Help Students Develop Strong Vocabulary Skills
Instructional Strategies for Teachers and Parents

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What is *vocabulary*?

The term *vocabulary* has a wide range of meanings – depending upon whom you ask to define it. Teachers may define vocabulary as (1) *sight-word vocabulary* (immediate recognition of the printed word), (2) *meaning vocabulary* (what students understand when reading printed words), or (3) *listening vocabulary* (understanding words heard in spoken language). Content teachers in a particular subject area may refer to vocabulary as (4) *academic vocabulary* (words that students need to know and understand in order to comprehend concepts being taught in school). *Vocabulary development*, however, includes **all** of the above and is critical for developing literacy skills.
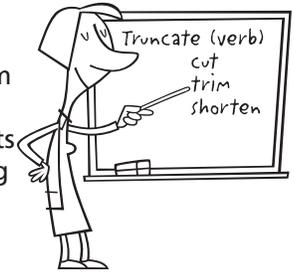
When we stop and think about the vast role vocabulary plays in a child's overall literacy development, it certainly takes the number one spot. It makes sense that if a child is struggling with reading, there is almost certainly a connection to his or her lack of vocabulary. After analyzing several scientific studies in 2000, the National Reading Panel (NRP) concluded that a reader's vocabulary strongly correlates to his or her understanding of the text. The NRP also found that "*when students receive instruction concerning key words **before** reading text, they have greater comprehension than students not receiving such instruction.*" This led the NRP to emphasize vocabulary instruction as an *essential* element in all literacy programs.

Learning (personal and academic), occurs at home, in school, and in the community. In order for students to develop their literacy skills, they need a rich vocabulary acquired through direct instruction, exposure to words, and social interaction. Teachers must give direct instruction through structured lessons in order for students learn new or *"unknown"* vocabulary. Usually, unknown words are academic or subject related. For younger students, new or unknown words may be words they have heard before but are learning to apply them in different contexts. *Parents can be instrumental in helping extend the teacher's vocabulary lessons at home* when reading, writing, or doing homework with their children.

At school, teachers must…

> *(1) Provide a variety of rich language experiences by:*

- Reading aloud.

- Encouraging dialogue between teacher and students during vocabulary instruction.

- Encouraging independent and shared reading and writing activities.

- Creating a print-rich environment using word walls to focus students' attention on new vocabulary.

> *(2) Teach individual words through direct instruction by:*

- Guiding students in correctly pronouncing the word(s) and saying the word together two or three times.

- Providing material containing new or unknown words in particular contexts as well as teaching other meanings or uses of the words.

- Engaging students in activities that allow sufficient time to practice using new words.

- Providing multiple exposures to new words with review and practice activities.
- Talking about the new words while citing other words that are similar in meaning (synonyms).

Erosion will eventually truncate the mountain's ridges.

(3) Teach word-learning strategies by:

- Helping students analyze parts of the words (prefixes, suffixes, and base words).
- Having students create vocabulary word cards containing useful information about the word such as its definition, synonyms, examples and non-examples (what the word is NOT), illustrations, images, part of speech, and sentences.
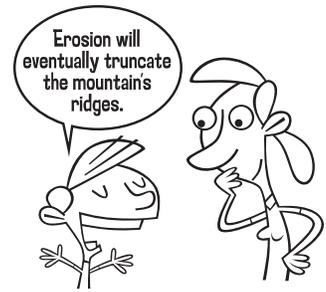
(4) Develop an interest in words by:

- Creating a word-rich environment with a variety of interesting books and magazines (fiction and nonfiction) appropriate for the ages and interests of the students.
- Promoting word play using games and puzzles.
- Encouraging word consciousness through writing exercises and conversation.
- Involving students in discovering word relationships (antonyms and synonyms), learning about the use of words in figurative language (idioms, metaphors, and similes), and exploring word history and origins, etc.

Parents can extend classroom vocabulary lessons at home by reading and writing with their children and incorporating new vocabulary in conversations. Have them explain in their own words what the "new" words mean. Help them associate new words with other words that have similar meanings.

Parents have many opportunities to help foster their child's vocabulary development and instill in them a love of words using games like: Scrabble®, Boggle®, Charades, Scattergories®, etc. Many educational word games are now available for free online or as an app for all types of devices.

Resources

Antonacci, Patricia A. and O'Callaghan, Catherine M. "Section IV, Essential Strategies for Teaching Vocabulary" *Promoting Literacy Development: 50 Research-Based Strategies for K–8 Learners*, May 31, 2012. Retrieved March 2013 from http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/40627_4.pdf

Kinsella, Kate; Stump, Colleen Shea; and Feldman, Kevin. Pearson Education. Prentice Hall eTeach. *Strategies for Vocabulary Development*. Retrieved March 2013 from http://www.phschool.com/eteach/language_arts/2002_03/essay.html

Feldman, Kevin; Kinsella, Kate. (2005). Scholastic Professional Paper. *Narrowing the Language Gap: The Case for Explicit Vocabulary Instruction.* Retrieved March 2013 from http://teacher.scholastic.com/products/authors/pdfs/Narrowing_the_Gap.pdf

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Helpful Products

The list of Super Duper® products below may be helpful when working with children who have special needs. Visit www.superduperinc.com and type in the item name or number in our search engine. Click the links below to see the product descriptions.

Word Joggers Game Item# TPX-21401	*Vocabulary Take Along* Item# TA-230
Read Between the Lines Item# BK-333	*Granny's Candies* Item# GB-154
Figurative Language Item# TPX-4801	*FREE Vocabulary APPS by Super Duper Publications* http://www.superduperinc.com/apps/apple.aspx