

The Role of Direct Vocabulary Instruction

This book is about direct instruction in basic and advanced vocabulary with an emphasis on receptive vocabulary—listening and reading vocabularies. Although there are many different ways to think of direct vocabulary instruction, I believe effective instruction for receptive vocabulary is best thought of as involving three general phases, particularly when terms are organized in semantic clusters, as they are in this book. Those phases are: (1) an introductory phase, (2) a comparison phase, and (3) a review and refinement phase.

I should contrast my comments here with previous work I have done on direct vocabulary instruction. Specifically, in the book *Building Background Knowledge for Academic Achievement* (Marzano, 2004) and the book *Building Academic Vocabulary: Teacher's Manual* (Marzano & Pickering, 2005), I described a six-step process for teaching vocabulary. Those steps are:

1. The teacher provides a description, explanation, or example of the new term.
2. Students restate the explanation of the new term in their own words.
3. Students create a nonlinguistic representation of the term.
4. Students periodically engage in activities that help them add to their knowledge of the vocabulary term.
5. Periodically, students are asked to discuss terms with one another.
6. Periodically, students are involved in games that allow them to play with the terms.

The positive effects of this process on student achievement have been demonstrated in a series of studies (Marzano, 2006a, 2006b; Gifford & Gore, 2008; Dunn, Bonner, & Huske, 2007). The six-step process was designed for teaching terms that are *not* organized in semantic clusters. The introduction of semantic clusters as described in this book allows for powerful options that are not available when teaching terms in relative isolation. Although the six steps listed are included in the three phases articulated in this book, the phrases described here capitalize on the semantic relationships between words in semantic clusters.

The *introductory phase* of teaching vocabulary terms involves the first three steps of the six-step process. The purpose of these steps is to help students attach meaning to new terms they are learning. This initial stage of learning involves associating past experiences with a new term. To illustrate, assume that a student is learning the term *sibling*. During the introductory phase, the instructional task is to help the student associate the term *sibling* with the student's experiences. In this case, the teacher's goal is to have students make a connection between the term *sibling* and their brothers and sisters.

During the *comparison phase*, the instructional focus is on helping students develop distinctions between the meaning of the new word and other words they might know or are learning. This is where the semantic clusters come into play. To illustrate, the term *sibling* is found in cluster 94: Family Relationships. The basic terms in that cluster are reported in Figure 4.1.

aunt	2	sister	2
brother	2	son	2
dad	2	uncle	3
family	2	cousin	3
father	2	daughter	3
granny	2	grandparent	3
ma	2	husband	3
mama	2	mammy	3
mom	2	nephew	3
mother	2	niece	3
papa	2	sibling	3
parent	2	wife	3

FIGURE 4.1 Basic Terms in Cluster 94: Family Relationships

By engaging students in tasks in which they examine the similarities and differences between the term *sibling* and terms like *brother*, *sister*, *cousin*, and *mother*, the teacher can help students deepen their knowledge of the target term as well as the related terms. Whereas the purpose of the introductory phase is to provide students with an initial understanding of the target term, albeit with little clarity or depth, the purpose of the comparison phase is to help students make distinctions regarding what terms mean and what they do not mean.

During the *review and refinement phase*—the third phase—the instructional task is to expand students' understanding of the term by making multiple and varied linkages. This helps students make refinements in their understanding. For example, a student who has a fair understanding of the term *sibling* might explore the relationship between the term *sibling* and a term like *household*. This is a situation in which the advanced terms associated with a cluster might be used. To illustrate, following are the advanced terms for cluster 94:

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Family Relationship.

ancestor	4	offspring	4	maternal	5
bride	4	spouse	4	patriarch	5
groom	4	domo	5	pedigree	5
heir	4	guardian	5	ward	5
household	4				

As students review and refine what they know about the term *sibling*, they can add some of the advanced terms to their knowledge base, as the advanced terms share some semantic features with the basic terms. The goal of the third phase, then, is to expand the number and diversity of linkages between the target term and other terms that are closely related or even tangentially related. The introductory phase provides an initial understanding of the term. The next two phases help students make varied and complex linkages with other terms. Thus, by definition, the second and third phases expand instruction beyond the initial term that was taught.

These three phases are not discrete. Though the introductory phase is first, the comparison phase and the review and refinement phases overlap and can be done at any point. This relationship is depicted in Figure 4.2.

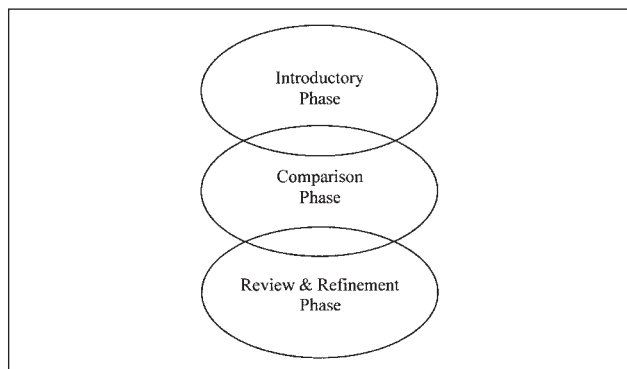


FIGURE 4.2 Phases of Teaching a New Term

As Figure 4.2 indicates, the first phase overlaps with the second and the second overlaps with the third. This means that while focusing instruction on any one phase, a teacher might also employ instructional strategies from another phase. We consider the introductory phase in the remainder of this chapter. In Chapters 5 and 6, we consider the comparison phase and the review and refinement phases, respectively.

STRATEGIES FOR THE INTRODUCTORY PHASE

The purpose of the introductory phase is to provide students with an initial understanding of a new term. It involves two steps: (1) providing descriptions, examples, anecdotes, and illustrations, and (2) having students develop their own descriptions, examples, and illustrations.

Providing Descriptions, Examples, Anecdotes, and Illustrations of the New Term

The first step in the introductory phase is to provide students with descriptions, examples, anecdotes, and illustrations of the new term. While providing a description, the teacher tries to present defining or important characteristics of the new term or examples of the new term used in context. For some words, it might be difficult to provide descriptions of their important characteristics. In this case, examples become very important. For example, it would be relatively easy to provide a description of the important characteristics of the term *automobile* (e.g., another name for a car, most families have one, it's used to go to work and run errands). However, it wouldn't be very easy to describe important characteristics of the term *since*. For this term the teacher might provide examples of how the word is used—examples that clearly demonstrate the meaning and use of the term. While providing descriptions and examples, the teacher might elicit information about the term from the students to help ensure that linkages are made to their background knowledge. Anecdotes can also be provided by the teacher. At some point, the teacher might provide students with a picture or pictorial illustration of the new term. This is particularly important for ELL students, who might not fully understand the teacher's descriptions or examples if this information is not presented in their native language.

The behaviors described do not represent a strict sequence. Different strategies can and should be used, depending on a term's meaning and part of speech (Stahl, 1999). Next, we consider how instruction during the first step of the introductory phase might play out for various parts of speech.

Nouns

About 61% of the basic terms in Appendix B are nouns. When a vocabulary term is a noun, the teacher might provide a brief description that focuses on some of the characteristics of the term. For example, assume that a teacher is introducing the term *sled*, which is from cluster 318. The teacher might begin by describing general characteristics of the noun, such as:

- *A sled is something you use to slide down a hill when it has snowed.*
- *A sled is used to have fun during the winter.*
- *You can have more than one person on a sled if it's long enough.*

The teacher might then elicit input from students about the new term. Students who had background experience with the new term could provide anecdotes about their experiences. To elicit information from students about the term *sled*, the teacher might ask questions like the following:

- *What are some things you have done with a sled?*
- *What are some different types of sleds you have seen or heard of?*

At some point, the teacher might relate a brief anecdote about a time when he or she has gone sledding. The teacher would use the term in a sentence or two, drawing on the input students had provided:

- *I rode the sled down the hill on the slippery snow.*

Finally, to illustrate the term, the teacher might provide a picture that had been downloaded from the Internet and that involves the new term. This is shown in Figure 4.3.



FIGURE 4.3 Sled

If an appropriate picture cannot be found, then the teacher might provide a simple hand-drawn picture, like that in Figure 4.4.



FIGURE 4.4 Sled

Verbs

About 22% of the basic terms in Appendix B are verbs. To illustrate how verbs might be approached, assume that a teacher is introducing the term *discuss*, which is from cluster 105. The teacher might describe important characteristics of the verb by stating the following:

- *Discussing is talking with another person about something you are both interested in.*
- *Discussing is more than just telling someone what you think. It is also listening to the other person, even though you might not agree with them.*

Notice that the examples use the gerund form of the verb. If the gerund form is not familiar to students, the teacher would make sure to provide examples with familiar syntax:

- *I will discuss the movie with you when it's over.*

Next, the teacher might provide students with a brief story about a time when he or she was in a discussion. Afterwards, the teacher would illicit input from students regarding the new term by asking questions like the following:

- *Can anyone tell me about a time when you discussed something?*
- *What are some discussions you have heard?*

Next, the teacher would use the term in a sentence that illustrates some of its characteristics:

- *The man and woman were discussing whether they should buy a new car.*

Finally, the teacher would provide a relevant hand-drawn picture or a picture from the Internet, like that in Figure 4.5.



FIGURE 4.5 Discuss

Adjectives

About 11% of the basic terms in Appendix B are adjectives. To illustrate the use of descriptions, examples, anecdotes, and illustrations with adjectives, assume that a teacher was introducing the adjective *polite*, which is found in cluster 228. The teacher might provide information about the term in the following way:

- *When you are being polite, you are being nice to people.*
- *The man who gave up his seat to a lady on the bus was being polite.*

With adjectives, it is common to provide information about their defining characteristics by providing examples as illustrated in the second bullet. Here the teacher did not describe the characteristic of being polite, but rather simply gave an example depicting a person being polite.

Next, the teacher might elicit examples from the students by asking questions like the following:

- *Tell us about a time when you were being polite or saw someone else being polite.*
- *How would you describe someone who is being polite?*

The teacher might provide an example of *polite* used in a sentence in the following way:

- *The polite policeman helped the little girl cross the busy street.*

This example might be coupled with a brief story from the teacher about a time when someone was polite to him or her.

Finally, the teacher might provide a hand-drawn picture or a picture from the Internet, like that in Figure 4.6.



FIGURE 4.6 Polite

Adverbs

About 3% of the basic terms in Appendix B are adverbs. To illustrate how adverbs might be approached, assume that a teacher is introducing the adverb *away*, which is from cluster 20. To introduce this term, the teacher might provide the following:

- *When I went on vacation, I was away from home.*
- *When you leave someplace, you go away from that place.*

Notice that the first statement is an example of the term that leaves the inference about its characteristics up to students. The second statement is more of a description of the characteristics of *away*. As is the case with adjectives, it can be very challenging to describe defining characteristics of adverbs.

Next, the teacher might provide a brief anecdote about a time when he or she was away from home. Examples from students could be elicited by asking questions like the following:

- *Tell us about a time when you were away from someplace.*
- *Tell us about a time when someone was away from you.*

The teacher might then provide students with the following sentence using *away*:

- *When I went to college I was away from home.*

Finally, the teacher might provide a hand-drawn picture or a picture from the Internet like that in Figure 4.7.



FIGURE 4.7 Away

Conjunctions

About one-half of 1 percent of the basic terms in Appendix B are conjunctions. The purpose of conjunctions is to connect ideas stated in clauses. Thus, their meanings can be fairly abstract. Because of this, it typically takes more explanation to articulate the characteristics of conjunctions than is the case with nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. For example, a teacher might provide the following when introducing the conjunction *since*, which is from cluster 10:

- *If the reason I couldn't do my homework is that I had to visit my sick grandmother in the hospital, I would say: "Since I was visiting my grandmother in the hospital, I didn't do my homework."*
- *When you use the word "since," you mean about the same thing as the word "because."*

In the first statement, the teacher provides a clear context for which the term *since* would be appropriate. In the second statement, the teacher provides students with a synonym for the term.

Next, the teacher would elicit student input using questions like the following:

- *Describe something that happened to you or someone else where you could have used the term "since."*
- *How have you heard people use the term "since"?*

As students described situations, the teacher would help them phrase their examples in ways that illustrate correct use of the conjunction *since*. Additionally, the teacher might provide students with the following example of the term used in a sentence:

- *Since I was very tired last night, I went to bed early.*

The teacher could elaborate on this example by providing a brief anecdote that accompanies it.

Finally, the teacher would provide a hand-drawn picture or a picture from the Internet like that in Figure 4.8.



FIGURE 4.8 Since

Prepositions

About 2% of the basic terms in Appendix B are prepositions. Prepositions connect information, as do conjunctions. Again, this renders them fairly abstract. Consequently, extra explanation or examples are frequently required when introducing a preposition. To illustrate, assume that a teacher is introducing the preposition *across*, which is from cluster 22. Because it is difficult to describe the meaning of *across*, the teacher might initially provide students with the following two examples of the preposition:

- *Bill yelled across the river.*
- *Bill threw the ball across the river.*

These examples might be highlighted by a brief anecdote that is consistent with one of the examples. The teacher could also provide the following explanation:

- *In the first sentence, the word across tells us where Bill was yelling. In the second sentence the word across tells us where the ball went after Bill threw it.*

The teacher might follow up these examples with a demonstration of the term. For example, the teacher might present the following sentences with accompanying enactments:

- *I am throwing the eraser across the room.*
- *I am walking across the room.*

While providing the first example, the teacher might actually throw an eraser across the room. In the second example, the teacher might walk across the room. Teacher demonstrations like these can also be done with many verbs, adjectives, and adverbs.

To elicit student input, the teacher might provide students with the following prompt:

- *Describe something that happened to you where you could use the term across.*

As students described their situations, the teacher would help them phrase their examples in ways that demonstrated the correct use of the preposition.

Finally the teacher would provide a hand-drawn picture or a picture from the Internet like that in Figure 4.9.

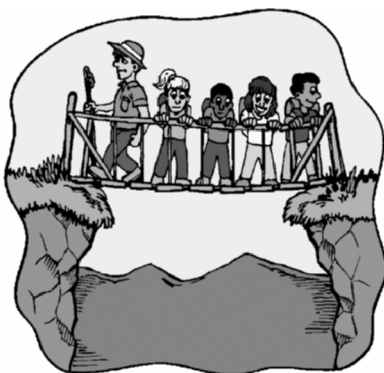


FIGURE 4.9 Across

Interjections

Less than 1 percent of the basic terms in Appendix B are interjections. Interjections are terms that typically depict emotion or convey information that will be said with great emphasis. For example, the term *wow* is an interjection. It is from cluster 14. Interjections are difficult to describe, because they deal more with emphasis than information. Consequently, they are typically introduced by examples. To illustrate, a teacher might provide the following statements to students when introducing *wow*:

- *If I'm excited about winning the lottery, I would say, "Wow!"*
- *If you watch a baseball player hit a home run, you might say, "Wow!"*
- *Wow, class! You got the highest test score in the school on the state's reading test.*

The teacher might elaborate with an anecdote about a time when the term *wow* could be applied to his or her actions.

To elicit input from students, the teacher might ask the following:

- *Describe a time when something happened to you where you could have used the term "wow."*

As students provided their examples, the teacher would help them phrase their comments in ways that correctly illustrate use of the interjection.

Finally, the teacher would provide a hand-drawn picture or a picture from the Internet like that in Figure 4.10.



FIGURE 4.10 Wow!

Pronouns

Pronouns constitute about 2 percent of the basic terms in Appendix B. There are many types of pronouns, including personal pronouns (e.g., *I*, *me*), interrogative pronouns (e.g., *who*, *what*), and reflexive pronouns (e.g., *myself*, *yourself*). Pronouns are function words; consequently, they are very difficult to describe. One of the best ways to introduce them is to provide examples of their use:

- *When I'm explaining something about me I might use the term "myself": "I told Bill a lot about myself."*

With pronouns, it is difficult for students to provide much input regarding their meaning, simply because they are a function more of syntax than of meaning. Consequently, it is useful to provide students with some simple exercises that might give them insight into their meaning and use, such as the following.

Which pronoun would you use in the following sentence?

The car is _____.

- *myself*
- *mine*
- *you*
- *your*
- *the*

After providing a few brief exercises like this to demonstrate use of a specific pronoun, the teacher might use it in a sentence:

- *I believe in myself.*

Again, a brief anecdote that goes with this example might be used to dramatize the use of the term. Finally, the teacher would provide a hand-drawn picture or a picture from the Internet like that in Figure 4.11.



FIGURE 4.11 Myself

Some Special Terms

There are a number of terms that are like pronouns, in that they have more of a syntactic function than a semantic function. Such terms include articles (e.g., *a*, *an*, *the*) (found in cluster 13) and auxiliary verbs (e.g., *could*, *would*, *should*) (found in cluster 1). Articles are found in cluster 13, entitled Specifiers (e.g., *each*, *every*). Together, these types of “special terms” make up less than 1 percent of the basic terms in Appendix B.

To introduce specifiers like *each* and *every*, the teacher might employ some concrete props like five blocks of wood. While pointing to each block individually, the teacher would say:

- *I am pointing to each block.*

Next, the teacher would open his or her palms in a way that includes all five blocks and then say:

- *Now I'm including all the blocks.*

Here the teacher has used a comparison of the specifiers *each* and *all* to demonstrate their meaning. The same basic comparative approach could be used with auxiliary verbs. The teacher would start by providing students with the following statements:

- *I can ski.*
- *I should ski.*

The teacher would then explain the differences in the following way:

- *The first sentence, using “can,” means that I know how to ski. The second sentence, using “should,” means that it would be good for me to ski but it doesn't mean that I know how to ski right now.*

Again, short exercises might next be provided to students:

I like _____ person in class.

- *each*
- *none*
- *all*

I _____ be at school on time.

- *am*
- *are*
- *should*

After a few simple exercises have been presented to students, the teacher would again use the new terms in sample sentences:

- *I know the name of each student in class.*
- *I should always be nice to the teachers in school.*

Finally, the teacher would provide a hand-drawn picture or a picture from the Internet like that in Figure 4.12 depicting the term *each*.



FIGURE 4.12 Each

HAVING STUDENTS DEVELOP THEIR OWN DESCRIPTIONS, EXAMPLES, AND ILLUSTRATIONS

The second step of the introductory phase involves student descriptions, examples, and illustrations. That is, after the teacher has introduced a new term, students use their own experiential base to generate descriptions, examples, and illustrations. Again, it is useful to consider how this might be done with specific types of terms.

Nouns

After the teacher has introduced the noun *sled*, the teacher might say:

- *Now you try to explain what you think a sled is. If you have trouble describing a sled, then use it in a sentence in a way that will help you remember what it means later on. Also draw a picture that shows what you think the term means.*

Notice that the teacher has provided students with two options: one in which they try to describe a sled or explain what it does, and the other in which they simply use the term in a sentence in a way that will remind them what it means.

One student might write the following and accompany it with the picture in Figure 4.13:

- *A sled is something you use in the winter to have fun with.*

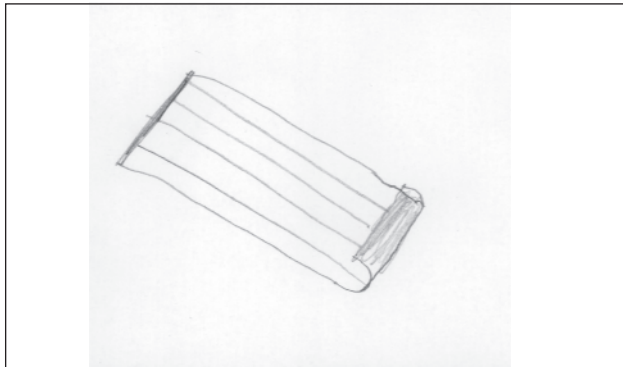


FIGURE 4.13 Sled

Another student might write the following and accompany it with the picture in Figure 4.14:

- *I had fun riding the sled at my grandfather's house last year.*



FIGURE 4.14 Sled

Following are samples of the types of descriptions, examples, and illustrations that two students might provide for terms that exemplify the various parts of speech described previously. For all parts of speech, the teacher's directions would be the same. Students are invited to explain or describe the target term or use it in a way that demonstrates its meaning. Students are also asked to draw a picture or pictograph illustrating the meaning of the term. In the following samples, student descriptions, examples, and illustrations are provided for the remaining parts of speech without further comment.

Verbs

Target term: *discuss*.

First student's example and illustration:

- *When you discuss something, you talk a lot about it.*



FIGURE 4.15 Discuss

Second student's example and illustration:

- *I discuss important things with my big brother.*

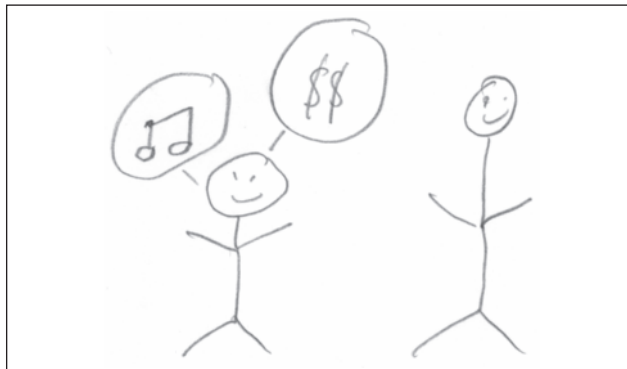


FIGURE 4.16 Discuss

Adjectives

Target term: *polite*.

First student's example and illustration:

- *I am being polite when I say please.*



FIGURE 4.17 Polite

Second student's example and illustration:

- *My teacher was polite when she met my parents. She said nice things about me.*

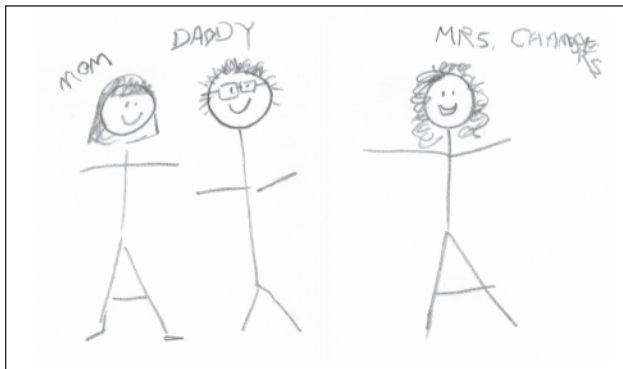


FIGURE 4.18 Polite

Adverbs

Target term: *away*.

First student's example and illustration:

- *My brother is away in the army.*

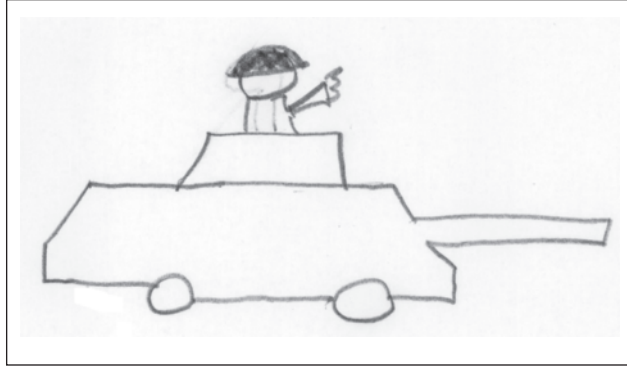


FIGURE 4.19 Away

Second student's example and illustration:

- *When you throw something away, you don't want it anymore.*

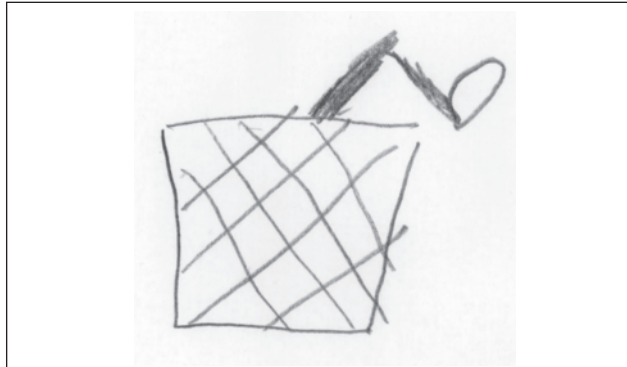


FIGURE 4.20 Away

Conjunctions

Target term: *since*.

First student's example and illustration:

- *Since I first decided to be a professional basketball player, I have practiced every day.*

M	T	W	Th	F
Bball	Bball	Bball	Bball	Bball
4:30pm	4:30pm	4:30pm	4:30pm	4:30pm
S	Su			
Bball	Bball			
4:30pm	4:30pm			

FIGURE 4.21 Since

Second student's example and illustration:

- Since *means the same thing as* because *means*.

Since = Because

FIGURE 4.22 Since

Prepositions

Target term: *across*.

First student's example and illustration:

- *Every day I walk across the park to get to school.*



FIGURE 4.23 Across

Second student's example and illustration:

- *When you say "across," you mean something is far away.*

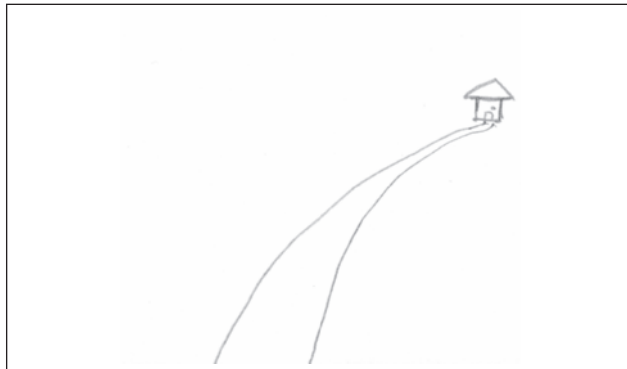


FIGURE 4.24 Across

Interjections

Target term: *wow*.

First student's example and illustration:

- *I said, "Wow!" when I got my birthday present from my parents.*



FIGURE 4.25 Wow

Second student's example and illustration:

- “Wow” means that you are really excited.



FIGURE 4.26 Wow

Pronouns

Target term: *myself*.

First student's example and illustration:

- You use “myself” like you would use “I.”



FIGURE 4.27 Myself

Second student's example and illustration:

- *I talk about myself a lot.*



FIGURE 4.28 Myself

Some Special Terms

Target term: *each*.

First student's example and illustration:

- *I like all the students in my class, but each one is different.*

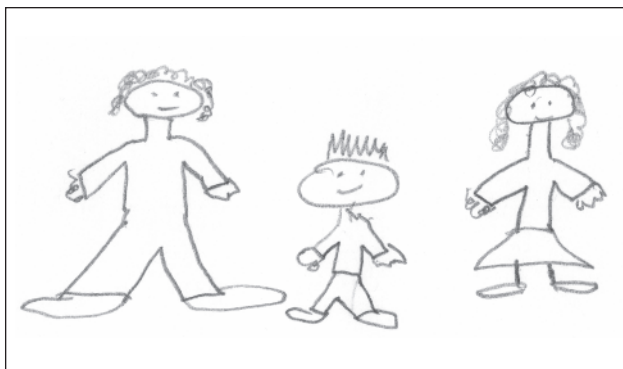


FIGURE 4.29 Each

Second student's example and illustration:

- “Each” means you’re talking about specific things one by one.



FIGURE 4.30 Each

Target term: *should*.

First student's example and illustration:

- *I should brush my teeth every night, but I don't.*



FIGURE 4.31 Should

Second student's example and illustration:

- “Should” and “could” kind of mean the opposite of each other.

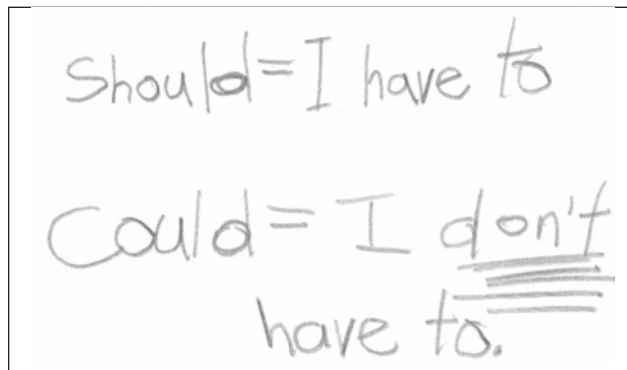


FIGURE 4.32 Should

SUMMARY

This chapter has addressed the introductory phase of teaching a new term. This phase involves two steps:

1. Providing descriptions, examples, anecdotes, and illustrations.
2. Having students develop their own descriptions, examples, and illustrations.

During the first step of the introductory phase, the teacher provides students with information and experiences that help them attain a general understanding of the term. During the second step of the introductory phase, students use their own experiential base to generate personalized descriptions, examples, and illustrations.