Using Robust Vocabulary Instruction in the Classroom

Why Vocabulary?

What the research tells us

• Oral language skills are an important predictor of attainment.

• Oral vocabulary is important in enabling children to learn to read (Pullen, Tuckwiller, Konold, Maynard & Coyne, 2010).

• It is well documented that the vocabulary gap is widening.

• Research has shown that attending school has little effect on vocabulary growth (Biemiller and Boote, 2006).

• Developing oral language builds secure foundation for literacy and can have positive impact on reading comprehension (Fricke et al., 2013).
Why focus on vocabulary?

- It’s not so easy to learn word meanings from written context
- Children require multiple encounters of a word to ‘learn it’
- Stages of word knowledge:
  
  **Stage 1: No Knowledge**  
  Child has never seen the word before

  **Stage 2: Heard it, but don’t know it**  
  Child has a general ‘sense’ of the word

  **Stage 3: Recognises it within a narrow context, and has some knowledge of it. Child knows ‘it has something to do with...’**

  **Stage 4: Knows it well**  
  Child has a rich, decontextualised knowledge of the word
The idea behind ‘Tier 2 words’

- They are important and useful
- Likely to appear frequently in a variety of contexts/texts
- There is potential to ‘instruct’ them

Think! Do the children already have a way of expressing the concept represented by the word?
Using Robust Vocabulary Instruction in Practice

- Select a set of tier 2 words
- Develop ‘student friendly explanations’
- Create some brief activities that will initiate their engagement with the words and their meaning
Selecting ‘Tier 2 words’

- Remember: important & useful, moveable, provide extra specificity, potential to instruct.
- Children can already express the concept represented by the word
- Activity
Practical Activity

• Spend 5 minutes skim reading a part of the book you have brought along....
• Identify as many tier 2 words as you can
• Think about your rationale
When to start?

• With young children:
  – Choose words that aren’t too difficult to explain
  – Complete activities after a story is read

• With older children:
  – Instruct words before a text is read (this will alleviate any comprehension difficulties)
  – Or, as the word is encountered
How many words?

- Only words that might have the potential to disrupt comprehension of major ideas
- Infants: sets of 3 over a period of a week
- P3-P5/6: sets of 5 over a period of a week
- P7: sets of 7 words over a period of a week
### Things to avoid!

- **Asking “who can tell me what X means?”**
  - Encourages guessing
  - Wastes time
  - Students may remember incorrect word associations

- **Definitions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example: Exotic</th>
<th>Example: Conspicuous</th>
<th>Example: Devious</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dictionary definition: <strong>“foreign; strange; not native”</strong></td>
<td>Dictionary definition: <strong>“easily seen”</strong></td>
<td>Dictionary definition: <strong>“straying from the right course; not straightforward”</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult to draw a relationship between the 3 words</td>
<td>Difficult to distinguish from ‘visible’</td>
<td>Likely to be interpreted in a concrete way</td>
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- **Example: Typical**
  - Dictionary definition: **“being a type”**
It’s better to:

• Explain a word’s meaning than provide a definition

• Develop student friendly explanations
  – Capture the essence of the word and how it is typically used
  – Explain the meaning in everyday language
  – Contain the words someone, something and/or describes
Developing Student Friendly Definitions

• Dull: if you describe someone or something as dull, you mean they are not interesting or exciting

• Activity
  – Choose a word
  – Talk me through what to do
Implementing in the class

• Share the definitions

• Create activities to provide opportunities for the children to engage with the words

— Michelle will support with this every week

Does delicate mean something small and easily broken or something big and heavy?

If a woman bought a fine lacy dress, you could say “it is delicate”. When else might you talk about something being delicate?

A beautiful butterfly would be........

Which word does breakable make you think of? Why?

The vase was so delicate that.....

Charades

Up-levelling sentences
Activity

• Choose a word
  – What activities could we do?
Measuring

• Depends what you want to improve
  – Speak to me

• It might be...
  – Number of tier 2 words during 15 minute daily write
  – Tallying of words used in their spoken vocabulary
    • Chart on the wall each week (masters available)
The Plan!

• Michelle & Mhairi will be supporting you, 3 sessions per week
• Michelle will support you in creating and making activities – she will make things for you!
• Shared resource base so that you can amend activities saving teacher prep time – Allstaff
• Mhairi & Michelle supporting data collection and analysis
• Most of all, enjoy it and have fun!