

Vocabulary Deepening: From Literal to Metaphorical

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Levels	<i>Intermediate to advanced</i>
Aims	<i>Expand word knowledge</i>
Class Time	<i>20–30 minutes</i>
Preparation Time	<i>30 minutes</i>
Resources	<i>Topic-related images</i> <i>Recording sheets</i> <i>Display board</i> <i>Data projector</i>

This activity expands students' word knowledge by focusing on the word's core underlying meaning and transferability to understand its family members. Students connect literal knowledge of the word to its metaphorical usage and meaning, thereby deepening overall word knowledge.

PROCEDURE

1. Select and introduce a target vocabulary item. The item may be one directly related to a topic in hand or one that learners identify that arises in class or which you think is worthy of attention.
2. Using the visuals to support understanding of the target word, develop a concise and precise explanation of the target word *hand*, first with students thinking on their own, followed by pair and group sharing.
3. Learners share the spoken and written form of the target word in their own language(s).
4. Scaffold learners' contribution to develop a consensus explanation; focus on the word's underlying meaning, which is the core meaning of the word and its family members.

5. Have students use a range of dictionaries to look up the word and compare explanations.
6. Students should develop fluency expressing the word, the consensus explanation, and word usage in contextually relevant sentences. Here is an example using the target word *hand*:
 - *the end part of a person's arm from the wrist, made up of the palm, four fingers, and one thumb*
 - *the grasping appendage at the end of a person's arm used for picking up and holding things*
7. After the collocation session, allow some time for learners to record any notes on the vocabulary from this exercise so they can review it another time.
8. Identify the word family members of the target word. Have students say and write down each word family member.
9. Share the list of word family members as a class by taking turns to nominate one. Each nomination should include
 - writing up the word for all to view,
 - pronouncing the word,
 - explaining the word,
 - using the word in relevant contextual sentences.

e.g., hands, handy, handed, handless, handle, handful, unhand (me)
10. Scaffold for fullness of meaning-making and fluency, each time discussing the link to the underlying meaning. If learners cannot nominate many word family members, you can offer some examples.
11. Have learners work in pairs to identify phrases or expressions they may know or have heard or read using the target word.
12. Encourage them to share what they know as a class, making contributions yourself also, and compile a list of phrases and expressions. With a list of about 10 phrases and expressions, discuss the meaning, especially identifying how the underlying meaning of the target word informs the meaning of the phrase or expression, for example:

lay a hand on something, hand in glove, go hand in hand, hand over fist, have a hand in something, be in someone else's hand, to hand over, out of hand, turn your hand to something, out of hand, a hand-to-mouth existence, to be handed

something on a plate, to keep your hands off, to have time on your hands, a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush

13. Explain to learners that some are closely related to the underlying meaning while others seem not to be more or less congruent, more or less literal, more or less metaphorical. Explain and discuss the meaning of *literal*, *congruent*, and *metaphorical*. A simple way to explain these is as follows:
 - *Literal* means the obvious or most commonly known meaning.
 - *Congruent* means what the word is close to, the core underlying meaning of the word.
 - *Metaphorical* is not the obvious meaning (as in literal) but a somewhat hidden (nonliteral) or less known meaning.
14. Create a metaphorical continuum:

Most LITERAL —————> Least LITERAL
Most CONGRUENT —————> Least CONGRUENT
15. Ask learners to decide in pairs where each phrase and expression might be placed along the continuum. When sharing, they should be ready to justify their decision to the class.
16. Fully discuss each as a class—meaning, usage, and placement.
17. Develop little scenarios or anecdotes linked to each phrase, in pairs, as a class, or teacher provided, for example:

He was nearly 80 years old and quite fit for his age. In former years he'd been a leading-edge scientist—a biologist, in fact. After retirement he said to his family, "I'm starting my own fish farm. I've got time on my hands now and I want to keep my hand in the area of biology I love best—fish hatching and fish preservation."

She was always nervous when she stepped onto a plane. While she knew her safety and getting to the destination was in the hands of a fully trained, experienced pilot, she found it hard to relax. There was, of course, no other choice. Flying as a passenger went hand in hand with letting go and placing her trust in the flying crew.

18. Learners might choose or be given a phrase for which to develop a contextually relevant anecdote or scenario both in speaking and in writing.

CAVEATS AND OPTIONS

1. This approach lends itself more to some words than others. Be selective, particularly focusing on ones that arise in the classroom.
2. You may need to lead the way more or less, depending on learners' language proficiency.
3. As much as possible, give space for learners to grapple with unpacking the meanings of the phrases and expressions and be fully involved orally.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- Macmillan. (2009–2014). *Macmillan dictionary*. Retrieved from <http://www.macmillandictionary.com>
- Simon-Vandenberg, A., Taverniers, M., & Ravelli, L. J. (Eds.). (2003). *Grammatical metaphor: Views from systemic functional linguistics*. Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins.