

CLOSE THE VOCABULARY GAP!
PROVEN STRATEGIES ECE
ADMINISTRATORS CAN USE TO HELP
TEACHERS ENHANCE VOCABULARY
DEVELOPMENT IN THEIR CLASSROOMS

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Is Developing Young Children's Vocabulary Knowledge Really that Important?

- YES!
- Achievement gap begins as early as age three (30 million word gap between children in low income settings compared to those in affluent settings) *
- Research was conducted with 42 families in Kansas City.
- Children in low-income settings heard, on average, 616 words per hour compared to children in more affluent settings who heard, on average, 2153 words per hour.

* Hart, B. & Risley, T. (1995). *Meaningful differences in the everyday experience of young American children*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

Implications of Findings

- High correlation between three-year-olds' lexical (vocabulary) knowledge and language proficiency at ages 9 and 10.
 - Vocabulary
 - Listening
 - Syntax
 - Reading Comprehension

What Else Do We Know About Children's Vocabulary Development?

- Knowledge about words and their meanings is essential to understanding and interpreting text.
- Low-SES children enter school with less-extensive vocabularies than their middle-class peers.
- Middle-class children have learned about **6,000** root word meanings, compared to **4,000** by their lowest-quartile classmates, by second grade (a 2-grade gap). (Neuman, Newman, Dwyer, *Reading Research Quarterly*, 2011).

More . . .

- More fortunate students know more *academic words*, which helps them make cognitive links (“Velcro of the mind”).
- These differences in word knowledge contribute to the achievement gap.
- Most schools do not invest time in direct vocabulary development.
- Teaching tools offer little guidance for teachers in vocabulary instruction.

How Can WE Bridge the Gap?

- My own interest in children's vocabulary development.
- How administrators can make sure that vocabulary learning becomes an even more essential—and exciting!—part of early child education?
- Question: When we teach vocabulary, should we do so in a purely organic way as new words arise, or teach children a prescribed list of words?

What can Teachers and Administrators Do Right Away?

- Read books aloud often—interactively. Select titles that feature rich vocabulary (more on this soon).
- Teach words thematically (for example, building word webs—*garden, plant, flower, vegetables*).
- Use media to help convey concepts (e.g., video clips, songs, photos).



What You Can Do Right Away

- Dialogic reading at home and school.
- Oral development on the go.
- Reading fiction and nonfiction texts aloud to children.

Provide *Time* for Vocabulary Instruction



- Research shows that as little as 12-15 minutes a day can make an important difference (when added to a core literacy program).
- Remember: Children benefit from lots of interactions around words, especially content area words. Math is key (with words such as: *add, subtract, measure, forward, backward, equal*).

More Strategies

- Teaching words for *known* concepts (sizes, night/day, feelings, noises).
 - Noises
 - *No Jumping on the Bed* (Arnold)
 - *No More Water in the Tub* (Arnold)
 - *Koala Lou* (Fox)
 - *Walk with a Wolf* (Howker)
 - Feelings
 - *The Way I Feel* (Cain)
 - *The Story of Ruby Bridges* (Coles)
 - *Look Out, Bird!* (Janovitz)
 - *The Day the Goose Got Loose* (Lindbergh)
 - (YOU know LOTS more titles!!)
- Teaching new meanings for *known* words (multiple meanings).
- Clarifying and enriching meanings of *known* words (*angry/peevied; furious/piqued; and perturbed/agitated*).

(Adapted from: Edna Brabham, Connie Buskist, Shannon Coman Henderson, Timon Paleologos, & Nikki Baugh, 2012)

Bringing Parents into the Equation

- Every point of contact with parents is a golden opportunity to share vocabulary development strategies for them to use at home.
- Parents are eager to learn tools and strategies!



“There’s an App for That”

- Generation Z and Technology
- Expert advice: www.common sense media.org
- Also see Reading Rockets: http://www.readingrockets.org/teaching/reading101/vocabulary/literacyapps_vocabulary/
 - ▣ Experiment
 - ▣ Add your own discoveries to the list
 - ▣ Share ideas with colleagues



Words

- The great thing about collecting words is that they're free; you can borrow them, trade them in, or toss them out. Words are lightweight, portable, and they're EVERYWHERE!"
 - Susan Woolridge (1997)
- Reflect: Which strategies do teachers and administrators in your school use regularly? Which strategies could you emphasize even more?

References

- “Educational Effects of a Vocabulary Intervention on Preschoolers’ Word Knowledge and Conceptual Development,” by Susan Neuman, Ellen Newman, and Julie Dwyer in *Reading Research Quarterly*, July/August/September 2011 (Vol. 46, #3, pp. 249-272).
- “Flooding Gaps to Accelerate Word Learning,” by Edna Brabham, Connie Buskist, Shannon Coman Henderson, Timon Paleologos, and Nikki Baugh in *The Reading Teacher*, May 2012 (Vol. 65, #8, pp. 523-533).

Q & A

- Let's hear from you.
- I can be reached at: julie.wood@post.harvard.edu