

Vocabulary Instruction for Struggling Intermediate and Advanced ELL Students

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ABSTRACT

Most students, including English language learners (ELLs), need between 12 and 14 exposures to words and their meanings to fully learn them (Durkin, 1978/79; Roser & Juel, 1982; Scott, Jamieson, Noel, & Asslin, 2003). Teaching the meanings of important words before learning new content activates students' background knowledge and prepares them for learning and comprehending. If learning words—and how they are learned—is understood as the basis for strong language development, why do teachers spend so little instructional time (only 5% to 10%) devoted to vocabulary instruction? This paper will provide an overview and synthesis of current research on vocabulary instruction primarily as it relates to second language word development in order to argue for increasing instructional time on active vocabulary learning.

It also will look at the myths around vocabulary acquisition, and how to best understand “word knowledge.” It concludes with some favorite effective instructional activities for all students, but especially for struggling intermediate and advanced ELL students.