Improving Young Children’s Comprehension through Vocabulary and Concept Development

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Comprehensive, Research-Based Literacy-Focused Curriculum for 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds
Children from Low Income Homes…

- Parents spend 7 minutes per hour interacting with a child who is saying a few words.
- They spend 20 minutes per hour with a child who has learned to talk.

Children from High-Income Homes…

- Parents spend 42 minutes per hour with a child who is saying a few words.
- They spend 55 minutes per hour interacting with a child who has learned to talk.

(Hart & Risley, 2001)
600-Word Gap in Vocabulary by 3 years

- Professional: 1100 words
- Working-class: 750 words
- Welfare: 500 words

Estimated Cumulative Vocabulary Words
Oral Language Lays the Foundation for Early Literacy Development

• Young children need teachers who take time to work with them individually, in small groups, and sometimes with the entire class – to help them develop their skills and interest in learning new things about the world.

• Young children need teachers to teach new words and concepts, and explain new vocabulary.
Quality children’s books introduce new vocabulary words while reinforcing the concepts that our children are learning. (Fisher et al., 2004)
For young learners, a Word Wall is an alphabetically arranged collection of words with pictures used as to help children develop fluency in working with letters and words.
Children are familiar with print in their environment: logos and signs on stores, restaurants, and products. (Prior & Gerard, 2004)
Word Wall Cards

Children’s comprehension increases by 33 percent when direct vocabulary instruction is provided on specific words while reading.

(Marzano, 2004)

ants
Where Do I Begin?

“Come Along, Sing the Alphabet Song”
Begin with Children’s Names

Deanna

Joshua

Who Took the Cookies from the Cookie Jar?
Special Friend

Tune: “Mary Had a Little Lamb”
Who will be our special friend, special friend, special friend?
Who will be our special friend?
His name begins with A.

Who Will Be Our Special Friend?
Video
Young children learn words best when vocabulary instruction is integrated into their classroom routines.

(Xue & Meisels, 2004)
Wake Up, Willie

Tune: “Row, Row, Row Your Boat”

Wake up Willie,
It’s time to start the day.
Point to a Word Wall word.
Show us what to say.
Chants

- Skunk
- Mouse
- Stomp, Stomp, Clap
- Blow a Kiss
- Dribble and Shoot
- Raise the Roof

Repetition increases the strength of neural connections. Encouraging children to listen to and repeat words helps them build neural connections that will in later years enhance their capabilities of learning words. (Wolfe & Nevills, 2004)
Vocabulary knowledge is strongly related to reading proficiency and school achievement.

(Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002)
Vocabulary and Concept Words

pieces

pretend
Introducing and Teaching Vocabulary and Concept Words

- Show the card and tell children the word.
- Ask what they think the word means.
- Discuss responses and tell or restate the meaning.
- Give an example, and use the word in a sentence.
- Use the word in conversations over time.
Multiple opportunities for children to interact with target vocabulary in meaningful contexts results in increased vocabulary learning.

(Coyne, Simmons, & Kame‘enui, 2004)
Reach In The Jar

Tune: “Are You Sleeping?”

Reach in the jar, reach in the jar, and grab a word, grab a word.
Use it in a sentence.
Use it in a sentence, So we can learn,
So we can learn.

Building working vocabularies and conceptual development in young learners is facilitated through social interactions. (Winters, 2004)
Find the Word

Find the word that is spelled this way.
Tell me what it means and make my day!

p – i – e – c – e – s.

pieces
Who Let the Words Out?

*Tune: “Who Let the Dogs Out?”*

Who let __________ out?  
Who, who, who, who, who, who?  
Who let __________ out?  
Who, who, who, who, who, who, who?

“Goldilocks Words”

Introduce children to words that are not too difficult, not too easy, but just right!

(Stahl & Stahl, 2004)
Using Vocabulary Words Throughout the Day

I am SO Smart!

Teaching Manners Video

I am SO Smart! Video
Ants live in colonies.

Ants have six strong legs so they can move quickly.

Ants use their antennae for touch and for their sense of smell.

An ant has two stomachs – one with food for itself and a second with food to be shared with other ants.
Yes, I Do!

*Tune: “Five Little Ducks”*

I like cookies.
yes, I do!
In the bag there are a few.
Pull one out to show to me.
What is on your cookie?
Tell, us please!

A
Strategies to Promote Children’s Concept Development:
(Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008)
Provide opportunities for children to be creative.
Encourage children to generate their own ideas.

Let’s Dance Video
Encourage children to create their own products.
Relate concepts to children’s lives.

Yes, Sean, your name does begin with an uppercase letter S.
Engage children in discussions and activities that encourage analysis, reasoning,
and problem solving.
Active participation increases the likelihood that preschoolers will learn vocabulary.
(Coyne, Simmons & Kame’enui, 2004)
My Aunt Came Back

My Aunt came back from Japan
and brought me back a lacy fan.

Old Algiers – pinking shears

Holland too – a wooden shoe

Old Zaire – a rocking chair

Old Chile – an itchy flea

City Zoo – some nuts like you!
Thank You!

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