Review of Graves, M.F., August, D., and Mancilla-Martinez, J. (2013). *Teaching Vocabulary to English Language Learners*. New York: Teachers College Press. 164 pages. ISBN: 978-0-8077-5375-0

This is an excellent book. It is written by three researchers who have worked extensively on the vocabulary knowledge of both native-speakers and non-native speakers of English. They have all also been actively involved in interventions to increase learners' vocabulary size. This combination of practical experience and a detailed knowledge of the research has resulted in a book that speaks directly to teachers and does this with assurance and authority.

The book focuses on learners of English as a second language, that is, learners who live in a country where English is the language of the school and the wider community. The book is directed largely towards teachers in the United States where Spanish speakers make up a significant proportion of the population, although its message is clearly applicable in other countries.

As the title says, it is also about the *teaching* of vocabulary. While the writers acknowledge several times in the book the primary importance of incidental vocabulary learning through language use, their focus is clearly on deliberate teaching and learning – what I call language-focused learning (Nation, 2007).

There are several reasons for mentioning these points. Firstly, there is the issue of terminology. In second language teaching, what the writers call English language learners (ELLs), others would call ESL (English as a Second Language) learners. This terminology difference is probably not accidental, as it seems to reflect the difficulty of deciding whether learners of English who were born in an English speaking country but whose parents are not native-speakers of English are in fact more like native speakers than non-native speakers. Indeed some of the research mentioned in the book shows that native speakers and those we may call non-native speakers seem to be learning vocabulary at the same rate although the initial gap between them is not closed. Secondly, if a reader is not fully aware of the deliberate teaching focus of the book, it can come across as a recommendation for doing lots of vocabulary teaching. Vocabulary teaching needs to be carefully balanced with opportunities for incidental learning through reading, listening, speaking and writing (my belief is a ratio of three parts incidental learning to one part deliberate learning). Vocabulary teaching is an inefficient means of helping learners with vocabulary (as is acknowledged several times in the book), but is a necessary part of a well balanced vocabulary development program.

The main message of the book is very clear and is well outlined in the introduction. It provides the titles for four of the subsequent chapters. A good vocabulary program (1) provides rich and varied language experiences, (2) involves the teaching of individual words, (3) teaches word-learning strategies, and (4) fosters word consciousness. The *rich* in *rich and varied* probably refers to richness of context and mental processing rather than a heavy burden of unknown vocabulary. Chapter 3 on rich and varied experience deals with learning vocabulary through the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, and deals with important activities like shared book reading, silent reading, and discussion. Chapter 4 focuses on teaching individual words and covers a lot of useful activities. This chapter made me uneasy and I suspect

the writers may have felt the same unease. There are thousands of words to learn and the teaching activities are so time-consuming (in several cases involve teaching rates of around 1 or 2 words per hour) with rather low success rates (typically less than 50% of the taught vocabulary is learned) that one wonders if time could be better spent getting the learners to read more or to discuss more (see for example Carlo at al (2004) for similar low returns for large amounts of teaching time). This unease increases when looking at some of the empirically validated programs in Chapter 7 where a program like word generation involves 75 minutes per week to teach five words (15 minutes per word) where it seems two-thirds of the taught words were already known by many of the learners in the treatment. These learners moved from 65% known on the pre-test to 83% on the post-test (presumably about one in every two unknown taught words being learned). The suggestion on page 121 to "devote considerable instructional attention to vocabulary instruction starting in the primary grades and continuing throughout schooling" seems to be questionable advice.

Fortunately, as described in Chapter 3, it seems that the use of individualised computer-based programs like 4000 words may provide more efficient, effective and well-monitored opportunities for learning that need not cut deeply into classroom time.

Chapter 5, Teaching word-learning strategies, and Chapter 6, Promoting word-consciousness, sensibly show how learners need to be equipped to deal with the large numbers of words they will meet and need to learn. Because teaching can only deal with a very small amount of what needs to be learned, if learners are skilful in their own learning, they can learn more efficiently. The strategies described include using word parts, using context clues (guessing from context), using cognates, and using the dictionary. The strategies are well described and well justified, and guidance is provided on how to develop the strategies. It is good to see bilingual dictionaries getting the positive recognition they deserve.

There are two areas where we need more research and where the currently available research needs to be looked at critically. The first is vocabulary size. Measuring vocabulary size is probably the worst researched area of applied linguistics, not because of a lack of research but because of poor methodology. Graves et al use Nagy and Anderson's (1984) figures, which are not measures of size but a calculation of the number of different words learners will meet. These work out at learners gaining 3,000 word families per year. I cannot fault Nagy and Anderson's research, but when we look at frequency ranked lists of word families, their figures seem far too high. They also do not fit with Biemiller's careful measures of the vocabulary size of Canadian primary school children (Biemiller, 2005). Estimates of learners gaining 1000 word families per year (which I think are roughly correct) would strengthen Graves et al's arguments for vocabulary teaching.

The second area of research needing some attention is the evaluation of vocabulary teaching activities. There is now a growing body of research and theory in this area, stimulated by Laufer and Hulstijn's (2001) involvement load hypothesis (see also Nation and Webb, 2011: Chapter 1). Graves et al consider repetition as a condition affecting learning but do not look at other well researched accompanying conditions like retrieval, generative use, elaboration, instantiation, and the negative effect of interference. A focus on learning conditions would allow an evaluation of the many activities described in the book.

These points however are largely quibbles and do not detract from the usefulness of the book. This book is a rich resource for teachers. It is written to be clear and easily accessible and yet is firmly based on research. It is essential reading for teachers wishing to support their second language learners' vocabulary growth.

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I.S.P. Nation

Paul Nation is Emeritus Professor of Applied Linguistics in the School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. His books on vocabulary include *Teaching Vocabulary: Strategies and Techniques* (2008) published by Heinle Cengage Learning, and *Learning Vocabulary in Another Language* (2001, second edition 2013) published by Cambridge University Press.

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