Improving Vocabulary

In the Age of Common Core Standards:
Guidance for Early Childhood Educators

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Foreword by Timothy Shanahan

ALL ABOUT WORDS
INCREASING VOCABULARY IN THE
COMMON CORE CLASSROOM, PREK-2

Teacher’s College Press, 2013
Tip of the iceberg
- Knowledge
- Symbolic representations
- Build concepts

All about words
- Vocabulary is THE strongest predictor of children’s achievement
  - Not only in elementary school but in high school
- Children of poor, marginalized populations
- Children of families who speak a language other than English
- Mother’s education
Hart and Risley...
Poverty
2007 results from National Assessment of Educational Progress at 4th Grade

Overall, 34% of 4th graders performed **below the Basic** Level of Proficiency in 17,600 schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Percent below Basic</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>White</td>
<td>23</td>
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<tr>
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<td>54</td>
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<td>Hispanic</td>
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NAEP 2012
Common Core Standards

- Cumulative model of expectations
- Academic Vocabulary
- Building knowledge through texts
- Creating cross-textual experiences
- Integrating technology and print
- A focus on evidence
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NAEP 2012
Common myths

- Children are ‘word sponges’
- They learn words through activities
- Storybook reading
- “I do it all the time”
The numbers are larger than you can imagine

No. of words children will need to know
Children will need explicit AND implicit instruction

Explicit: A ‘cave’ is a hole in the mountain”

As opposed: What is a cave?
- Be intentional in our word selection
- Words from core reading program
  - Platypus
  - Around

  OR:
  - OR:
  - Ride
  - move

Question: are these words important?
- INSTEAD: insects, antennae, segments, legs
- Parts of the body: brain, heart, lungs
Key principle

- Camouflage
- Habitat
- Survival
Ongoing professional development
Poll question
Creating a vocabulary rich environment
Creating cozy spots for reading
- Purposeful talk: Why do you think?
- Challenging words: meterologist
- Extend and clarify
- “Taking it up a notch”
  - Compare/contrast
  - If/then
Eye to eye instruction
Building vocabulary

- Implicit instruction
- Explicit instruction
Poll question
The problem

“A space probe is an unpiloted spacecraft that leaves Earth’s orbit to explore the Moon, planets, asteroids, comets, or other objects in outer space as directed by onboard computers and/or instructions sent from Earth.”

Grade 6 text
o ‘asteroid’
o ‘comet’
o ‘Atmospheric conditions’
o ‘space probes’

o What is similar about them?
Traditionally, much instruction has been designed around themes.
We teach children words and content in categories.
- Not necessarily ‘tier II’ words
- Not necessarily ‘academic’ words
- Rather they are ‘content-specific’ words: words that are essential for learning content

• STEP 1
- Plants
  - Stems, petals, leaves,
  - Photosynthesis; oxygen and carbon dioxide

- All about me
  - Heart, lung, brain, blood
How do we go about teaching vocabulary?

A common teaching sequence
- Identify words: 8-10
- Child-friendly definition
  - “A dolphin is a marine mammal. It looks like a fish but it has lungs and breathes air just like us”

STEP 2
Step 3

- Give children many opportunities for guided practice.
  - Pictures; rhymes; riddles;
  - Call and response techniques
Step 4

- Distributed review
  - Over learning
  - Weekly, monthly, and over time
Step 5

- Progress monitor
New words
Teach content-rich words (5-step series)

Make sure these words are related in categories (to form a semantic network)

SELF TEACHING DEVICE

Ex: Is a spider an insect? A spider has 8 legs, and all others have 6, so it is not a spider
Materials to use

- Text sets
  - Book 1: Pattern Book
  - Book 2: Transitional Text
  - Book 3: Transitional Text
  - Book 4: Informational Text
- Focus on a topic of interest
- A series of books that use multiple genre
  - Pattern books or predictable books
  - Narrative nonfiction
  - Informational

Features of text sets
- Daily readings of books in text sets
- Start with predictable books (gives children the names they can remember)
- Move on to narrative nonfiction; spend at least two times a week reading these books
- Turn to Information books
Why is it powerful?

- Supports word knowledge and conceptual development
- Enables children to develop ‘inter-textual links’ as they compare and contrast across genres
- Helps them to learn the ‘features of information books.’
Principles:
- The notion of acceleration
- Content-rich vocabulary
- Organization of word knowledge
- Use of text sets
- Gradual release of control
- Lots of practice and distributed review
- Don’t be afraid of challenging students; they love it!
Poll Question
Book: All About Words (Teachers ’College Press, 2013)

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