**Southern Nevada
Regional Professional Development Program**

Vocabulary Strategies Across the Curriculum

Vocabulary should be taught in all content areas and at all levels, but often the number of unfamiliar words students face in just one course is overwhelming. When teaching vocabulary, it is helpful to keep in mind that, "word knowledge is not an all or nothing proposition" (Janet Allen, 1999). Research suggests that there are three levels of word knowledge: **verbal association, partial concept knowledge, and full concept knowledge.** It is often enough for students to only be able to recognize some words in the context of their text (verbal association); while other times, they should understand the definition as it applies to that situation (partial concept knowledge). Vocabulary that represents key concepts in a course should be learned well enough that they student can use the word both inside and outside of the classroom (full concept knowledge).

With this in mind, effective vocabulary instruction should vary depending on the level of knowledge necessary for student understanding. Before introducing new vocabulary, teachers need to determine the importance of the term being learned and then select a strategy suited for that level of understanding. Some vocabulary strategies are designed to facilitate word recognition. These activities will support reading comprehension and can be used with as many as 20 new words. Other strategies focus on vocabulary acquisition; they encourage students to examine the words in various contexts and connect them to their own experiences. These activities are designed to help students internalize the new term and should be used with no more than 5 or 7 words at a time.

Determining Vocabulary Importance

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Type of word	Core content	Important	Nice to know
What the word does	Concepts or ideas that lay the foundation for entire units of study or disciplines	Concepts, events, people, or places that deepen understanding and facilitate content connections	Nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, specialized vocabulary, etc., that enrich language but are not central to understanding
Suggested time spent mastering words	Anywhere from one week to several months, depending on the centrality and importance of the concept	From fifteen minutes to a couple of class periods, depending on importance	From one to ten minutes, depending on student comprehension speed

Questions to determine word level

1. Which words are most important to understanding the text?
2. How much prior knowledge will students have about this word or its related concept?
3. Is the word encountered frequently?
4. Does the word have multiple meanings?
5. Is the concept significant and does it therefore require preteaching?
6. Which words can be figured out from the context?
7. Are there words that could be grouped together to enhance understanding a concept?
8. What strategies could I employ to help students integrate the concept (and related words) into their lives?
9. How can I make repeated exposures to the word/concept productive and enjoyable?
10. How can I help students use the word/concept in meaningful ways in multiple contexts?

Following are a few strategies to facilitate word recognition:

1. **Contextual Redefinition: A vocabulary activity to facilitate context recognition and establish a purpose for reading:**

Often the purpose of vocabulary study is to remove barriers to comprehension of text, as well as model for students how to use context clues to determine unknown word meanings, Prior to reading or learning a new concept, it is important to pre-teach unfamiliar terms to enable students to construct meaning during reading and/or instruction. **Contextual Redefinition** is a strategy that introduces new vocabulary in rich contexts that help to define words and facilitate memory by giving the words meaningful associations. When paired with discussions of text structure and context clues, it can help move your students to higher levels of reading comprehension. **Contextual Redefinition** is designed to facilitate **word recognition** and should be clearly focused on immediate, short-term learning needs.

1. **Select Unfamiliar Words**—Select no more than 10 words from the text or from the lesson to be introduced.

2. **Write a Sentence**—Create context rich sentences using the word. Categories of context clues can be experience, compare and contrast, description, synonyms, etc. If your text uses the words in well-written, context rich sentences, you may want to use words directly from the reading.

3. **Present the Word in Isolation**—Using the overhead or board, write the word and have the students generate meaning as they refer to the context sentences; they can do this in small groups or individually. Once the student definitions are written, have the class share and come to an agreement on the meaning. Finally, have the students use the **Think-Aloud** strategy to describe how they came up with their definitions (modeling the thinking process).

4. **Predict**—Based on the student-generated definitions, have the class predict the topic to be read/learned and link to prior knowledge.

5. **Read**—Students are now ready to read the selection or receive instruction. As they read or take notes, have students verify or refute their selected definitions. This gives them both meaning and a purpose for reading.

6. **Define the Word**—Finally, have the students write down the correct definition taken from a reliable source (text, dictionary, or teacher). Discuss differences and similarities between their definitions and dictionary or textbook definitions.

2. Three-Column Vocabulary:

Two and Three-Column Notes have numerous variations.   Have students preview the chapter and write the bold or italicized words in the left column –or-- give students the vocabulary words. In the middle column, they write definitions, predictions, what ever works for the reading. In the third column, students can write examples, draw pictures, diagrams, make connections. I teach the several ways and then let them choose based on individual learning styles.

3. Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy (VSS):

This activity can be time-consuming but teaches students valuable strategies for learning new vocabulary and helps them remember words better because of the associations made and ensuing discussions.

1. Student groups should preview a text and select one word they feel is important for study. The teacher also gets to nominate a word. You can give them different sections to preview to insure they choose different words.
2. Students then must tell (1) Where they found the word and read the sentence; (2) What they think the word means in this

context; (3) Why they think the class should learn it (identify the word's importance to the content topic).

3. As soon as the groups are ready, a spokesperson from each group presents a nominated word and answers the three questions in #2. Discussion should include contributions form other class members as well, so that definitions are extended and personalized. The focus is always on the meaning of the word in the context of the content topic.

4. After all the words/terms have been nominated and written on the board, a final class list is established by eliminating duplicates, words the class feels it already knows, and any that do not appear to be appropriate.

5. Chosen words are then redefined and written with definitions in journals, notebooks, or can be posted on the wall for "word wall" activity.

6. Reinforce vocabulary with writing activities, semantic mapping, crosswords, etc.