# CÁC NGUYÊN TẮC DẠY-HỌC TỪ VỰNG

KIERAN A. FILE*

*Tháng 7/2008, tại Trường Đại học Kinh tế Tp. Hồ Chí Minh đã diễn ra Hội thảo chuyên đề về giảng dạy các kỹ năng tiếng Anh. Trong hội thảo này, phần thuyết trình của thạc sĩ Kieran A. File – Trưởng Chương trình tiếng Anh học thuật thuộc Dự án bán du học – đã thu hút được sự quan tâm đặc biệt của nhiều giáo viên và đại biểu tham dự. Tạp chí KHNN xin giới thiệu nguyên văn hai bài thuyết trình của thạc sĩ Kieran A. File tại hội thảo nói trên.*

## TEACHING VOCABULARY – SIX BASIC PRINCIPLES

### Introduction

Recently I had the pleasure of meeting with English language teaching staff at the University of Economics in Ho Chi Minh City. I was invited to come and share with teachers some basic principles of vocabulary teaching. The main focus of the presentation was to highlight some considerations for teachers wishing to set up and plan a regular vocabulary teaching and learning programme with their classes. Most teachers know that dealing with unknown words as they come up in class activities is a good and popular way to teach vocabulary, however, students can also benefit by doing direct and deep study of new and unknown vocabulary. Below is a brief look at six considerations teachers should address when they plan a direct vocabulary teaching and learning programme.

### Principle One

***Teachers should: Choose useful words***

Teachers should choose words that will be useful for their students to learn. Useful words are words that learners will meet often, or need to use often in their language use situations. But how do we as teachers know if a word is useful? Luckily there are frequency lists available that help identify these useful words. For instance *The General Service List* (West, 1953) is a list of the most common 2000 words used in everyday English. This would be ideal for learners beginning to study English or those wishing to learn English for conversational purposes. Amongst other lists available is the *Academic Word List* (Coxhead, 1998) which contains the most frequent academic

* ThS. Dự án bán du học, Trường Đại học Kinh tế Tp. Hồ Chí Minh

vocabulary - something that would be useful for learners studying to enter an English university. We can also use our judgment, however it is great to have word lists available to help support our judgments as to whether a word is useful or not.

**Principle Two**

***Teachers should: Let the learners do the work***

Far too often it is teachers who do all the work for their learners by providing definitions, sentences etc. While helping students with difficult definitions is necessary, it is probably more meaningful for learners to do the work themselves. One way to approach this is to set students the task of learning the words for themselves in preparation for class. That way they can then bring along to class any questions or problems they are having with the words and the teacher can address these.

**Principle Three**

***Teachers should: Focus on different aspects of a word***

There is much more to a word than just its meaning. For example, amongst other things, students can learn a word's stress (accent), its collocations and word family members, its grammatical patterns and word parts etc. Learners can enrich their knowledge of a word, and perhaps remember it better, by learning more of these different aspects. And if you have taken note of principle two, the learners can be encouraged (or told!) to discover these different aspects for themselves.

**Principle Four**

***Teachers should: Provide meaningful learning opportunities***

It is not enough to simply tell students the meanings of words or get them to only study words out of context. They need opportunities to see or hear target words in a meaningful context, and opportunities to use target words in meaningful writing and speaking tasks. Challenging students to find these words in reading or listening passages and use these words in particular writing and speaking tasks is a simple way to approach this. The provision of these opportunities is the main job of a vocabulary teacher.

**Principle Five**

***Teachers should: Implement a regular testing schedule***

Along with directly teaching and studying new words, and seeing and using them in context, students should be tested regularly. Testing can be used to give students

feedback on their success and/or failure to learn and use the target words and motivate them to study vocabulary. At the very least, regular testing can provide learners with a chance to retrieve newly learnt words from their memories and use them in a meaningful way. Good vocabulary tests will have a balance of vocabulary understanding (receptive) and vocabulary use (productive) tasks.

**Principle Six**

***Teachers should: Be patient with their learners***

Students constantly forget words they have learnt. This is part of the learning process. However this can often frustrate teachers. It is important that teachers remain patient with their learners and allow them a lot of opportunities to see, use and revise new vocabulary in a positive learning environment. A patient teacher can reduce the anxiety levels in a classroom and this can in turn have a positive effect on vocabulary learning.

**Conclusion**

Obviously these six principles are not the only principles for vocabulary teaching and learning, but they offer teachers a good starting point for decisions about the vocabulary they plan to spend time on in their classrooms.

REFERENCES

1. Coxhead, A.J. (1998). *An Academic Word List.* English Language Institute Occasional Publication Number 18. Wellington: Victoria University of Wellington.

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# PROMOTING VOCABULARY LEARNING

KIERAN A. FILE

**Introduction**

It was my pleasure to return to meet with staff at the University of Economics (HCMC) again. In my first talk we discussed some vocabulary teaching principles. This time we looked at how teachers can promote vocabulary learning. We primarily looked at vocabulary practice games and how to challenge our learners to use newly learnt words. These activities and challenges aim to motivate students and create

opportunities for fun and active vocabulary revision and practice. Below is a brief summary of some of the points and activities that were covered in the presentation.

**Add vocabulary challenges**

Students need to be reminded of the opportunities they have to use newly learnt vocabulary. When a student engages in a writing or speaking task they are primarily concerned with communicating. This can lead them to fall back on what they already know or what they are fluent in to promote ease of communication. They will not always push themselves to use newly learnt or taught vocabulary and grammar items. To help promote new vocabulary use teachers can add vocabulary challenges to speaking and writing activities. This can remind students of the opportunities they have to use newly learnt vocabulary. These challenges can be as simple as eliciting newly learnt vocabulary, boarding it and challenging them to use it in a speaking or writing task. To get feedback, teachers could ask students to count the times they, or their partner, used the new vocabulary in a writing or speaking task.

**Add vocabulary to speaking tasks**

Teachers can also add newly learnt vocabulary to the input (or question) of a speaking task as a way of promoting vocabulary use. The trick is to add the new vocabulary to the task in such a way that it becomes necessary to use the word in order to complete the task. For example, below is a ranking task which requires groups of students to discuss which items are the most important and rank them in order of importance.

You are going on a **tramping trip** to New Zealand. Below is a list of 10 things you want to take. Rank the items in order of **usefulness** for you. Be prepared to explain your reasons.

- Lonely planet **guide book**
- A hunting knife
- A beach towel and **togs**
- **Tramping** boots
- **Nylon Parker**
- A **compass**
- **Iodine** for **treating** water
- A **satellite phone**
- A **torch** + **spare** batteries
- **Woolen socks**

Notice the vocabulary items in bold. These words would need to be used by the learners in order for them to be able to complete the speaking task. By using the words in this meaningful speaking task, students are consolidating their knowledge of those particular words and gaining some fluency with them. Teachers should be careful that they choose useful words to add to these tasks, words that the learners are likely to see, hear and use a lot in the future (*Iodine*, for example, you would not expect learners to see and hear very often). As well as ranking tasks, teachers can add target vocabulary items to discussion questions, roleplays and scripted dialogues.

**Vocabulary practice games:**

Finally, another way to promote vocabulary learning is to play vocabulary practice and revision games with your classes. There are hundreds of vocabulary practice games but I would like to highlight two games in particular that were popular with students in the HCMC context I was teaching in.

*Back to the board*

In this game the class is separated into two teams. Each team should come up with their own team name. In each team a representative is chosen to sit with their back to the board so that they **cannot** see the board. The other group members gather around the representative so they **can** see the board. The teacher then writes a word on the board and the group members need to describe the word to their group's representative. Remember the representative cannot see the word on the board so they need to listen to their group and try and guess the word. There are rules however: the group members cannot use gestures, they cannot say the word at any time and they cannot use their first language to translate the target word. Once one of the representatives has guessed the word correctly, their group receives a point, a new representative is then chosen to sit with their back to the board and the game is repeated with a new word.

*Pictionary*

In this game the class is again separated into two teams. Each team should come up with their own team name. A representative from each team is chosen to start the activity. They come to the board and the teacher secretly shows them a word. They then have to quickly grab a board pen and draw a picture of the word for their group. The first group to guess the word gets a point. Some important rules to establish when playing this game: the representative cannot write words or numbers on the board when

they draw their picture. Also, the representative cannot speak at anytime while it is their turn to draw the word. Once one of the teams has guessed the word correctly, their group receives a point, a new representative is then chosen from each group to approach the board and draw a new word.

Obviously games cannot be played all the time, in every class. They are best used as a warmer activity or a revision activity once a week.

**Conclusion**

The approaches to promoting vocabulary learning from games and speaking and writing tasks mentioned above are of course not the only ones. You may have your own games and approaches that successfully get learners using and practicing newly learnt words. The important thing is that learners have opportunities to learn and use newly learnt words in a meaningful way. Using a newly learnt word in a task can enhance a learner's knowledge and control of that word and that is the goal when promoting vocabulary learning.