

I. I. Roubel
Priluki, Belarus

DIGITAL TOOLS TO MAKE VOCABULARY STICK

Vocabulary knowledge plays an important role in overall academic success. It is also pivotal in learning to read as well as reading to learn, and has a direct impact on comprehension. Actually, vocabulary is one of the things used to evaluate students' achievements: the knowledge we have about any topic is based on the vocabulary. Thus, it is essential for students to acquire a wide and diverse vocabulary.

Students need both direct and indirect instruction in vocabulary and word meanings. Direct vocabulary acquisition means that vocabulary can be learned using tools such as dictionaries and vocabulary lists that make the students pay more attention to explicit interaction with the meaning and form of vocabulary. Indirect learning of vocabulary is a strategy of word learning which arises without the particular intention to emphasize words.

Repetitions, as well as multiple exposures to words, are also important. Students will not add a word to their vocabulary organically if they have only heard it once, or without applying the word in daily usage. Spiraling vocabulary and reusing it throughout lessons is an effective practice for vocabulary instruction. Multiple exposures and repetition help students understand the nuances of words and how to apply them when speaking and writing.

One more way to help students retain new vocabulary better is to give the word more context than just the dictionary in which its definition was found. It is a good idea to consider because context plays a key role in how words are used and interpreted in speech and writing. The more context a student is given for a particular vocabulary word, the more effectively they are able to retain the meaning and assimilate it into their daily usage.

Thus, we can draw a conclusion that teachers need to use a variety of instructional strategies to teach vocabulary and help students “own” the words. One of the ways to do this is to adapt a six-step process for building academic vocabulary laid out by Robert J. Marzano. Dr. Marzano describes a six-step process in the instruction of vocabulary [2]. His research and theory point to instructional activities that help students understand new vocabulary terms and remember what they have learned at a later date. The first three steps are to assist the teacher in direct instruction. The last three steps are to provide the learner practice and reinforcement.



Picture 1. A Six-step Process for Teaching Vocabulary [1]

This article explores the ways to incorporate Marzano's six-step process while teaching vocabulary and combine it with technologies that have become an integral part of our everyday life. Teaching with technology provides both educators and students with more opportunities: they can align digital tools with their desired pedagogical outcomes. Moreover, the students we are teaching at the moment belong to Generation Z (true digital natives) and generation Alpha (they have a unique digital savviness). Therefore, we as language teachers should stay current with new tech tools and trends to keep our students engaged in active learning.

During the first step, the teacher explains the target word and provides students with information about it. For each term, the teacher would identify the critical features that form the basis of the descriptions. Although the teacher's description might be informal, it should contain all the elements considered important to an accurate understanding of the word. Using both linguistic and non-linguistic explanations of a new term will help students develop an initial understanding of the term, as well as prepare them to create their own pictures or graphic representations later.

This step can be supported by the usage of ThingLink. ThingLink is an education technology platform that allows teachers and learners to create, collect and share interactive images and videos. It's easy to create a series of interactive images to help learners focus on the language needed for different situations. ThingLink helps students to learn words in context, not stand alone lists. With the help of ThingLink we may give a description, provide an explanation or an example.

The next step is to give students the opportunity to restate. Students process information actively and repeatedly to store the meanings of the words in their long-term memory. They are asked to restate in their own words what the teacher has presented about a new vocabulary term. It is important that students not simply copy the teacher's explanation of a term. Rather, students should construct their own explanations based on what the teacher has presented. Their constructions may not be comprehensive, but efforts should be made to ensure they do not contain major errors. Students put a vocabulary term into a "personalised context" which relates to them.

One of the tools where students can put their "restated" terms is Padlet. Padlet is a digital collaborative board with infinite space. There are many choices for the information to be presented: text, video, images, or other option. The boards can be made public or private. As a moderator, a teacher controls who posts on the board and whether the students are allowed to add comments, ratings, or emojis to the post. This interactive space is easy to use and is easily accessible from nearly any web browser-capable device.

In Step 3 students are asked to construct a picture, symbol, or graphic representation of the term. This forces them to think of the term in a totally different way. Written or oral descriptions require students to process information in linguistic ways. Pictures, symbols, and graphic representations require students to process information in non-linguistic ways. This step is crucial for retention

because it creates a visual imprint in our brain. For vocabulary development, this step is best done immediately after students have generated their own linguistic description of the term. If students are not accustomed to creating pictures and graphics for ideas, they might initially need significant guidance and modeling. Even if they have experience with non-linguistic representations, it is likely that they will still need help with terms that are difficult, new to them, or abstract.

There are many tools students can use in “Construct” step. Canva and Smore have proved to be among the most useful ones. Smore is a website that lets people design and share their own newsletters, infographics, and flyers. The design options aren't too complex: you can add some extras, like images and video, and change fonts and colors, but the template is fairly simple. Canva is a free-to-use online graphical tool that combines design, photo editing, and layout to help teachers and students create their projects. Canva is great because it already has lots of templates such as leaflets, social media posts, comic strips, brochures, posters, and infographics. Students have a chance to work together and be assigned into teams. The products can be downloaded in different formats as well as shared with others.

“Engage” step lets students take part in activities to deepen their knowledge of the new word. In this stage, the educator seeks to extend and refine students’ understanding of the word. To ensure multiple exposures to terms, students should take part in activities that allow them to interact with vocabulary terms in a variety of ways. Students should be able to use these terms after the previous steps. They should engage together and try to apply a new term in different contexts. The following activities can be used in this step: comparing terms, classifying terms, generating metaphors or analogies using terms, revising initial descriptions or non-linguistic representations of terms

The tool which can be used here is Phraseit.net. This is a free online image editor which lets students add speech- and thought bubbles to the photos. There are different ways to use it. Students can upload the photo themselves (use a new context) or they should come up with a speech bubble to the picture which is randomly selected. The speech bubble should contain a vocabulary term.

During Step 5 students are asked to discuss the terms with one another. Students’ interaction plays a key role in the development of academic vocabulary. Consequently, teachers should periodically organize students into groups and ask them to discuss the terms and notions. One of the ways to do this is to use Google Classroom. It is a free blended learning platform developed by Google. The primary purpose of Google Classroom is to streamline the process of sharing files between teachers and students, but Google Classroom features allow teachers to have their own version of an online discussion board. An educator simply asks a question or posts a photo and students can start a discussion online. Students can respond to the questions either individually or collaboratively.

Step 6, or “Play” step, involves students in games with terms. Teachers can use games as sponge activities to stimulate interest and enthusiasm about vocabulary, as well as provide multiple exposures to terms. Many types of games

can help teachers keep new terms in the forefront of students' thinking and allow students to reexamine their understanding of terms. It is critical not to skip this step because playing time is the time when they do the retrieval practice quickly and practice the vocabulary spontaneously. Teachers should set aside the time to play games in order to energize students and guide them in the review and use of important terms. Educators can do this with the help of Quizziz, an online assessment tool. It allows teachers and students to create and use one another's quizzes. After providing students with a unique access code, a quiz can be presented live as a timed competition or used for homework with a specific deadline.

There are many more free websites and applications to support Marzano's six-step process and provide effective vocabulary instruction. Every teacher has a chance to browse around the sites and tools and choose something that suits their teaching context. Additionally, digital tools active engagement helps students take part in the learning process.

Teachers certainly need a variety of vocabulary instruction strategies to teach vocabulary. However, sometimes there is a gap between effective and ineffective vocabulary instruction strategies. Adapting and using Marzano's six-step process can become the first step on the way to help students to succeed. Having a stronger vocabulary will help students be more successful as they will read better, write better, and perform better. This strategy enables classroom teachers to teach and reinforce selected vocabulary terms with success.

LITERATURE

1. A Six-Step Process for Teaching Vocabulary / South West Central Service Cooperative. – 2006. – URL: https://www.swsc.org/cms/lib04/MN01000693/Centricity/Domain/91/Marzano_6_Step_Vocabulary.pdf (date of access: 03.01.2022).
2. Marzano, R. J. Building Academic Vocabulary (Teacher's Manual) / R. J. Marzano, D. J. Pickering. – Alexandria : Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2006. – 180 p.