asked, "Who has ever seen a rat?" Several students told of their experiences seeing rats or having them as pets. Then Mrs. Jarmin told the class that they would see a video based on the novel *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*, and that they would read the book after seeing the video.

Before showing the video, Mrs. Jarmin wanted to teach the students some terms they would encounter during the unit. Working with small, rotating groups, she introduced reciprocal teaching (Palinscar & Brown, 1984) by posting the following words on a chart: "predicting," "clarifying," and "questioning." Mrs. Jarmin distributed three index cards that described each of the three terms to each student in the group. First she asked

FIGURE 3.5 *Building Background Component of the SIOP®: Miss Paige's lesson*

4	3	2	1	0	NA
7. **Concepts explicitly linked** to students' background experiences		**Concepts loosely linked** to students' background experiences		**Concepts not explicitly linked** to students' background experiences	
4	3	2	1	0	
8. **Links explicitly made** between past learning and new concepts		**Few links made** between past learning and new concepts		**No links made** between past learning and new concepts	
4	3	2	1	0	
9. **Key vocabulary emphasized** (e.g., introduced, written, repeated, and highlighted for students to see)		**Key vocabulary** introduced, but not emphasized		**Key vocabulary** not introduced or emphasized	

students to look at the card that gave guidelines for predicting. She read, "Let's look at the title." Mrs. Jarmin paused and asked the students what the title was. The students showed her the title of the book. She continued reading, "Look at all the visual clues on the page." Again she stopped to make sure the students understood and she asked the meaning of "visual clues." Because the students weren't sure, she told them the phrase means pictures, graphs, and the like. Then she read, "What do you think we'll be reading about?" Mrs. Jarmin told the students to follow the guidelines and tell her what they predicted the book would be about. (See Figure 3.6.)

She reiterated the information on the card, telling the students to look at the title, look at the pictures, and think about what they'd be reading about. She left the group to think while she checked on another group. When she returned she said, "What do you think we'll be reading about? I . . ." A student began his sentence with, "I think we'll be reading about some rats." Mrs. Jarmin asked him to explain how he came to that answer and then replied, "Good. Who has more information they want to share?" One student made a comment about the mice. The teacher wrote the words "mice" and "rats" on the board and asked what the story would be about. Some students seemed confused about those words so the teacher asked them to look at the title. They had a brief discussion about how mice and rats differ. Once the distinction was made, they moved on to the card about clarifying.

Mrs. Jarmin read, "One of the words I wasn't sure about was ________." She then distributed a photocopy of the summary of the story to the students and told them to use a highlighter to identify the words they didn't understand. The teacher circulated among other groups as the students read the summary and highlighted unfamiliar words. When she returned, she asked the students to tell her their highlighted words as she wrote them on the board. She said, "Let's see if there are other words that can be used in place of the

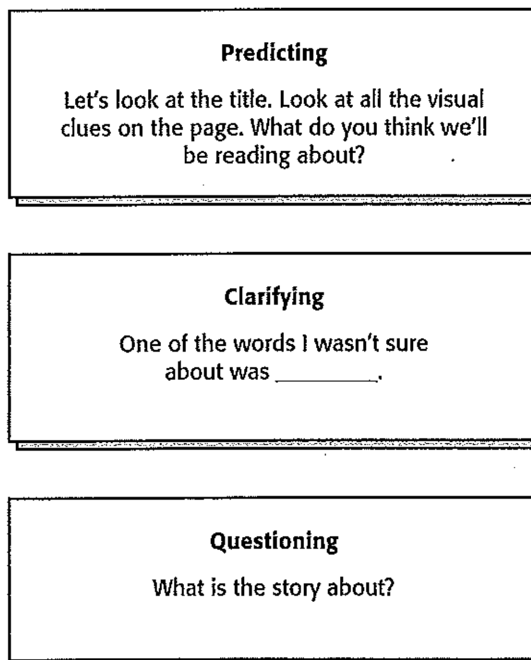


FIGURE 3.6 *Activity Based on Reciprocal Teaching*
(Palinscar and Brown, 1984)

highlighted words. We'll see which words we already know and the ones we don't know we'll look up in the thesaurus. A thesaurus is a book that is like a dictionary that helps us clarify words." The words the students didn't know were:

Vocabulary Word List	
NIMH–	a place
Scarce–	______________
Asparagus–	a vegetable
Frail–	______________
Abandoned–	left behind

The group went through the list, with Mrs. Jarmin asking if anyone knew the meaning of the words. One student recognized that NIMH is the name of a place and that asparagus is a vegetable, so the teacher wrote those definitions beside the words. Since nobody knew the meaning of "frail" and "scarce," Mrs. Jarmin drew a line, indicating that the students would find those words in the thesaurus. Then the students looked up each word together. The first student to find the word called out to the others the page number on which the word was found. As a group, the students decided on a word or two to denote meaning. When they finished defining all the words, the teacher drew their attention to the final card about questioning. She read, "What is the story about?" and said, "Now that we have made some predictions about the story and we've clarified some terms, what do you think this story will be about?"

The students were now familiar with making predictions about a story and knew one way to clarify words they didn't understand. So before starting the video, Mrs. Jarmin showed a transparency on the overhead projector that listed ten words she identified as key vocabulary. Each group of students was asked to look up two of the words in their thesaurus. The class discussed the synonyms that the students read, and Mrs. Jarmin wrote a short definition next to each word on the overhead. She then told the students to copy the words on a piece of paper and to put a check next to each word as they heard it while watching the video. At the conclusion of the video, she asked students which vocabulary words they had heard and marked. Mrs. Jarmin wrote those words on a word wall and then reviewed with the class the meaning of each word, providing synonyms and drawing a picture, if necessary, to convey meaning as they had done in the clarifying exercise. (The word wall remained posted throughout the reading of the novel, and Mrs. Jarmin often drew students' attention to one of the posted words as they came across it in the text.)

After viewing the video, Mrs. Jarmin and the class began reading the story. Mrs. Jarmin paused after the first chapter and brought out a Venn diagram from an earlier lesson that illustrated the way fiction and fantasy are similar, although not all fiction involves fantasy. She asked the students how they would describe this story so far, as fiction or as fantasy. Looking at the descriptors listed on the Venn diagram, they decided the story was fantasy. Mrs. Jarmin then told the students that, especially because fantasy can sometimes be confusing, they would construct a graphic organizer as they proceeded

through the story to keep track of the characters, as well as to provide visual clues for plot events and vocabulary in the story. She asked students to think of words to describe the characters Timothy, Martin, Cynthia, Teresa, and Mrs. Frisby, from the first chapter. As students mentioned adjectives describing the characters, Mrs. Jarmin began writing them on chart paper as a graphic organizer.

Mrs. Jarmin and the class continued this same type of process until they had completed the novel.

On the SIOP® form in Figure 3.7 rate Mrs. Jarmin's lesson on each of the Building Background features.

Mr. Ramirez

Mr. Ramirez began the first lesson of the unit by distributing the text to the students. He asked what the students thought the book would be about, and they suggested that it would be something about rats. He told them that they would first watch a video based on the book before actually reading the text. He gave an oral summary of the video to provide some background before showing it. He showed the video, then told the students they would begin reading the book the next day.

Mr. Ramirez began the second day's lesson by writing twenty vocabulary terms on the board. He told the students that they were to copy each term in their notebooks and look up the definition of each term in the dictionary. The students spent the second day completing this activity. Most students worked independently, although sometimes they would ask a friend for help.

The third day of the unit Mr. Ramirez read the first chapter with the students. While reading, he asked a number of comprehension questions, cleared up one student's confusion about which character was ill, and reviewed the chapter completely after reading it with the students. He continued this process throughout the book. At the conclusion of the unit, he gave the class an exam to check their understanding.

FIGURE 3.7 *Building Background Component of the SIOP®: Mrs. Jarmin's Lesson*

4	3	2	1	0	NA
7. **Concepts explicitly linked** to students' background experiences		**Concepts loosely linked** to students' background experiences		**Concepts not explicitly linked** to students' background experiences	
4	**3**	**2**	**1**	**0**	
8. **Links explicitly made** between past learning and new concepts		**Few links made** between past learning and new concepts		**No links made** between past learning and new concepts	
4	**3**	**2**	**1**	**0**	
9. **Key vocabulary emphasized** (e.g., introduced, written, repeated, and highlighted for students to see)		**Key vocabulary introduced**, but not emphasized		**Key vocabulary** not introduced or emphasized	

FIGURE 3.8 *Building Background Component of the SIOP®: Mr. Ramirez's lesson*

4	3	2	1	0	NA
7. **Concepts explicitly linked** to students' background experiences		**Concepts loosely linked** to students' background experiences		**Concepts not explicitly linked** to students' background experiences	
4	3	2	1	0	
8. **Links explicitly made** between past learning and new concepts		**Few links made** between past learning and new concepts		**No links made** between past learning and new concepts	
4	3	2	1	0	
9. **Key vocabulary emphasized** (e.g., introduced, written, repeated, and highlighted for students to see)		**Key vocabulary** introduced, but not emphasized		**Key vocabulary** not introduced or emphasized	

On the SIOP® form in Figure 3.8, rate Mr. Ramirez on each of the Building Background features.

Discussion of Lessons

7. *Concepts Explicitly Linked to Students' Background Experiences*

Miss Paige: 4

Mrs. Jarmin: 2

Mr. Ramirez: 1

Miss Paige's lesson received a "4" on the SIOP® for this feature. She elicited information about students' knowledge of rats, but more important, she discussed how animals in stories and novels sometimes take on characteristics. She also asked students for examples of books they knew that had animals behaving as people. Miss Paige introduced a central theme in the novel, survival, by having students brainstorm words and concepts they knew related to the theme. A novel such as *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* may be difficult for English learners to understand, yet by linking the topic to their own experiences the teacher helped to enhance student comprehension.

Mrs. Jarmin's lesson received a "2" on the SIOP® for this feature. She made an effort to activate the students' prior knowledge, but it was not done in an explicit or systematic way. While Miss Paige organized the information using a semantic map for students to see and make reference to later, Mrs. Jarmin merely conducted a verbal discussion of a few students' experiences. ELs benefit from visual clues given during a discussion, and Mrs. Jarmin did not provide any visual assistance for those learners with limited English proficiency. Further, she did not organize the information in a useful way that would make the information accessible and meaningful to all the students in class.

Mr. Ramirez's is lesson received a "1" on the SIOP® for this feature. Although the video did provide background information for the students, Mr. Ramirez did not provide students with an adequate introduction to the video or the book. While he attempted to provide some background before showing the video, there is little benefit for English learners to hear only an oral explanation of new, unknown information. Further, he did not provide any opportunity to link the students' background or experiences to the unit by tapping into what they already knew.

8. *Links Explicitly Made between Past Learning and New Concepts*

Miss Paige: 3

Mrs. Jarmin: 4

Mr. Ramirez: 0

Miss Paige made several links to past learning by discussing books students had read or listened to (e.g., *Charlotte's Web* and *The Witches*). She also developed a word wall that assisted students' learning by reminding them of the meaning of words used in the story.

Mrs. Jarmin provided a direct link between past learning and new learning by showing the Venn diagram, and she also began constructing a graphic organizer that will be an important tool for activating students' knowledge as they proceed through the book. Each day the students will be oriented to the characters in the story and will be reminded of events covered in the book.

Mr. Ramirez did not make any attempt to link previous learning to what the students were currently reading about, nor did he establish any system for reviewing the material during subsequent lessons.

9. *Key Vocabulary Emphasized*

Miss Paige: 1

Mrs. Jarmin: 4

Mr. Ramirez: 0

Although Miss Paige wrote on a transparency a number of key vocabulary terms and discussed them, there was no further reference to the list nor did she have students copy the list for their own reference. It became a vocabulary-building activity done in isolation of any context, rendering it less effective than if she had used the transparency throughout the unit, reviewing and repeating the words and having them available for students to see.

Mrs. Jarmin took time to introduce students not only to the story and associated vocabulary, but also to ways of "doing school." The introduction took only fifteen minutes or so, and it presented some valuable skills that are required in school but not always explicitly taught. Also, she made new vocabulary words meaningful by defining terms before watching the video, then asking students to identify the terms within the context of the video. The words were written, posted, and referred to frequently. In this way, the key vocabulary terms became an integral part of the unit.

Mr. Ramirez did a poor job of developing students' vocabulary in any authentic way. First, rather than selecting a manageable number of key terms, he simply selected twenty words he assumed the students didn't know. He didn't discuss the terms with the students or support their understanding of new vocabulary. Given these students' low literacy and English proficiency levels, an optimal number of new terms would range from five to

twelve. The large number of terms, coupled with the vocabulary contained within the definitions, becomes overwhelming. Second, considering the students' academic and English proficiency levels, copying terms from the board and looking up their definitions in the dictionary is not meaningful. Frequently this type of exercise results in papers filled with misspelled words and incomplete sentences since the majority of words—both the vocabulary terms and their definitions—are unfamiliar to these students. Finally, the more decontextualized the activity, the more problematic learning becomes. That is, the more directly related the activity is to the learning objective, the more likely it is that student learning will take place. In this lesson, the activity was not closely aligned to the context of the story. Both the vocabulary terms and their multiple definitions were unfamiliar to the students, as was the formal lexicon of the dictionary that was supposed to clarify the terms. The activity, although probably well-intentioned, had little or no meaning for these students.

Summary

The importance of building background has been well established in the research literature, and is one of the easier components of the SIOP® to incorporate into teaching. Taking a few minutes to jump-start students' schemata and past learning, to explicitly find out what they know or have experienced about a topic, and then explicitly linking their knowledge directly to the lesson's objectives will result in greater understanding for English learners. English learners may have an especially difficult time with academic language, the vocabulary necessary for academic achievement. Therefore, it is of critical importance that the key vocabulary necessary for mastering content and language objectives is explicitly taught and reviewed regularly. Three types of academic language focused on in the SIOP® Model include content words, process/function words, and words that teach English structure. The traditional method of copying words and writing definitions is ineffective. Activities such as preteaching vocabulary words by highlighting them in context, posting and frequently reviewing words, using visuals to provide concrete meanings, and engaging students in interactive practice with words are effective ways to promote academic language development for English learners.

Discussion Questions

1. Some educators argue the importance of connecting new information to English language learners' own cultural backgrounds in order to make content concepts meaningful. Others disagree, stating that students relate more to popular American influences (e.g., "adolescent culture") than they do to their parents' traditional cultural practices. What are some merits and problems with both positions? What about ELs born in the United States who have never lived in their native cultural setting?
2. Think about a joke or cartoon that you didn't understand, such as from a late-show monologue or a political cartoon. Why was it confusing or unamusing? What

information would you have needed for it to make sense? What are the implications for teaching content to all students, including English learners?

3. If you are creating a SIOP® lesson, how will you activate students' prior knowledge and build background? What connections to past learning can you make? What are your key vocabulary words and how will you teach them?