Supercharge Children’s Language Development with Rich, Robust Vocabulary

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In this session:

- **What** is *oral language*?
- **Why** is *oral language* important?
- **How** can we foster *oral language*?
- **How** do children *learn* vocabulary?
- **How** can we *use books* to *build* vocabulary?
The term oral language refers to the ability to actively speak and listen to communicate, to learn, and to thrive.
Children’s early experience with words accumulates as a dictionary of meanings, synonyms, antonyms, and slang expressions . . . early interactions set up an entire approach to words as symbols for experience.

(Hart and Risley, 1995)
Oral language is the foundation for understanding written text. Word knowledge is the cornerstone of reading comprehension.
…learning to read requires children to understand that what they say can be written down and that what is written down can be pronounced and makes sense—that is, it has meaning. Thus, when young children pronounce written words, those words need to match with meanings available from speech.

(Beck, McKeown, and Kucan, 2008)
Meaningful Differences: The Hart and Risley Study

Children come to school with gaps in their language, and these gaps have a lasting impact on the children’s academic development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Average Number of Words Heard Per Hour</th>
<th>Cumulative Projection by Age Four</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>616</td>
<td>13 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>1251</td>
<td>26 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>2153</td>
<td>45 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cornerstone of Literacy

Early Literacy Pyramid™
Oral Language and the Whole Child

Intentional, purposeful conversations support children’s cognitive, language, social, and emotional development.
High-Quality Talk in Early Childhood Classrooms

“High-quality” talk means:

• Asking thought-provoking questions
• Giving sufficient wait time for answers
• Responding to children specifically and directly
• Talking frequently in a positive tone of voice
Sophisticated Modeling and Word Consciousness

Deliberate modeling of vocabulary builds “word consciousness” and can increase students’ oral vocabularies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Concept</th>
<th>Sophisticated Word Choice</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>happy</td>
<td>glad, cheerful, delighted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nice</td>
<td>kind, pleasant, thoughtful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>weather watcher</td>
<td>meteorologist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clean-up helper</td>
<td>custodian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plant helper</td>
<td>gardener</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pets helper</td>
<td>animal nutrition specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>line leader</td>
<td>class movement coordinator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Empowering with Language

When children are spoken to purposefully or intentionally great things happen.

• They develop larger vocabularies.
• Larger vocabularies lead to better readers.
• Modeling complex words and sentences and asking open-ended questions lead to high IQ scores.
• Responsive and sensitive language encourages social/emotional development.
Children benefit by intentional exposure to positive, lengthy, and descriptive language. We must encourage curiosity and discussion every moment of the day and value the art of explaining “reasons why.”
Be Intentional and Get Talking

“Children who hear complex and varied conversations that involve familiar topics, and who have meaningful opportunities to use and experiment with words and conversations, will enter school with the best preparation to proceed through the later stages of literacy development.”

(Test, Cunningham, and Lee, 2010)
Dive Deep into Science and Social Studies

Use high-interest topics and themes to immerse children in academic language.
Give Them Something to *Talk About*

Stimulate developmentally appropriate discussions using detailed art and illustrations.
Oral Language in Action
Engaging Language Models

Use **chants, rhymes, and songs** to model rich language that is fun and easy to use.

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I’m Glad I’m Me

No one looks the way I do.  
I have noticed that it’s true.  
No one walks the way I walk.  
No one talks the way I talk.  
No one plays the way I play.  
No one says the things I say.  
I am special. I am me.  
There’s no one else I’d rather be!

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I’m

No one looks the way I do.  
I have noticed that it’s true.  
No one walks the way I walk.  
No one talks the way I talk.  
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Easy, Peasy Language Activities

Utilize common everyday objects to give a real purpose to communicating with words.
Fun, Fun, Fun with *Oral Language*

Play *familiar games* to make oral language practice fun.
Question? What’s a Question?

Use mystery and intrigue to get students excited, engaged, and asking questions.
Categories Build Connections

Focus on a single category of words to build concepts, make connections, and expand vocabulary.

- Things that are red
- Things you would have at a birthday party
- Things that a baby uses
- Things that fly
Encourage children to think about and then move from part to whole—using language to describe the hidden picture.
Conversations with The Me Bag

Facilitate home-to-school sharing and conversations to help children listen and learn about each other.
The Me Bag in Action
The *Power of Puppets*

Provide playful puppets and watch them become children’s *friends* and language partners.
Realia Makes the Abstract Concrete

Demonstrate abstract concepts, like positional words, using familiar, hands-on objects.
Children need **a variety of active experiences** before they begin to internalize vocabulary. **But, children can’t just see, hear, and say a word. They must **BE** the word.**
Get Word Conscious

“...we need to provide opportunity and access to sophisticated language so that all children become aware of the power of words, and develop an awareness and curiosity about words.”

(Scott, Skobel, and Wells, 2008)
Vocabulary—The Gift of Words

Children need repeated and meaningful experiences with rich vocabulary.

- Become the word with hands-on activities
- Use the word during authentic oral language activities
- Litter your lessons with literature
- Make connections with past experiences
Introduce, explain, and encourage children to actively “Be the Word” with rich and robust vocabulary.
Wow Words in Action
Families Can Use Wow Words Too…

Send home Wowbands to bring rich language into each home.

4 others
September 10

someone seemed to be channeling her inner Mrs. last Friday. I was talking to her older sister about how proud I was of the results of that week's spelling test, as some of the words had been pretty difficult for her. comes over to her sister, puts her arms around her shoulders and asks her "Was that test a CHALLENGE for you?? I'll bet that was a challenge!", and then gives her a big hug. That is probably the third time, that I can think of off the top of my head, in which has applied one of her wow words appropriately without any discussion or prompting in conversation. Thank you, for all the work you put in with these kiddos! The results are so fun to see!!

challenge

A challenge is something that is hard to do.
How can we *use books* to *build* vocabulary?

Reading aloud to young children, especially when accompanied by discussion before and after reading, is perhaps the *most effective* way to increase children’s vocabularies.
In preschool children listening to stories, greater home reading exposure is positively associated with activation of brain areas supporting mental imagery and narrative comprehension . . .

(Hutton et al., 2015)
Engaging books with vivid content provide opportunities for children to dig into the world around them.
Boost *High-Quality Text Discussions*

Thought-provoking questions advance children’s cognitive social development and increase their academic language.

- *Tell me what happened in this book.*
- *Talk about your favorite parts.*
- *This book reminds me of...*
- *Add something new to this book.*
Children are excited to use new words in the classroom, at home, even the playground. You will know when a child owns a word when it creeps into everyday speaking, reading, and writing.

While we swam we grew back legs.
Rich language is an adventure.

“Word learning is not, an all-or-nothing proposition, like a light switch that turns a light on or off. It is like a dimmer switch that gradually produces an increasingly richer supply of light.”

(Blachowicz and Fisher, 2002)
Bibliography


