

# Vocabulary Development During Read-Alouds: Primary Practices

Karen J. Kindle

The read-aloud context has proven to be an effective vehicle for vocabulary instruction, but teachers need to recognize the practices that optimize word learning and determine the most effective manner of adding elaborations and explanations during story reading without detracting from the pleasure of the reading itself.

**R**eading storybooks aloud to children is recommended by professional organizations as a vehicle for building oral language and early literacy skills (International Reading Association & National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998). Reading aloud is widely accepted as a means of developing vocabulary (Newton, Padak, & Rasinski, 2008), particularly in young children (Biemiller & Boote, 2006). Wide reading is a powerful vehicle for vocabulary acquisition for older and more proficient readers (Stanovich, 1986), but since beginning readers are limited in their independent reading to simple decodable or familiar texts, exposure to novel vocabulary is unlikely to come from this source (Beck & McKeown, 2007). Read-alouds fill the gap by exposing children to book language, which is rich in unusual words and descriptive language.

Much is known about how children acquire new vocabulary and the conditions that facilitate vocabulary growth. Less is known about how teachers go about the business of teaching new words as they read aloud. The effortless manner in which skilled teachers conduct read-alouds masks the complexity of the pedagogical decisions that occur. Teachers

must select appropriate texts, identify words for instruction, and choose strategies that facilitate word learning. This study sheds light on the process by examining the strategies that teachers use to develop vocabulary as they read aloud to their primary classes.

## What We Know About Vocabulary and Read-Alouds

Reading aloud to children provides a powerful context for word learning (Biemiller & Boote, 2006; Bravo, Hiebert, & Pearson, 2007). Books chosen for read-alouds are typically engaging, thus increasing both children's motivation and attention (Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey, 2004) and the likelihood that novel words will be learned (Bloom, 2000). As teachers read, they draw students' attention to Tier 2 words—the “high frequency words of mature language users” (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002, p. 8). These words, which “can have a powerful effect on verbal functioning” (Beck et al., 2002, p. 8), are less common in everyday conversation, but appear with high frequency in written language, making them ideal for instruction during read-alouds. Tier 1 words, such as *car* and *house*, are acquired in everyday language experiences, seldom requiring instruction. Tier 3's academic language is typically taught within content area instruction.

During read-aloud interactions, word learning occurs both incidentally (Carey, 1978) and as the teacher stops and elaborates on particular words to provide an explanation, demonstration, or example (Bravo et al., 2007). Even brief explanations of one or two sentences, when presented in the context of a supportive text, can be sufficient for children to

make initial connections between novel words and their meanings (Biemiller & Boote, 2006). Word learning is enhanced through repeated readings of text, which provide opportunities to revise and refine word meanings (Carey, 1978). These repetitions help students move to deeper levels of word knowledge—from *never heard it*, to *sounds familiar*, to *it has something to do with*, to *well known* (Dale, 1965).

### **Incidental Word Learning Through Read-Alouds**

Carey (1978) proposed a two-stage model for word learning that involves *fast* and *extended mapping*. Fast mapping is a mechanism for incidental word learning, consisting of the connection made between a novel word and a tentative meaning. Initial understandings typically represent only a general sense of the word (Justice, Meier, & Walpole, 2005) and are dependent on students' ability to infer meaning from context (Sternberg, 1987).

Extended mapping is required to achieve complete word knowledge, because "initial learning of word meanings tends to be useful but incomplete" (Baumann, Kame'enui, & Ash, 2003, p. 755). Through additional exposures, the definition is revised and refined to reflect new information (Carey, 1978; Justice et al., 2005).

### **Adult Mediation in Read-Alouds**

The style of read-aloud interaction is significant to vocabulary growths (Dickinson & Smith, 1994; Green Brabham & Lynch-Brown, 2002) with reading styles that encourage child participation outperforming verbatim readings. Simply put, "the way books are shared with children matters" (McGee & Schickedanz, 2007, p. 742).

High-quality read-alouds are characterized by adult mediation. Effective teachers weave in questions and comments as they read, creating a conversation between the children, the text, and the teacher. To facilitate word learning, teachers employ a variety of strategies such as elaboration of student responses, naming, questioning, and labeling (Roberts, 2008).

Analysis of the literature on vocabulary learning through read-alouds leads to two conclusions. First, adult mediation facilitates word learning (i.e., Justice, 2002; Walsh & Blewitt, 2006). Biemiller and Boote (2006) concluded that "there are repeated findings

that encouraging vocabulary acquisition in the primary grades using repeated reading combined with word meaning explanations works" (p. 46).

Second, the relative effectiveness of different types of mediation remains less clear. Adult explanations are clearly linked to greater word learning, but it is not evident which aspects of the explanations are the critical components: the context, a paraphrased sentence, or even the child's interest in the story (Brett, Rothlein, & Hurley, 1996; Justice et al., 2005). It is also possible that active involvement in discussions is more salient than the type of questions posed (Walsh & Blewitt, 2006).

### **Setting for the Study**

This study was conducted at a small private school in the south central United States. Westpark School (pseudonym) is located in an ethnically diverse, middle class neighborhood in a suburb of a large metropolitan area. Four of the six primary teachers at Westpark agreed to participate in the study: one kindergarten, one first-grade, and two second-grade teachers. Cindy, Debby, Patricia, and Barbara (all pseudonyms) varied in their years of experience. Debby, who had previously retired from public school teaching, was the most experienced with more than 20 years in the classroom. Barbara was also a veteran with 10 years of experience. At the other end of the spectrum, Patricia was in her third year of teaching, and Cindy was in her internship year of an alternative licensure program.

### **Observations and Interviews**

To determine the teachers' practices for developing vocabulary within read-alouds, the teachers' "own written and spoken words and observable behavior" (Bliss, Monk, & Ogborn, 1983, p. 4) provided the best sources of data. By constructing detailed, extensive descriptions of teacher practice within a single site, patterns of interaction and recurring themes can be identified (Merriam, 2001).

Carspecken's (1996) critical ethnography methodology was adapted and used to collect and analyze data. Observations were conducted to identify patterns of teacher-student interactions within read-alouds. Following preliminary coding, individual interviews were conducted. The combined data

provide a rich description of the pedagogical context of vocabulary development during read-alouds.

Each teacher was observed four times over a six-week period. The teachers were asked to include a read-aloud during each observation and were informed that vocabulary development was the focus of this study. They were encouraged to “just do what they normally would do” when reading to their classes. The hour-long observations, scheduled at the teachers’ convenience, were audiotaped and transcribed. Additional data, such as gestures, actions, and descriptions of student work, were recorded in field notes. Transcriptions and field notes were compiled in a thick record for analysis.

Following the observations and preliminary data coding, semistructured individual interviews were conducted. An interview protocol was developed and peer-reviewed. Topics for discussion included teaching experience, understanding of vocabulary development, use of read-alouds, and instructional strategies. Lead-off questions and possible follow-up questions were generated to ensure that key areas were adequately addressed in the interview. Transcripts of the interviews were coded and the observation data were re-analyzed and peer-reviewed.

## Vocabulary Instruction During Read-Alouds

The determination that a particular word in a read-aloud is unfamiliar to students triggers a series of decisions. The teacher must decide both the extent and intent of instruction. How much time should be

spent? What do students need to know about this word? Also, the teacher must select an appropriate instructional strategy from a wide range of possibilities. Which strategy will be most effective? What is the most efficient way to build word knowledge without detracting from the story? The teachers at Westpark used a variety of instructional strategies and levels of instructional foci in their read-alouds.

### Instructional Focus

Categories of instructional focus emerged during data coding. Interactions centered on vocabulary differed in both extent and intent. The extent, or length, of interactions varied greatly. Typically, more instructional time was spent on words that were deemed critical to story comprehension or that students would be using in a subsequent activity. Pragmatic issues of time seemed to impact the extent of the interactions as well. The frequency and length of interactions tended to decrease through the course of the read-aloud as the time allotted came to an end or children’s attention began to wane.

As seen in Table 1, three different levels of instruction were identified in the data: incidental exposure, embedded instruction, and focused instruction. Incidental exposure occurred during the course of discussions before, during, and after reading and resulted from teachers’ efforts to infuse rich vocabulary into class discourse. For example, during one discussion, Cindy commented that the character was *humble*; in another that she came *bearing gifts*. Even though no direct instruction was provided for these terms, the intent is instructional since Cindy

Table 1  
Levels of Instruction

Level of instruction	Example	Explanation
Incidental exposure	I don’t know what I would have done. <i>Curiosity</i> might have gotten the better of me.	Teacher infuses a Tier 2 word into a discussion during the read-aloud.
Embedded instruction	And he’s using a stick—an oar—to help move the raft [pointing to illustration].	Teacher provides a synonym before the target term <i>oar</i> , pointing to the illustration.
Focused instruction	Let’s get <i>set</i> means let’s get ready [elicit examples of things students get ready for].	Teacher leads a discussion on what it means to get <i>set</i> , including getting <i>set</i> for school and Christmas.

deliberately infused less common words to build vocabulary knowledge through context clues.

Embedded instruction is defined as attention to word meaning, consisting of fewer than four teacher-student exchanges. The teachers used embedded instruction when the target word represented a familiar concept for the students or when it was peripheral to the story. Information was provided about word meaning with minimal disruption to the flow of the reading. Typically, teachers gave a synonym or a brief definition and quickly returned to the text.

Focused instruction occurred when target words were considered important to story comprehension or when difficulties arose communicating word meaning. These interactions varied greatly in length from 4 to 25 teacher-student exchanges. Focused instruction often took place before or after reading. In most cases, the teachers had identified keywords that they felt were important for students to learn, warranting additional time and attention. Other times, focused instruction appeared to be spontaneous, triggered by students' questions or "puzzled looks" during the reading.

Instruction also varied in its intent. Teachers sought to develop definitional, contextual, or conceptual word knowledge (Herman & Dole, 1988) based on the specific situation. The learning goal shaped the nature of the interactions.

The definitional approach was used when the underlying concept was familiar to the students or when the goal of instruction was to simply provide exposure to a word. Teachers either provided or elicited a synonym or phrase that approximated the meaning of the target word. This approach can be quite efficient, requiring little investment of time (Herman & Dole, 1988), thus allowing attention to be given to many words during the course of the read-aloud.

Teachers developed contextual knowledge when they referred students back to the text to determine word meaning. In such cases, the teacher might refer students back to the text or reread the sentence in which the target term occurred, helping students to confirm or disconfirm their thinking as in this example from *Sarah, Plain and Tall* (MacLachlan, 1985):

Cindy: Woolly ragwort. Where is that? [looks through text] What was woolly ragwort? Do you remember? It was part of Caleb's song.

Student: Yeah.

Cindy: It said—or Sarah said [reads from the text], "We don't have these by the sea. We have seaside goldenrod and wild asters and wooly ragwort."

Cindy's intent was for students to gain contextual knowledge using the information in the text to draw a tentative conclusion about word meaning. This example highlights one of the problems inherent with contextual strategies. Students, perhaps misled by the word *sea* in the text, suggested that *wooly ragwort* might be a seal, a bird, or a stone. Since they were unfamiliar with goldenrod and asters, they were unable to use these clues effectively to conclude that wooly ragwort was a plant. In this case, reminding students that the characters were picking wildflowers might have helped.

Learning a definition is seldom enough for children to develop deep word knowledge. Students need conceptual knowledge to make connections between new words, their prior experiences, and previously learned words and concepts (Newton et al., 2008). Cindy relayed an incident that taught her the importance of building conceptual knowledge when working with unfamiliar words. She had instructed her students to look up the word *pollinate* in the dictionary, write two or three sentences using the word; and then draw a picture illustrating its meaning. Unfortunately, the definition contained many words that the children did not know such as *pistil* and *stamen*. It was obvious when she reviewed their work that her students "didn't get it." Cindy realized that the definition was not sufficient for them to understand the concept of pollination.

### **Instructional Strategies**

Within the constructs described above, teachers employed a variety of instructional strategies. Nine categories of instructional strategies were identified during the observations:

1. Questioning
2. Providing a definition
3. Providing a synonym
4. Providing examples
5. Clarifying or correcting students' responses
6. Extending a student-generated definition
7. Labeling

## 8. Imagery

## 9. Morphemic analysis

Each of these strategies is described along with examples from the observation data.

**Questioning.** The most commonly used strategy was questioning. As the teachers read and encountered a word that they thought might be unfamiliar, they would simply stop and ask about it. This strategy usually occurred at the beginning of an instructional exchange. For example, after reading a section of *Sarah, Plain and Tall* (MacLachlan, 1985), Debby paused to ask her students about the word *bonnet*.

Debby: What's a bonnet? Do you all know what a bonnet is? What's a bonnet?

It is interesting to note that most of the teachers repeated the question several times in their initial utterance. This practice gives students time to formulate a response and also helps to establish a phonological representation of the new word, which is linked to word learning (Beck & McKeown, 2001).

Questioning was also used to assess the students' existing word knowledge and to determine if students had effectively used context clues. Once a correct response was given, the exchange ended and the teacher resumed reading, as seen in the following sequence.

Debby: [reads from *The BFG*, Dahl, 1982] "So I keep staring at her and in the end her head drops on to her desk and she goes fast to sleep and snorkels loudly." What is that?

Student: Snores.

Debby: [resumes reading] "Then in marches the head teacher."

Alternatively, the teacher might provide the definition and ask students to supply the term. For example, in an after-reading discussion, Patricia asked students to recall the meaning of *research* to review or assess word learning.

Patricia: And what was it called when they look in the encyclopedia for information? What was that word, John?

This strategy can prove difficult. John and several of his classmates made incorrect responses before the correct answer was given.

**Providing the Definition.** At times, teachers chose to provide a definition of a word. Word learning is enhanced when the explanation is made in simple, child-friendly language and the typical use of the word is discussed (Beck et al., 2002). This strategy was more commonly used in embedded instruction, as seen in the following example.

Barbara: [reading *Duck for President* (Cronin, 2008)] "On election day, each of the animals filled out a ballot and placed it in a box." Filled out a piece of paper. Wrote down who they wanted to vote—or who they wanted to win the election.

Barbara thought it unlikely that her students would be familiar with the word *ballot*, so she simply provided the definition in terms that kindergartners could understand.

**Providing Synonyms.** An expedient means of providing word meaning is to state a synonym for the word. This method was used often in conjunction with recasting. That is, the teacher repeated a sentence, replacing the target word with a synonym, as seen in this example.

Barbara: Let's get ready. Let's get set.

This strategy was used extensively by Barbara to reinforce word meanings. For example, in a postreading discussion, she went back and reviewed key events in the story, simultaneously reinforcing the meaning of the phrase *a bit*. Although her focus was comprehension, the students heard the target word alongside a recasting with a synonym many times.

Barbara: So remember, a bit of blue means—how much is she going to add?

Student: Um—a little bit?

Barbara: A little bit, right. Just a small amount.

Barbara: So what happened here? They mixed red, they mixed blue—but it's still red. But why? Why is that Sarah?

Student: Because Sal adds a bit of blue.

Barbara: Right, just a little bit of blue. Just a tiny small amount. But that wasn't enough to change the color, was it?

Student: No.

Barbara: Just a little bit, right.

**Providing Examples.** Word knowledge can be extended and clarified through examples that may be provided by the teacher or elicited from the students. Students learn how the target word is related to other known words and concepts and are given opportunities to use the target words, further strengthening word learning (Beck et al., 2002). Teachers help students make their own connections when they ask for examples of how or where students have heard the word used, or remind them of situations in which they might have encountered a specific word.

As Patricia introduced a folk tale, she wanted her students to be prepared for the regional language they would hear. Although she did not use the word *dialect*, she explained that the language in the story would sound different to them and asked them for examples from their own experiences.

Patricia: This is a story from Appalachia and they use a different kind of language. Uh, they speak in English, but they kind of talk—what do you call it—country. Have you ever heard people talk like that?

Student 1: Yeah.

Student 2: My grandma.

Patricia: They use different little sayings and maybe have a different accent to their voice.

Student 3: But they're still speaking English.

Student 4: Like New York?

Student 5: England, England!

Student 6: Kind of like cowboys?

Two students demonstrated their understanding of the concept as they generated their examples of New York and English accents. Another student made the connection between dialect and the cowboy lingo the class had learned during a recent unit of study.

**Clarification and Correction.** Teacher guidance is an important part of the instructional process (Beck et al., 2002). At times, students suggest definitions for target words that reflect misconceptions or partial

understandings. The teacher must then either correct or clarify students' responses. When Patricia asked her students for the meaning of the word *glared*, a student gave a response that was partially correct, but missed the essence of the meaning. Patricia's additional question helped the students to refine their understandings.

Patricia: What does it mean to glare at somebody?

Student: Stare at them?

Patricia: Yeah. Is it a friendly stare?

Student: No—like [makes an angry face].

**Extension.** Due to the gradual nature of word learning, students may provide definitions that are correct but simplistic. The teacher may elect to extend the definition, providing additional information that builds on the student's response. For example, when a student stated that a bonnet was something you wear on your head, Debby extended the definition by providing some historical information and describing its function or use.

Debby: They wore it a lot on in the prairie days because they traveled a lot and they got a lot of you—those wagon trains and the stagecoaches and all were kind of windy. And so they would keep their bonnets on—to keep their head—their hair from blowing all over the place. Very, very common to use—to wear bonnets back then.

**Labeling.** Labeling was most often used with picture book read-alouds. As the teacher named the unfamiliar item, she pointed to the illustration, connecting the word with the picture. Debby used this strategy while reading *Leonardo and the Flying Boy* (Anholt, 2007) to her second graders, pointing to the depictions of various inventions mentioned in the text. Thus, without interrupting the flow of the reading, word meaning was enhanced as children related novel terms with the visual images.

Barbara used the strategy extensively with her kindergartners. While reading *Duck for President* (Cronin, 2008), she pointed to the picture of the lawnmower as she described how a push mower is different from the more familiar power mowers. In another text, she reversed the process, providing the unfamiliar word *raft* for the boat pictured in the illustration.

**Imagery.** At times, teachers used facial expressions, sounds, or physical movements to demonstrate word meaning during the course of read-alouds. Gestures of this type occurred more frequently when the teachers were reading aloud from chapter books, perhaps due to the lack of illustrations to provide such visual support. In



some cases, imagery appeared to be intrinsic to expressive reading, rather than a deliberate effort to enhance word meaning. For example, Debby lowered her head and looked sad as she read about a character hanging his head in shame. Although her intent was to create a dramatic reading, the addition of the simple actions would also serve to facilitate word learning if that particular expression was unknown to students. In the following example, Debby provided two imagery clues as she read the text.

Debby: [reads text] "There was a hiss of wind."  
[extends /s/ to create a hissing sound] "A sudden pungent smell." [holds her hand up to her nose]

The use of imagery was more common with embedded instruction than with the longer focused instructional exchanges. Typically, imagery was used to enhance students' understanding of the text without impeding the flow of the story, although in some instances, imagery was used after discussion as a means of reinforcing the stated definition.

At times, however, the use of imagery was a more integral part of instruction and was even used by the children when they could demonstrate a word meaning more easily than put it in words. When Patricia asked her students about the meaning of the word *pout*, several responded nonverbally, sticking out their lower lips and looking sad. Cindy used the strategy to help her students understand the meaning of the word *rustle*. Although a student provided a synonym, Cindy used imagery to extend word learning.

Cindy: What does *rustle* mean?

Student: Moves?

Cindy: Movement. OK. What's a rustle sound like? Somebody rustle for me. [students begin moving their feet under their desks] Maybe like [shuffles her feet], like really soft sounds. Like a movement. They're not meaning to make a noise, but they are just kind of moving around in the grass and stuff.

**Morphemic Analysis.** Even young children need to become aware of how word parts are combined to make longer, more complex words. Children can be taught to "look for roots and/or familiar words when trying to figure out the meaning of an unfamiliar word" (Newton et al., 2008, p. 26). Instructional strategies that draw children's attention to structural analysis are an appropriate choice when the meaning of the root word is familiar. In the exchange that follows, Barbara drew attention to the prefix *re-*, affixed to the familiar word *count*.

Barbara: [reads text] "Farmer Brown demanded a recount." A recount is—do you know what a recount is, Jeremy?

Jeremy: Uh, no.

Barbara: A recount is—he said he wanted the votes to be counted *again*.

**Multiple Strategies.** Teachers often employed more than one strategy during focused instruction. Although questioning was commonly used to initiate instruction, the target word must be either partially known or appear in a very supportive context for this strategy to be effective. Questioning can lead to guessing, so "it is important to provide guidance if students do not quickly know the word's meaning" (Beck et al., 2002, p. 43). In cases where questioning yielded either an incorrect response or no response at all, teachers added additional strategies, such as providing the definition, examples, or imagery.

## Discussion

The practices of the teachers at Westpark are both unremarkable and remarkable. They are unremarkable in that their practices are consistent with the descriptions of read-alouds in the literature. The teachers selected appropriate texts, words for instruction, and

strategies to teach unknown words. They engaged in discussions before, during, and after reading the texts. Practitioners and researchers alike will find familiarity in the descriptions of the read-alouds.

At the same time, their practices were remarkable. The intricate series of interactions between teacher, students, and text in a read-aloud reflects countless instructional decisions, underlying pedagogical beliefs, and the unique quality of the relationship that has been built between teacher and students. The data obtained from the observations and interviews provide a window into the processes of the read-aloud, providing brief but significant glimpses that have important implications.

There were many similarities noted in the read-aloud practices of the teachers in this study. With the exception of one performance-style reading, read-alouds were interactive with the children actively engaged. Attention to word meaning occurred in every read-aloud, providing evidence of the importance placed on vocabulary by the teachers.

At the same time, individual differences were noted in the way the teachers went about developing word meaning. They varied in their use of incidental exposure, embedded instruction, and focused instruction. Cindy felt it was important for her students to be able to independently figure out word meaning from context. Consistent with that conviction, she most frequently used focused instruction with questioning and incidental exposures, with relatively few incidences of embedded instruction. In contrast, Barbara's pattern of interaction seems to reflect a preference for adult mediation over incidental learning, perhaps stemming from a belief that kindergarten children require more support to learn words during read-alouds than their older schoolmates.

In addition to variance in the level of instruction used by the teachers, they also exhibited differences in their use of instructional strategies. Some differences were directly related to the type of book being read. For example, labeling was common when reading picture books, but was seldom used with chapter books. Differences in strategy use may also reflect the teachers' perceptions of appropriate practice for a specific grade. Both second-grade teachers stressed the importance of context clues in teaching vocabulary. This conviction was evident in their frequent use of questioning and context strategies. Other strategies were only used when an adequate response was not obtained, or when a more extensive definition

was required for comprehension. The increased use of multiple strategies seen in kindergarten and first grade may reflect the teachers' beliefs that vocabulary development was an important goal apart from story comprehension.

There may be a more pragmatic explanation as well. When reading chapter books, the teachers seemed to have a set stopping point in mind each day. Completing a chapter on time appeared to take precedence over vocabulary instruction. Shorter picture books seemed to afford teachers more time to develop words and employ more strategies within instructional sequences. This would suggest that text selection impacts strategy use in addition to word selection.

Individual differences in read-aloud practice are significant because they impact word learning. Even when scripts were used for read-alouds, Biemiller and Boote (2006) found that "some teachers were more effective than others in teaching vocabulary to children" (p. 51). They concluded that intangible qualities such as the teachers' attitudes about and enthusiasm for word learning could be a factor in the number of words children learn. Given the degree of variance in word learning, evident when teachers were constrained by a script, it would certainly be expected that differences would only increase when teachers are free to conduct read-alouds in their own manner.

### ***Recommendations for Practice***

Read-alouds are instructional events and require the same advance planning as any other lesson. Although the teachers in this study used many strategies identified in the literature as effective, additional time and thought in advance of the reading would have decreased confusions, used time more efficiently, and ultimately increased learning. Books should be selected with vocabulary in mind, previewed, and practiced. Attention to student questions about word meaning that arise during reading is important but may result in extended discourse on words that are not critical to comprehension and can detract significantly from the read-aloud experience. Teachers should select target words in advance and plan instructional support based on those particular words. To increase word learning potential, the following five steps are recommended.

1. *Identify words for instruction.* To maximize learning, words targeted for instruction should be identified in advance. Examine the text for words that are essential for comprehension and Tier 2 words (Beck et al., 2002) that will build reading vocabulary. Look for words that are interesting or fun to say. Narrow the list down to four or five words to target for more in-depth instruction, giving priority to those needed for comprehension.
2. *Consider the type of word learning required.* Does the target word represent a new label for something familiar or an unfamiliar concept, or is it a familiar word used in a new way? Is the word critical for comprehension? These questions determine the appropriate level of instruction (incidental, embedded, or focused); whether instruction should occur before, during, or after reading; and strategy selection.
3. *Identify appropriate strategies.* Select strategies that are consistent with your instructional goals. When the novel word represents a new label for a familiar term, a synonym or gesture may be adequate. Providing examples and questioning might be used to develop a new concept prior to reading, with a simple definition included during the reading to reinforce learning.
4. *Have a Plan B.* If a strategy proves ineffective, be prepared to intervene quickly and provide correction or clarification. Have an easy-to-understand definition at the ready. Be able to provide a synonym or an example.
5. *Infuse the words into the classroom.* Find opportunities for the new words to be used in other contexts to encourage authentic use and deepen word learning.

## Final Thoughts

Read-alouds can be viewed as microcosms of balanced instruction. This balance does not result from adherence to a prescribed formula, but rather from countless decisions made by teachers. These instructional decisions affect the balance of direct and incidental instruction, between planning in advance and seizing the teachable moment, the quantity and quality of vocabulary instruction within the read-alouds, and ultimately student learning. Teachers'

perceptions of an appropriate balance are evident in their uses of read-alouds, styles of reading, text selection, and in the way that vocabulary is developed.

The read-aloud context has proven to be an effective vehicle for vocabulary instruction, but further research is needed to clarify the conditions that optimize word learning and to determine the most effective manner of adding elaborations and explanations during story reading without detracting from the pleasure of the reading itself. Identifying the practices that are commonly used by primary classroom teachers provides researchers with valuable information that can lead to the development of effective instructional strategies, inservice teachers' staff development, and preservice teacher training.

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