1. Introduction:
English as a world language plays a big part in our every day life. Due to the new professions which develop in a very short time those days and due to the trade relations with countries in East and West, the capability of speaking foreign languages, especially English, has become a basic skill.
It is not so much the knowledge of linguistics and grammar that counts, but the knowledge of vocabulary and the capability of speaking mostly fluently.
As a teacher you also have to take these standards into account when teaching vocabulary.
Vocabulary should play a central role in teaching English- and not just in higher classes, also right from the beginning in 5th grade.
The aim of teaching vocabulary is not just the knowledge of words, but the preparation of the pupils for communication.
Even if they do not take one of those jobs, where good knowledge of English is required, they will still have the opportunity to communicate in foreign countries.
This essay will deal with the problem of teaching vocabulary. The main emphasis is on theory, but to connect it with practical things, there is also an analysis of textbooks on the question of teaching vocabulary.

2. The choice of the vocabulary:
Some teachers might say that there is no use discussing this issue as there are a lot of good textbooks with their own vocabulary. And very often teachers use the texts and the vocabulary that are offered by the books.
But these teachers are not critical enough. Very often textbooks include words that are not really needed. So is it for example not essentially important for pupils to know what “the nave“ or “the spire“ of a church is. But it is important for pupils to understand and know the verb “bless“ or the word “church“. All these words could have been used in a text about churches or in a text about religious life in Britain.
In this case the teacher should decide for himself which words he would teach his pupils and which words would really be necessary to know.
As it can be seen in the example above, it is really important to discuss this issue. To make the decision if the words are important or not easier, the teacher can consider three things:

1. Can the pupils use the words in their every day life? Are the words useful for communicating with other people? Is the vocabulary not too specified?
2. Can the pupils learn and memorize all of the words? Or is the list of words given in the text too long?
3. Is the vocabulary provided in the text good for a basic knowledge and can it be expanded if the pupil wants to occupy himself more with English?

The aim of a teacher should not be to teach his pupils as many words as possible, but to teach them the words they need to speak freely. As it is not really possible to define a “basic vocabulary” which every pupil should learn in the first three classes, the teacher should try to find vocabulary with which the pupils are able to talk about situations of their every day life and of course about their emotions. If pupils know just 2000 words, they are able to read and to understand 85% of all texts. It should therefore be the aim of a teacher to provide pupils with really basic and moreover useful words, and not to make them learn words they can never use in their lives.

One problem that occurs is the problem of the words with different meanings.

It is obvious that it is not possible to teach pupils in 5th grade all meanings of a word. Especially in the first years of learning English, the pupils will be totally confused by the different meanings. It is therefore better to teach just one meaning of a word and to add the other meanings in a higher grade, when the pupils have memorized the first meaning and have a better knowledge of English in general.

Most teachers nowadays come to the conclusion that it is more effective to talk English during the lessons and to make the pupils used to speaking and listening to English.

Another problem that occurs in this context is the question of the introduction of vocabulary.
3. Introducing vocabulary:

3.1 Introducing vocabulary in the foreign language:

Although it seems to be more effective to talk English during the lessons, there is still no solution for the introduction of new vocabulary. Should it be introduced in English or in the mother tongue? A lot of teachers are against the method of introducing vocabulary in English and some teachers favour it.

The main reason why some teachers are against introducing vocabulary in English is that they are afraid that the introduction in English might not be as exact as the introduction in the mother tongue. But the truth is that very often introductions in the mother tongue are more inexact and confusing for the pupils than an introduction in English. Gisela Göhrum gives herefore a good example in her book *Englischunterricht an Haupt- und Realschulen*. She depicts that the explanation of the English word “large“ with the german word „groß“ would not be exactly the same and therefore confuse the pupils, as “large“ is mainly used in terms of expansion.

The teacher should consider that more than one equivalent for „groß“ exist in English. In this example, the pupils might get a wrong idea of what the word means, the teacher would have to spend more time on correcting this idea than he would have needed to explain it in English.

If the teacher explains the word in English, the pupil might also get a vague idea of what the word means, but if the teacher uses more and more contexts in his explanation, the pupil will get an exacter idea of the meaning. An advantage of this method is that the pupils will memorize the words better if the teacher explains them in the foreign language. It is proven that children learn things better, when they have to work hard to achieve them. The same appears to learning vocabulary: they will memorize the words better, because they had to think about them and try hard to find out the correct meaning. The advantage lies in the fact that the pupils had to act and react and not just to listen and write down.

Teachers who favour the explanation of vocabulary in English therefore help pupils to remember words better. It is not true to say that this method is less effective or inexact.
3.2 The Introduction of vocabulary with context clues:

It is usual that whenever a word occurs in a text or a passage which is unknown, the teacher has to explain the word. There are many possibilities to do this: you can explain the vocabulary before you read the text- to help the pupils understand it better- you can explain it while reading the text or you can give the text as homework and make the pupils look the words up in a dictionary.

The first possibility is the one that is used mostly in lower classes (5th and 6th grade).

The second and the third possibility demand a wider knowledge of English and a better understanding of the language, they will probably be used in graduading classes (9th and 10th grade).

Especially for those classes can it be very boring to use the same method all the time. There is another method of introducing and explaining vocabulary that is also possible in those classes: the usage of context clues.

The main idea of this method is that a text includes a lot of clues that explain words, give examples and help to understand the words without knowing them.

This method is good to develop pupils’ vocabulary and moreover to increase their reading comprehension.

The main clues are the following:

1) **definition**: very often a writer defines an unknown word through a known word.

   (Example: Later Congress votes to augment or increase the job training program....
   - Here the unknown word augment is defined by the word increase.)

2) **example**: writers give examples to illustrate the use of an unknown word.

3) **comparison and contrast**: A comparison helps to find similarities to known words and a contrast depicts differences between the unknown and a known word, so that one is able to understand the unknown word.

4) **summary**: A summary sums a situation or an idea up, very often occur unknown words in the summary while the whole idea or situation is understandable.
5) **synonyms and antonyms:** A synonym explains an unknown word through a known word meaning the same and an antonym explains the word with a known word that has the opposite meaning.

If a pupil knows these context clues, it is unnecessary to explain all the unknown words. The teacher of course still has tasks: His main task is firstly to explain these context clues to the pupils. But even if they know all of the context clues, is the teacher still necessary. Now his main task is to help the pupils with their work; he should make the pupils aware of existing context clues and if they are not able to find them out, he should show the clues to them.

So the teacher takes over a helping or an advising function, while the pupils try to learn themselves. This is of course one advantage of this method, but the best advantage of this method is that the pupils learn vocabulary in a complete context and not just as isolated words.

4. **Different ways to introduce and repeat vocabulary:**

4.1 **Pictures:**

It is very useful to think about the needs of pupils before thinking of the way to present vocabulary. It is proven that especially young children learn vocabulary better, if they have a picture that they can relate to a word.

The pupils also learn better if they can act. Act means in this case that the pupils should have the opportunity to move around or at least to think. It is always a bit of a challenge that pupils need.

A good way to make words attractive to young pupils and to motivate them for learning is to show them the objects that are related to the vocabulary that they are learning. As an example: If you are talking about a pencil, it is good if you show the pupils a real pencil, or if you talk about a window, you should point to a window and show it to them.

This method is especially easy if it is a word field of school that includes words like rubber, ruler or pencil.
But even other words can be introduced this way. If it is not always possible to bring along the object, there is still the possibility of painting pictures. It is clear that not everybody is the kind of person that has a talent for painting or can paint an excellent picture in a short time and with just a few strokes. But even this person can bring along posters, photos or pictures he or she drew at home. It is easy to make a challenge for the pupils out of this method. The teacher can make little cards with the name of each learned word on them and also the objects corresponding with the words. The pupils would have the task to put or stick the correct card under the right object. In this case, they would have to think and to move around. As it can be seen - it is not always complicated to make a little challenge out of simple things.

4.2 Games:
As the example of the word cards described above shows, it is not always hard to create a little game. And young children normally like to play games- they are thankful for every game, it does not have to be long or complicated. It is of course not necessary that the teacher has to think a whole day to create a new game, he can just take known games. Everything he has to do is to make them appropriate for the class and the learned vocabulary. To show that this need not be complicated, there are some examples for easy games listed below. One game that can be played in class is the game “I am going on a holiday and I am planing to take with me...“. The game starts with a pupil that repeats this or an equivalent sentence and thinks of one word he learned for homework, let us say “table“. The child then adds the word “table“ to the whole phrase. After that, the second child repeats the phrase including table. And then again, he adds a learned word. This is a good game for the repetition of words, because everybody has to remember the sentence and the new words. This game does not take very long and the concentration on the new words is also guaranteed. This kind of game is a good start for a lesson- and it is of course funnier than the normal test of the vocabulary. Another game that is really easy to use in class is the Kim’s game.
This game addresses the visual skills. It is based on the fact that the pupils have to memorize several objects. Usually the objects are on a tray. Then everybody has to memorize all the objects that are on the tray. After that the teacher covers the tray and takes one or two objects away. When the pupils get to see the tray again, they have to guess which objects are missing.

Another way of playing this game is presented in the textbook *Klett Verlag: Learning English Red Line 1* on page 125. In this case, the pupils look at the picture in the book, then close the book and try to write down everything they remember. This is a variation of the normal Kim’s game- but nevertheless still useful.

### 4.3 Analysis of textbooks:

The textbooks also use the fact that pupils- especially those who are in the lower grades- like to play games.

The authors of these textbooks also create exercises which animate pupils to play and to use their vocabulary without noticing it.

A good example for such an exercise is in *Cornelsen English G B2 Realschule* on page 53. In this example, the pupils have a kind of crossword puzzle, in which they should find 16 hidden words. Because this is not very easy, there are some sentences given which should help the pupils to find out the correct word.

By doing this, the pupils learn and remember their vocabulary without knowing or noticing it.

But textbooks also connect games with grammar. In another example which is taken from the same page, a game is connected with an writing exercise. First the pupils have to find correct pairs out of two lists and then they have to make sentences with these pairs.

Some exercises also animate the pupils to think about a new game and to try it with a partner. Examples for such an exercise are in *Cornelsen English G B2 Realschule* on page 107 or in the same book on page 81.
In both cases is no instruction for a game provided. It would be a good idea to let the pupils create a new game in pairs. After each pair found out a game, they could present this game to the whole class. This kind of activity would not only check the vocabulary, but also animate the pupils to speak freely in front of the class.

The *Cornelsen* schoolbooks try to present a lot of possibilities to help pupils learn and repeat their vocabulary in a funny way. Another kind of exercise that can even be copied by teachers and then used in other classes, is a puzzle exercise which is in *Cornelsen English G B3 Realschule* on page 16.

In this exercise the pupils have to built new words. They have a list of words which just consist of consonants. Instead of the vowels are just gaps. The pupils then have the task to put the correct vowels into the correct gaps.

I think It would be nor problem either to use it with the whole class as an funny exercise, or to make a game out of it. It would for example be possible to give points for every correct answer- but only for those pupils who found it first.

Unfortunately other textbooks do not use as many games and puzzles. Especially in lower grades could the addition of games into the textbooks could become a revolution. Learning vocabulary would not be boring, but funny.

### 5. Autonomous learning of vocabulary:

A lot of pedagogues nowadays favour those teaching methods where open education dominates. This means that the pupils should try to learn without a teacher. They can depict their learning aims and try to achieve those aims with helping each other or working alone. The central point of this method is that the pupils learn how to learn, that means that they learn where to look something up, where to get some information from and other useful basic skills.

These skills are very important for the pupils in order to live and survive in our current society.

These open education methods are also possible in English lessons- and they are especially useful for learning vocabulary.
Some pedagogues asked pupils about their learning habits and the survey came to the frightening conclusion that more than 50% of all pupils never use a dictionary to look words up and that only 10% know how to learn and practice vocabulary. It should therefore be the major task of an English teacher to show the pupils how to learn their words- to speak in the words of pedagogues: to make them learn how to learn.

The teacher should tell them about learning strategies and tell them:

1) which vocabulary they should learn.
   - This varies depending on the intention of the pupil. For repetition, they can choose the words they need to learn most, for preparation for a lesson, they should learn those words the teacher told them.

2) how many words they should learn.
   - This also depends on the intention of the pupil. If the words are unknown, the pupil should not learn more than 12 words. If the words are known and it is a repetition, the number of words can be extended.

3) when and how long to learn.
   - Each pupil should decide for himself how long to learn. It is not the time span, but the moment that is important. It is useful to make the pupils aware of the daily output of each person and how this varies during the whole day.

4) where to learn.
   - Normally the pupils should learn their vocabulary at home, but it might be useful in the first time, while introducing the new method of open education, to learn words during the lessons. It is really important that the teacher then shows the pupils the different learning strategies that exist for learning vocabulary. The teacher is very important during this time. He is the one that knows all of the strategies and he should be the one that gives them enough information about strategies, learning materials such as dictionaries, textbooks and media. Each pupil should find his own learning strategy during this time. He should be able to use this strategy alone at home- and this should be the aim of these lessons.
If a teacher decides not just to show the pupils the learning strategies, but to let them learn completely autonomously, he should consider several things.

This method of completely autonomous learning bases on the fact that the pupils should learn and choose their vocabulary themselves.

In this case the teacher does not only have the task to show the pupils how to learn their words, which is also very important, but moreover does the teacher have to prepare the vocabulary for the whole year.

After the pupils know how to learn and have found out their appropriate learning strategy for learning vocabulary at home, they decide which vocabulary they would like to learn. The teacher prepares a list of topics and a list of word fields. This list should consist of topics that correspond with the vocabulary in the textbook. If one unit in the textbook deals with the transportation system in Britain, the teacher should also provide word lists about this topic.

As it is important to choose vocabulary that is useful for the pupils, they should decide for themselves which topics and situations of every day life they would like to deal with. Of course the pupils can only choose a topic from the given list. After the pupils have chosen such a topic, the teacher shows them the different sources where they can get words from, such as dictionaries, school textbooks, newspapers, picture dictionaries etc.

Of course, these sources should vary depending on the learning level of the class. Each pupil then chooses with the help of the teacher not more than 20 words and has then the opportunity to decide when he wants to learn them.

And the learning of the vocabulary should then be easy, as the pupils have found their appropriate learning method.

But it should be added to this method that the pupils must get the right and the chance to ask their teacher for help whenever they want.

If a teacher decides to introduce this method of open education in his class, he must think of an appropriate way to mark the knowledge of his pupils.

Konrad Macht proposes in his article the method of preparing and presenting papers that include the words the pupil dealt with.
As this method is really complex and needs a lot of training, the pupils need to be used to learning alone and should be old and responsible enough to do so. It is therefore a good idea to use this method only in higher classes, starting with 8th or 9th grade.

6. Résumé:
This essay deals with those items that I think are essential to know for teaching vocabulary. As I tried to show is it firstly important to choose the correct words, which are useful to be taught. But it is moreover not less important to find a good way of presenting these words. I put an emphasis on ways of teaching vocabulary that would mostly be used in the lower grades, because I think that especially those pupils should be taught the right way to learn their vocabulary. And I think that a child could develop more joy of learning the language- which includes learning words- if the process of learning is connected right from the beginning with fun and not with pressure.
It is not such a big problem to make English more funny to children- games are easy to invent and also easy to use in language teaching and besides this a good way to make children love the language.
I believe that the love of a language is a better basis for learning it than being forced to learn it.
It should be out of discussion that the central aim teaching English should be the capability to speak fluently and freely. And to achieve this aim, teachers should provide their pupils as much help as possible and ease their way of learning the basics for this skill- the words. And it is also important that teachers consider the new methods of teaching vocabulary before keeping to the old methods that can kill every little joy, the pupils might feel for the language.
7. Bibliography:


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   In: English teaching forum, July 1994, Volume 32, number 3, p.39-41

3) Macht, Konrad: *Wortschatz Marke Do- It- Yourself.*
   In: Der fremdsprachliche Unterricht Englisch 1995, Nummer 1, S. 17-23

4) Rampillon, Ute/ Reisener, Helmut: *Words- words- words.*
   In: Der fremdsprachliche Unterricht Englisch 1995, Nummer1, S.4-9
8. Appendix
example no1:

from: Klett Verlag *Learning English. Red Line 1*, p.125

example no2:

from: Cornelsen Verlag *English G B2- Realschule*, p.53

example no 3:
example no 4:

example no 5:

example no 6:
from: Cornelsen Verlag *English G B3- Realschule*, p.16

diagram 1:

from: Rampillon/ Reisener: *Words- words- words.*