Word Wizardry: Vocabulary Enhancement in Early Childhood
PreK through Grade 1
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Teacher’s College Press, 2013

Tip of the iceberg
All about words

- Knowledge
- Symbolic representations
- Build concepts

Poll question

- Vocabulary is THE strongest predictor of children’s achievement
  - Not only in elementary school but in high school

Relation to other skills
- Children of poor, marginalized populations
- Children of families who speak a language other than English
- Mother’s education

Risk factors

Hart and Risley...

Poverty
NAEP 2012

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

Career and College Ready Standards
The numbers are larger than you can imagine

No. of words children will need to know

Poll question

- Children are ‘word sponges’
- They learn words through day to day activities
- They learn through ‘teachable moments’

Common myths
Poll question

- Children will need explicit AND implicit instruction
- Explicit: A ‘cave’ is a hole in the mountain
- As opposed: What is a cave?

Key principles

- Be intentional in our word selection
- Words from core reading program
  - Platypus
  - Around
  - OR:
    - Ride
    - move

Question: are these words important?

Key principle
Knowledge networks

- INSTEAD: insects, antennae, segments, legs
- Parts of the body: brain, heart, lungs

Key principle

- Camouflage
- Habitat
- Survival

Key principle

- Ongoing professional development
Creating a vocabulary rich environment

Creating cozy spots for reading

curiosity
Oral language

- Purposeful talk: Why do you think?
- Challenging words: meteorologist
- 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
- 'asteroid'
- 'comet'
- 'Atmospheric conditions'
- 'space probes'

What is similar about them?

**Difficult words**

- Traditionally, much instruction has been designed around themes

**thematic vs. categories**

- We teach children words and content in categories
Difficult words

- Not necessarily ‘tier II’ words
- Not necessarily ‘academic’ words
- Rather they are ‘content-specific’ words: words that are essential for learning content

**STEP 1**

An example

- 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

To summarize

- Text sets

Materials to use
Features of text sets

- Focus on a topic of interest
- A series of books that use multiple genre
  - Pattern books or predictable books
  - Narrative nonfiction
  - Informational
- 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

Activities

- 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.’

Why is it powerful?
Evidence

Poll question

- 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!

Reducing disparities