The Teacher

The magazine for teachers everywhere



Recycling vocabulary

Did you know that you have to see a new word at least five times before you can usually use it and include it in your 'active' vocabulary?

In your classes, students will have a valuable opportunity to pick up new vocabulary on a variety of topics. It is a good idea for you to encourage your students to revise this vocabulary on a regular basis in order for students to take 'ownership' of these words and to start to use them confidently.

Recording new vocabulary

If you feel that sufficient effort isn't being made to record new vocabulary, it's well worth talking to your students and asking them how and where they record new words that come up in class. They may have a notebook where they write the new words or they may have no system in place. All students should be encouraged to make an effort recording vocabulary in an orderly way. Suggest to the class that they have a special vocabulary book. Depending on their preferences and learning styles, the notebook can include pictures and mind maps. It doesn't have to be just a long list. Suggest to your class that they carry this book with them and use the time spent waiting for buses or sitting on trains to have a look through and test themselves.

The word bag

Apart from encouraging your students to keep an orderly vocab book of some sort, another way of having easy access to the words that have come up in your classes is to create a 'word bag' for each of your groups. All you need are two large envelopes and some strips of card. Write on one envelope 'Blank word cards' and 'Class word bag' on the other. Cut up lots of small strips of card and put them in the 'Blank word cards' envelope.

Every class, nominate a student to be in charge of the 'word bag'. He or she should be given the envelopes at the beginning of the class and is responsible for writing all the new vocabulary on separate blank word cards and putting them into the class word bag envelope. If this isn't practical for your group, you can be responsible for putting the words in the bag after each class. If you can keep the envelopes in the classroom you teach in, pinned on a cork board or in a safe place, it will be easier for you to keep track of the bag. After a few lessons, you will have a good selection of words in the word bag.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Revision activities

Here are some activities for using the word bag to recycle the vocabulary. They can be used at the beginning of a class as a warmer or at the end to fill up the last five minutes.

Quick-fire quiz

Pull out a bunch of words from the bag. Give clues or definitions so the students can guess the word on the card. The student who guesses the word correctly wins the card. The winner is the student with the most cards at the end.

'Beep' sentences

Read a sentence incorporating the word on the word card. Instead of saying the word, say 'beep'. Students guess the missing word. When students get the idea, pass them the word bag, so they can create their own sentences.

Circle story

Give each student a word card. You start and begin to tell a story and use the word you have on your card. When you have used your word, the next student continues the story until they can incorporate their own word.

Team vocab tests

Divide the class into teams or pairs. Pull out a set number of words and, using translation or clues, give the teams a vocab test.

Pictionary

In two teams, use the word cards as prompts for a game of pictionary. Use the board or paper.

The more you use the word bag, the more uses you will find for it. I find that students feel a sense of security, knowing what vocabulary will be checked, and they can also get a great sense of achievement when they feel confident using new words. Acquiring vocabulary takes a lot more effort for many students than we (and they) would like to believe. The word bag helps to avoid the feeling that new English vocabulary is a 'bottomless pit'! It can make the learning experience more tangible and achievable.

By Jo Budden

Now scan read the article more carefully. Find the answers to these questions:

1. In the writer's opinion, why is it important for students to review vocabulary that comes up in class?

2. Should all students record vocabulary by making long lists? Why/why not?

LIVEWORKSHEETS

4. In which stages of the lesson does the writer suggest you can use the word bag in class?

6. In the writer's opinion, what effect can using a word bag have on students?

LIVEWORKSHEETS