

Explicit vocabulary teaching



Driver Youth Trust

What's the idea?

It is important to support students' language development because research has shown that early language ability is predictive of children's social and academic outcomes in later life (see the SCALES project). Speech and language needs have also been linked to higher levels of disruptive behaviour and government statistics show that over 74 per cent of young people in a youth offenders institute have below-average communication skills, and over 60 per cent have speech, language and communication needs.

What does it mean?

Having more vocabulary at our disposal increases the potential for us to articulate ourselves with greater clarity and our ability to communicate with different

audiences. More importantly, the more words we are aware of, the more we can understand and make sense of what is being said within the classroom, and beyond.

Vocabulary experts agree that adequate reading comprehension depends on a person already knowing between 90 and 95 per cent of the words in a text (Hirsch, 2003). Initially, conversation is a great tool for developing vocabulary in infants. However, once children reach school age, developing vocabulary benefits from being taught in a more explicit and structured way, although conversation remains a useful tool. This does not just mean focusing on academic language. There is also a need to focus on language skills that are not developed in some households.

What are the action points for teachers?

Reading: This is a great opportunity to explore the different words children might use for different parts of the story

Exploring: Set learners a synonym challenge where they have to list some words from the text and then suggest words which have a similar meaning.

Articulating: Create a set of words which learners have to describe without actually saying the specific word.

Contextualising: Ask for words to be placed into a sentence so that you can gain an understanding of whether learners can use vocabulary in the right context.

Labelling: You can present a picture to learners and ask them to label it.

THE DRIVER YOUTH TRUST IS A CHARITY COMMITTED TO IMPROVING THE OUTCOMES OF YOUNG PEOPLE WHO STRUGGLE WITH LITERACY.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

If you are concerned about language development then you can find some useful resources on:

- » <https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/resources/resources/resources-for-practitioners/universally-speaking/>
- » Oxford University Press (2018) Why closing the word gap matters: Oxford Language Report. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- » Law J, Charlton J and Asmussen K (2017) Language as a Child Wellbeing Indicator – Early Intervention Foundation. London: Early Intervention Foundation.