JANUARY Tip of the Month

JOYcabulary

Let's Ring Words Together in the New Year!

The research:

- In the book *"No More "Look Up the List" Vocabulary Instruction* (Cobb & Blachowicz, 2014), the authors argue against the traditional, but ineffective practice, of teaching new words in a weekly list. Researchers have sought more efficient ways of learning - and retaining - vocabulary words.
- Robert Marzano presents academic vocabulary in *semantic clusters* (see MarzanoResources.com).
- Elfrieda Hiebert advocates something similar in her book *Teaching Words and How They Work: Small Changes for BIG Vocabulary Results (2020)* and on her website textproject.org. She argues that words in the narrative genre should be taught in *synonym networks* while words from informational texts should be taught in *topic networks*.

Semantic or Thematic Clusters?

Both authors take on an approach that focuses on the *relationships* among words. That is, when introducing new words, students can be taught how to extend knowledge of the new word to other words. This argument for semantic clusters is appealing. The similarity of the words should ease the learning task as the student simultaneously becomes aware of the slight distinctions between the related words.

However, many researchers cite a downside to teaching words in semantic clusters as it may cause interference effects in memory: the closer two words are in meaning or association, the greater the risk of forgetting. Some studies even go as far as to suggest that semantic grouping is actually worse than presenting lists of totally unrelated words. These researchers advocate for *thematic clusters* over semantic clusters. While semantic clusters group words that have similar meanings, thematic clusters group words that belong to a specific knowledge schema (a set of knowledge and experiences about a topic or idea).. An example of a thematic cluster would be *sweatshirt, changing room, wool, salesperson*.

Winter Word Cluster Below!

While the researchers debate, it may be helpful to group new words in some way. Below, find a word cluster for **winter**. The words can be grouped by food, weather, sports, etc. Students can ring the words that are already part of their vocabulary and focus on the ones that are new to them.

❄ Winter Words ❄

snow	freezing rain	blizzard	nor'easter	snowstorm
wind chill	wintery mix	black ice	icicles	evergreen trees
slush	thaw	iceberg	flurries overcast	sleet

hot chocolate	soup	chili	stew	hot cider warm milk

sledding	ice skating	skiing	ice fishing	hockey
snowboarding	snow tubing	tobogganing		

snow suit	mittens	gloves	scarf ear muffs	jacket
ski pants boots	fleece	sweater	thermal underwear	

chilly	freezing	cold	frosty	crisp	bitter cold
harsh subzero	blustery	biting	dreary	snow day	
snowed in	frostbite	shivering	hibernation	quilt	
blanket	wood stove	heater	flannel sheets	slippers	
sniffles	fever	flu	radiator	chimney	fireplace

snowball fight	snowman building	snow fort
chopping wood bonfire	shoveling	plowing

We wish you a rejuvinated January filled with JOY!

Spread the Word. Spread the Joy.

JOYcabulary