Four Broad Researched-based Practices For Building Vocabulary
by Janet Caruthers, Ed. S.

It is best to use all four practices and not rely on any one of them. Most can be incorporated into our teaching week if we know how.

1. Encourage Wide Reading – This can be independent reading, teacher/parent read-alouds, buddy reading, reading environmental print (signs, menus, recipes, food boxes, etc). The more they read, the better.
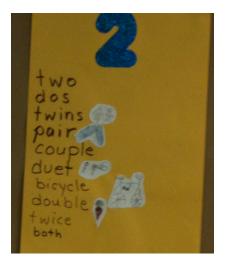
2. Encourage Word Play and Exploration – This is doing what we can to show our interest in words and encourage students to play with words and find new words on their own. Children love to make and add to lists. Why not display lists of:

- homophones,
- synonyms,
- antonyms,
- interesting words,
- categories of words
- "good feeling" words (see Word Walls)
- "bad feeling" words (see Word Walls)
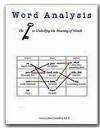- put words on continuums and discuss the semantic gradients (see Continuums)

Be sure these lists are prominently displayed so that students can use them in writing and confirm meaning when reading. Remember, the lists must be **student centered**. They make the lists. For other Word Wall ideas see Word Walls below.

3. **Build Strategies for Independent Learning**: Teach them to:

- **use word analysis** - If someone knows the common prefixes, suffixes, and roots, they increase their vocabulary by thousands of words. Why teach hundreds of individual words when we could teach their interchangeable parts! For a systematic study of the most frequently used prefixes, suffixes and roots, see the book *Word Analysis - Unlocking the Meaning of Words*
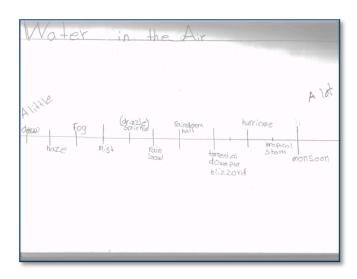

- **use context clues** – This must be taught so students are aware of their ability to do it.... like magic.

- **use authors' cues, "How Authors Show and Tell Us the Meaning of a Word"** by using cues (punctuation, trigger words, etc.)

- **use resources** - like the dictionary, thesaurus, and other resources.

4. **Explicit teaching** - use the S.T.A.R. sequence

- **Select** – Choose some Tier 1 and some Tier 2 words.
- **Teach** – Show the new word in pictures or give "kid friendly" definitions.
- **Activate** – They must see, hear, and use the word. Drawing is great for this.
- **Revisit** – New information needs to be manipulated in many different ways. The more times you use the new words in different contexts, the better. Students must be exposed to the new words multiple times. Spaced review is an extremely effective way of being sure students retain new information.
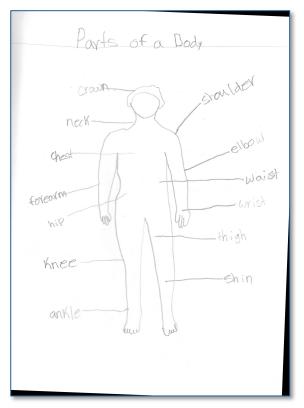
  Two great ways to **Activate** and **Revisit** new vocabulary is by having and using vocabulary Word Walls (see article on this site called "Word Walls" for ideas and examples.) and also to have your students build their own vocabulary book, *The Book of Knowledge Learning Log,* throughout the year. (see article on this site called "Continuums.")

Having students build their own vocabulary books addresses the **activate** and **revisit** part of S.T.A.R. Give each student a blank composition book and title it "My Own Book of Knowledge" or purchase a "Book of Knowledge Learning Log" for each student ($6.95 FREE shipping). Students **activate** their new knowledge by making entries in their blank composition book by using the pictures in *The Illustrated Dictionary of Everyday Things* and tracing/drawing and labeling them. Then, since their information is housed in a bound book, **revisiting** is easy. Every few weeks, go back and do something with previous entries (compare/contrast, alphabetize labels, draw each part, singular – plural, play BINGO, use labels in spelling sentences, categorize labels, buddy learning, open-book assignments, etc). For ideas and forms, see *Vocabulary Word Walls, Centers and Partner Learning* in our store. It is an inexpensive download.

Both **activate** and **revisit** can be done in a literacy center (taking no teaching time). For literacy center ideas, drawings without labels, and activity forms see *Vocabulary Word Walls, Centers and Partner Learning*.

The New Book of Knowledge teacher resource book (a download) gives information for: activating and revisiting new vocabulary, word analysis lists, books to read aloud for each object, ideas for using their "Book of Knowledge" entries to improve writing (using specific nouns, elaboration, and common expressions), and suggestions for continuums (semantic gradients).