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 SHELL EDUCATION



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Near the end of each calendar year, *Time* magazine has an issue of “10 bests”—news stories, photographs, books, movies, and so on. According to the article written by Gilbert Cruz, one of the “10 Best Buzzwords of 2007” was **locavore** (LO-kuh-vor).

What do you think a *locavore*\* is? What clues are you using to figure it out?

Most teachers we know find these word puzzles intriguing. We recognize that our language is constantly changing. We spend at least some time thinking about words—which words to teach; how best to teach them; how to assess students’ word knowledge; and the relationship between word learning, reading comprehension, and content learning.

It has become increasingly clear in the past couple of decades that a focus on vocabulary has the potential to support much of the other learning students do in school. Yet teachers’ questions about how to develop an effective vocabulary program abound. We have all experienced the dreaded vocabulary list approach, complete with writing and memorizing (only to quickly forget) dictionary definitions. We know that this approach doesn’t work, but what does?

This is why we wrote this book. In it, you will find research-based practices that can help your students develop their vocabularies. Throughout, we emphasize using word roots (prefixes, suffixes, bases) as an efficient and effective way to build vocabulary. Our instructional series *Building Vocabulary from Word Roots* details year-long word-learning routines for students. In this book, we elaborate on the research and expert opinions supporting this approach to word learning and develop the rationale for focusing on roots in your vocabulary program. This book also provides guidelines for developing models and strategies for vocabulary instruction from a roots



perspective, including sample practice activities and stories from teachers who are finding success with this approach to word learning. We also present tips for enhancing your use of a dictionary in the classroom, a brief history of the English language, and an appendix with resources for further learning. Also included in the appendices is a list of commonly taught roots, a list of words with origins in other parts of the world, and suggestions for professional development.

At the conclusion of each chapter, we suggest that you reflect on what you have learned and make notes for your own reference. If you are reading this book with colleagues, you may also want to make note of items for discussion with others.

If you are using *Building Vocabulary from Word Roots* in your classroom, this book will provide you with rationales and adaptations that you and your students may find beneficial. If you are using another vocabulary series (or none at all), this book will provide a background against which you can evaluate your current program or develop a new one. Happy reading!

Timothy Rasinski, Nancy Padak, Evangeline Newton,  
and Rick M. Newton

\* **locavore** (n.)—a person who tries to eat only foods that are harvested locally



## Teaching Vocabulary: What Does the Research Say?

Have you ever visited the National World War II Museum in New Orleans? It is a fascinating place. Among the documents available for viewing is the first draft of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s famous speech that begins, “Yesterday, December 7, 1941—a date which will live in *infamy*....” These powerful words helped the nation prepare for war. But they were not the first words FDR wrote. The first draft of the beginning of the speech reads, “a date which will live in *world history*.” Which do you think is more memorable, “infamy” or “world history”?

Word choice really does make a difference. Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) once observed that “the difference between the almost right word and the right word is really a large matter—it’s the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning.” This book is all about helping students find the right word.

As every teacher knows, this is no small task. The English language has between 1,200,000 and 2,000,000 words! And every year, technological advances bring us new modes of communication—and new words. One estimate is that technology is contributing about 20,000 words per year to our language. How can we—and our students—ever catch up? Luckily, there is a way.

Consider this: 90 percent of English words with more than one syllable are Latin based. Most of the remaining 10 percent are Greek based. A single Latin root generates 5–20 English words.