DEVELOPING RECEPTIVE AND EXPRESSIVE VOCABULARY

WHY ARE VOCABULARY SKILLS IMPORTANT?

Children need strong vocabulary skills so that they can express themselves clearly, understand lessons and instructions, and recognize words they read. Students with language difficulties often have difficulties understanding and using new vocabulary.

TRY THESE STRATEGIES TO STRENGTHEN STUDENTS’ VOCABULARY SKILLS:

• **Teach new words in context.** New words are learned through exposure to them when conversing and reading. For young students, make outings an opportunity to expand his/her vocabulary. Use his/her interests and experience as a source of new vocabulary. Talk about what is happening around the student using both familiar and new vocabulary.

• **Pre-teach new vocabulary and concepts prior to the lesson.** Try to associate new vocabulary with existing words and concepts.

• **Give definitions of unfamiliar vocabulary.** If a new word is used with the student, give a definition or use it in a sentence to provide a context for understanding it.

• **Connect new vocabulary to related words or other words within the same category.** Teach antonyms (e.g., transparent/opaque), synonyms (e.g., transparent/clear/see-through), and homophones (i.e., words that are pronounced the same but spelled differently, e.g., ate/eight) and homographs (i.e., words that are spelled the same but have different meanings, e.g., “The cat came back.” and, “My back hurts.”).

• **Make a semantic map.** Choose a word or category and write the word or category in middle of the board or on a sheet of paper. Ask the students to brainstorm and list all related words. Each related word is discussed and its relation to the target word. For example, the word may be ‘coyotes’ and students may generate the following words: ‘wolf’, ‘howls’, ‘brown’, ‘fur’, ‘skinny’, ‘fast’, ‘grey’, ‘moon’, ‘runs’ and ‘desert’.

• **Explaining figurative language.** Whenever you use a phrase in which the words do not convey literal meaning, give a clear statement of the intended message. For example, if you say “Cut that out.” follow up by saying, “Stop scribbling on your paper”.

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COMMUNICATING FOR LEARNING
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