

Enhancing Children's Language Development in Preschool Classrooms

Teaching New Vocabulary Words And Concepts

Most teachers introduce new vocabulary words without much thought, i.e., they provide labels and descriptive words on a regular basis during their conversations with children. However, many teachers rely on the same methods for introducing and teaching new words and concepts, and the same words become over-used. Using an expanded variety of strategies and repeating these new words in a variety of settings can teach children a more thorough understanding of the new words and concepts.

"Timing" is very important when teaching vocabulary. New words and concepts need to be introduced in a meaningful context when a child's attention is focused on an ongoing event or novel object. Providing descriptions of ongoing activities and explorations is a simple way for teachers to introduce synonyms (e.g., "Wow! Your building is getting very tall! It so high that it is almost a sky-scraper!") and new modifying words (e.g., "Look at the delicate hummingbird's egg. The egg is tiny, and the shell is so smooth. Be very careful. It is fragile so it can easily crack and break.").

Goal: Increase vocabulary

- Teachers recognize opportunities and methods to introduce new words.
- Teachers select a core set of concept words to target on a weekly basis.

How: Through using a combination of strategies, repeating new words and concepts in several contexts, and being cognizant of teachable moments to introduce words

When: Initially introduce core concepts targeted to whole class during group settings; introduce appropriate vocabulary during ongoing conversations with children and while providing enhanced descriptions of children's activities.

Strategies:

- Define words verbally (e.g., "Putrid is when something smells really, really nasty").
- Provide examples or comparisons (e.g., "Rough is what your daddy's beard feels like in the morning...ouch!").
- Use concrete words to label objects and events (e.g., "Listen. That dog is not barking. It sounds like he is whining; he's howling").
- Use words to express relational and categorical concepts (e.g., "This kiwi is a fruit. So are apples. What else is a fruit?")
- Demonstrate concepts with appropriate words and/or props (e.g., "This is a hoe; you use it to scrape away the weeds in the garden like this." *Demonstrate action.*)

One simple way to introduce new words is to replace the overused complimentary words, "good" and "special," with more specific compliments (e.g., "That painting is so colorful and bright! It reminds me of the sunset." "You are such responsible helpers! I only asked you one time to stop playing and to pick up this area. Thank you.").

If teachers plan weekly a curriculum in advance, teachers can easily expand vocabulary and concept knowledge by adopting a core set of words to incorporate on a daily basis throughout the curriculum unit in a wide range of activities. Words and concepts can be selected from story books, planned activities, general developmental curriculum, or for the purpose of preparing children for a future field trip experience. Core concept words are best introduced during group activities, but learning should not be limited to this setting.

