

Teaching Vocabulary through Technology

Summary: While teachers use technology for various things in the classroom, it is rarely used as part of vocabulary instruction. In an article for *The Reading Teacher*, instructors from Vanderbilt University and National University discuss concrete strategies and websites for teaching digitally-based lessons steeped in researched best practices about vocabulary learning.

Practical Applications

The instructors, Bridget Dalton and Dana Grisham, term electronic vocabulary “eVoc” and list 10 strategies. I’ve picked out the four I feel are the most innovative and applicable:

- **Using visual representations of words in text.** Since vocabulary relies heavily on the interaction between words, showing students the frequency and type of words that appear in text can help them think through word relationships. Free websites like www.wordle.net provide this type of word-mapping ability. Potential question to students could include, “What seem to be the most important words?” and “How do these words go together?” not to mention reading comprehension questions around main idea.
- **Digital vocabulary “field trips”.** A vocabulary “field trip” is when a teacher presents many different sources of text to students and has them pick out and record important words which are then brought together, grouped conceptually, and discussed in various word-work ways. A digital field trip puts this in students’ hands. Using free websites like trackstar.4teachers.org, teachers can compile websites about a topic and makes notes on the sites to help guide students (the authors give the example of an Alaskan weather search involving sites on dogsledding, the Aurora Borealis, etc.). The multimedia on the sites give students exposure to new words in many different modalities.
- **Let students use multimedia to show vocabulary knowledge.** The authors suggest that there is a word of multimedia out there that students could benefit from using to show off their vocabulary knowledge. For instance, creating a podcast or short video explaining the meaning of new words. Another idea is that students could create Powerpoint slides with a picture that they caption to show the meaning of a word (the authors show an example of picture of three children working together that a student has captioned with a made-up conversation between the children that ends with one using the vocabulary word “contribute”).
- **Online vocabulary games.** Perhaps the most straightforward use of the internet, the authors point to the websites www.vocabulary.co.il, www.vocabulary.com and www.freerice.com as having strong resources and games for teachers and students.

Conclusion and Citation

The traditional vocabulary instruction of copying definitions, drawing pictures and writing example sentences certainly has its place. The authors suggest, however, that it’s time to start looking for updated, digital ways to increase students’ lexicons as well as their excitement about expanding their vocabulary.

Dalton, B. & Grisham, D. “eVoc Strategies: 10 Ways to Use Technology to Build Vocabulary.” *The Reading Teacher*, 64.5 (2011), pp. 306-317.
<http://tinyurl.com/4z17jym> (subscription only).