Instructional Techniques Related to:
Activating and Connecting Prior Knowledge

<u>Responsive Vocabulary Instruction</u>

When creating a robust vocabulary program in all subject areas, keep in mind the following four premises:

1. Students have an existing foundation of comprehension grounded in their own culture, community, language, and life experiences. This foundation is students base their thoughts and opinions on.
   - Responsive vocabulary instruction builds and expands on words that the learner already knows and builds a bridge to academic vocabulary.
2. Proficient readers have vocabulary acquisition strategies that go beyond memorization of new words.
   - Responsive vocabulary instruction focusses on vocabulary acquisition strategies including varied reading, looking at words conceptually and contextually, breaking words down into their parts, and using synonyms.
3. Home language background matters. Some foundational language uses one word to mean many things, while some foundational language uses many words to mean one thing.
   - Responsive vocabulary instruction identifies whether foundational language uses synonymous usage or not, and then bridges to standard English, which relies on many words to mean one thing.
4. Teens and young adults use slang as part of their foundational language.
   - Responsive vocabulary instruction recognize slang as part of student vocabulary, and expands those words to academic vocabulary.

When developing responsive vocabulary instruction, there are two stages to your planning:

One: Level academic words

- Identify key vocabulary for each unit of study. Level them according to:
  - Level 1: words that students already know or are common every day words
  - Level 2: words that students should know as mature learners
  - Level 3: words that are important for students to be exposed to, but will rarely encounter in print or speech
- Responsive vocabulary instruction focusses on Level 2 words, as they have importance to the unit and are used in instruction often. These words give students the 'most mileage' for their effort and regular opportunity to use words in context.

Two: Use Vocabulary Acquisition techniques

Technique: Using Context Clues

Provide students with a paragraph that embeds the level 2 words in context. From there, students fill in a chart similar to the following:

Target Word in Context	This is what I THINK this word means	What were the clues in the sentence that helped me guess?	This is MY word for the target word.
The assignment was so tedious that he started to fall asleep.	boring	started to fall asleep	boring
I detest bell peppers because they make me sick.	hate	make me sick	hate
Coming from a long, gruelling basketball practice, my throat was parched.	very dry	gruelling basketball practice	dry

Muhammad, A. and Hollie, S. (2012). *The Will to Lead, the Skill to Teach*, Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press, p. 118. ISBN 978-1-935542-54-4.

Technique: Personal Thesaurus

A personal thesaurus can help to build the bridge between words students understand and the target academic vocabulary.

Using the context clues exercise above, students can expand their understanding by brainstorming other synonyms and an antonym, such as:

My word	boring	hate	dry
Target word	tedious	detest	parched
Other synonyms	dull	abhor	scratchy
	unexciting	loathe	dehydrated
Antonym	interesting	love	wet

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Technique: Personal Dictionary

A personal dictionary is useful for those words that are Level 3, because students may not have any current language that can be related to less common academic words.

For example, a word like 'oxidation' in chemistry may not have a connection to something in a student's culture or community background.

Academic Term	Personal Illustration
Oxidation	
Personal Connection	**Personal Definition**
Losing a negative is a positive.	When chemical reactions happen, sometimes electrons are stolen from one atom by another one. The atom that lost the electrons is the thing that is oxidized, and it becomes more positive.

A math example:
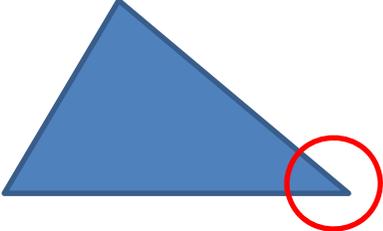
Academic Term	Personal Illustration
vertex	
Personal Connection	**Personal Definition**
The points of a triangle.	The point where any two lines meet, the corners.