Engaging Learners in Receptive Vocabulary Learning

Larry Xethakis

lxethakis@gmail.com

Retrieval and Learning

- Words that are repeatedly encountered have a better chance of being learned. (Brown, et al. , 2008)

- However, simply encountering a word in a text or listening repeatedly with is not enough to ensure learning.

- Words have to be 'retrieved' by students at each encounter for repetition to be effective and learning to take place.

- Retrieval is one of the two major processes that lead to a word being remembered. (Baddeley, 1990). (Noticing is the other.)

- Learners need to recall their knowledge of a word and connect it to the form of the word when they encounter it. (Nation, 2013)

- Each time they do this can be considered an instance of 'retrieval'.

"Getting the meaning of a word is not the same as remembering that meaning."

(Joe, et al. 1996)

- Initially, learners notice an unfamiliar word, find out its meaning and make a connection between these.

- Encountering the word again in a task creates an opportunity to retrieve their prior knowledge of the word and connect it with the present encounter of the word.

- A simple of example of this is using flashcards, where you challenge yourself to recall the meaning of the word each time you see the card.

(This is known as the testing effect.)

(Pyc and Rawson, 2007)

- This process helps to build a stronger memory of the word (Nation, 2013)

- Each new retrieval of a word draws on information from past retrievals.

- This strengthens the link between form and meaning, making future retrievals easier. (Baddeley, 1990)

- The greatest gains in learning come at:

  - 2-3 retrievals for reading

  - 5-6 retrievals for listening

  (Vidal, 2011)

Designing Retrieval into Materials

☐ Joe et al. (1996) suggests three means of designing opportunities for retrieval into tasks by making them involve:

1) retelling of the textual input;

2) repeated discussion or presentation of the material with changes in group members;

3) discussion of the information in the input to solve a problem

- The materials in this presentation were designed with Joe's suggestions in mind and encourage multiple opportunities for retrieval of vocabulary items.

- They do this through a number of means, including:

  - Linked skills activities

  - Split information tasks

  - Opinion gaps

  - Pyramid discussions

  - Mini-projects

Activities to Promote Retrieval

- **Linked skills activities** (Nation, 2013)

  - A set of activities where the target words can be retrieved a number of times in a variety of contexts (reading, speaking, listening and writing).

- **Split information tasks** (Nation, 2013)

  - A type of activity where the information needed to complete the task is divided among the students involved. The students work together and share their information to complete the activity.

  - A commonly used example is the pair-work information gap.

  - A more complex example is a jigsaw activity.

Opinion gaps (Rixon, 1979; Prabhu, 1987)

- A type of activity in which learners share their attitudes, feelings or preferences about the situation in the task. In these tasks all the learners each have all the information and express their opinions about it.

Pyramid discussions (Jordan, 1990)

- In this activity students first discuss a set of choices and then come to an agreement on the choices. Two pairs then repeat the process. These two pairs then join with two others, and so on until it becomes a class discussion. The practice speaking in smaller groups and repetition helps to build student confidence.

Mini-projects

- These are student created design projects based on the topic of the lesson.

Engaging Students

- "Engagement is a product of motivation and active learning." (Berkeley, 2005).

Motivation

"Level of enthusiasm and degree students invest attention and effort in learning" (Brophy, 2004)

Active learning

"Students make information or concepts their own by connecting it to their existing knowledge and experience." (Berkeley, 2005)

- Students are motivated by:

- What they think is important, and the value they place on the rewards and opportunity to engage in the task *(value)*

- What they think they can accomplish *(expectancy)*

"Students must have confidence that they can succeed with appropriate effort"

(Berkeley, 2005)

- These materials help to engage student interest by:

  - Focusing on science related topics and vocabulary. *(value)*

- Providing them with small challenges that can be overcome:

    - pair-vocabulary quizzes

    - scaffolded structure moving from receptive to productive use, and from one-way tasks to two-way tasks *(expectancy)*

- Giving them opportunities for authentic communication – expressing, exchanging and negotiating opinions) *(value)*

- Using pair and group work to build up their self confidence. *(expectancy)*

- Giving them opportunities to tie the words to their existing knowledge, by expressing and exchanging opinions and the content related mini-projects *(active learning)*

Voices from the Classroom

- Results from the class survey:
  - 43 of 45 students answered the class was 'interesting' or 'very interesting'
  - 39 of 45 students answered the level of the class was 'just right' or 'a little easy'

- Student comments:

"This class is better than just reading, writing classes"

"I like thinking about an unique idea."

"I learned many words about technology."

"The class had many discussions. It's interesting."

"Thinking idea in English is interesting."

"This class needs creative."

"I enjoyed thinking about Pythagoras Switch."

"I was interested in the topic of technology and environment."

"Especially Pythagoras Switch was interesting."

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