

CT Reading Institute Newsletter

February 2010



Hello! My name is Adult "Ed". Look for me in upcoming issues for important news, tips and updates.

Welcome to the first issue of the *CT Reading Institute Newsletter*.

Connecticut has taken a giant step toward making sure all of our students receive appropriate instruction in reading by creating the CT Reading Institute – open to all adult educators. Using Evidence-based Reading Research and the **STAR** model, (go to www.startoolkit.org for more information), the CT Reading Institute offers a series of workshops focusing on reading strategies that can be used in any class, including content area courses. The goal is to provide teachers with the necessary skills to identify strengths and weaknesses in their students' reading abilities and to use research-based strategies to teach reading. Currently over 80 teachers have received the **STAR** training either through the series of six workshops or site-based training.

Many of you have attended one or more of these workshops in the past and may be using these strategies in your classes currently. With this newsletter we hope to provide you with some new ideas and resources to keep you connected and provide information about what is going on in the world of reading. Please contact me with any tips or ideas for lessons you have tried and want to pass along to your colleagues.

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Teaching Vocabulary

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There is no "right" or "best" way to teach vocabulary. The best practice in any situation will depend on the type of student being taught, the words targeted, the school system and curriculum, and many other factors.

Research shows that learners need to know approximately 98 percent of the words in written or spoken discourse in order to understand it well (Nation, 2006). Reaching this percentage of coverage in written texts takes about 8,000–9,000 word families. The spoken mode requires slightly fewer word families, about 5,000–7,000. A word family consists of the root (*stimulate*), its inflections (*stimulates*, *stimulated*, *stimulating*), and its derivatives (*stimulation*, *stimulative*). Thus, each word family will have several members. For example, 6,000 word families equals about 28,000 individual words, and 8,000 families equals about 35,000 words. Of course, learners can cope with smaller vocabulary sizes than these, but if they wish to function in English without unknown vocabulary being a problem, then vocabulary sizes in line with these figures are necessary. The point is that students must learn a large number of words to become proficient in English, so teachers must help them learn as much vocabulary as possible.

The next question is which vocabulary to teach. The most frequent word families in English are essential for any real language use and are, therefore, worth the effort required to teach and learn them explicitly. Teachers often trust their intuition about which word families are the most frequent, but probably the best way of determining them is to refer to frequency lists, which have been compiled from language databases (called corpora) totaling 100 - million words or more.

Probably the best source is *Word Frequencies in Written and Spoken English* (Leech, Rayson, and Wilson, 2001). Another way to ensure that high-frequency words are taught is to use textbooks which are written with the aid of frequency data from corpora.

Teachers need to take a broader view of what vocabulary instruction entails, and take proactive charge of both explicit and incidental vocabulary development. It is important to acknowledge the incremental nature of vocabulary learning, and to understand that an effective vocabulary learning program needs to be principled, long term, and have high vocabulary learning expectations.

(reprinted from www.pearsonlongmanusa.com)

“One forgets words as one forgets names. One’s vocabulary needs constant fertilizing or it will die.”

- Evelyn Waugh

Tips for Teaching Vocabulary

Build a large sight vocabulary. Begin with Fry or Dolch Word lists to make sure your students know the most common sight words. Add words students find in everyday texts.

Provide numerous opportunities to practice using and hearing a word. Learners need to hear and use a word 8-10 times before they begin to “own it”. Make sure they use the word in a variety of contexts.

Make new words “real” by connecting them to the student’s world in some way. Use a vocabulary word organizer chart to allow students to connect words to synonyms/antonyms and their own life examples. Have them bring in examples they find of words used in context.

Encourage independent learning strategies. Students need to be able to continue their learning outside the classroom too.

To maximize the impact of teaching time teach word families. A word family consists of the root, its inflections and its derivatives. 6,000 word families equal about 28,000 individual words.

Provide opportunities for developing fluency with known vocabulary. Learners cannot focus on improving fluency if they are struggling to decode words. Use texts that they are comfortable with to practice fluency.

Examine different types of dictionaries, and teach students how to use them. Usually a good student dictionary is sufficient, but as students progress to higher levels encourage them to use a Thesaurus as well as larger dictionaries.

Great Websites for Teaching Vocabulary

<http://www.visuwords.com>

An online graphical dictionary and a useful means for showing relationships among words and their derivations

<http://www.literacyconnections.com>

Literacy Connections provides a wealth of information on reading, teaching techniques, ESL and adult literacy.

www.readwritethink.org

Provides literacy educators with access to an ever-growing collection of free educational materials, including lesson plans, handouts and research

“Words play an enormous part in our lives and are therefore deserving of the closest study.”

- Aldous Huxley

Go to www.crec.org/cetes/atdn to register for **Reading Strategies for Science and Math** on April 30th!

