

Language Support Model

Document 4



PRINCIPLES OF VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT: for Teachers

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HELPING CHILDREN TO DEVELOP VOCABULARY

By the age of seven, children have about 4000 words they can use, and they understand many, many more. There is no way we could teach all of these! What we are aiming to do is to **give children strategies** they can use when learning new words.

There are four important factors in doing this. We need to help the child to:

1. choose **useful** words to learn.
2. build up the **meaning** of the word by linking with other words (semantic links).
3. reinforce the **sound pattern** of the word (phonological structure).
4. hear and say the word a lot, and practice ways of **bringing the word to mind** (word finding).

Thereafter, it is important to encourage the child to use the skills learnt, in **real-life word-learning** situations, in the classroom.

All this involves teaching the child to **think** about their own word-learning, and to take control of how they learn words..

1 CHOOSING USEFUL WORDS

To teach strategies to help learn words we need to choose some useful words to focus on. Some **school topic words** could be good choices: they are better if they are frequent words, and ones that will be reinforced in class. These can be hard to select, and discussion with the child might help.

Words that label **concepts** and **relationships** and the vocabulary used in **maths** and **reading** can be very hard for children with language problems to learn. They are important for a lot of school work however, and might be very good targets to focus on.

The manual covers the following:

Example topic vocabulary (such as *nouns* and *verbs*)
Synonyms and antonyms (such as *hot, cold; same, different*)
Concept words (such as *either, or, if, unless*).
Maths vocabulary (such as *even/odd, more/less, total*)
Reading vocabulary (such as *sentence, paragraph, start/end, blend*)
Prepositions (such as *first, beside, next to*)
Questions (such as *what, when, who*).

2 BUILDING UP MEANING BY LINKING WITH OTHER WORDS (SEMANTIC LINKS).

Semantic links are concerned with word meanings and also link with our knowledge of the world. To learn a new word a child may be helped by thinking about its **semantic links, or** meaning links with other words. Several aspects (what something *looks like*, where we *find it*, what we *use it for* and so on) can be useful in 'anchoring' the word in memory. For example, for the word 'planet', we can use:

- 1) description: *round, big*.
- 2) location/ where it is found: *in space*.
- 3) function/ use: not applicable for 'planet'!
- 4) category/ group name: *things in space*
- 5) related words: *star, moon*

The features identified for *planet* can be discussed as appropriate. The child may need explicit information from the adult about the word's features, as opposed to being asked questions. This is especially necessary for words new to the child. Most of these semantic links will work with topic words, which can often be linked to more frequent, simpler words that the child already knows. For words that describe concepts and relationships we can only use description, location or categorisation a little, and rely mainly on discussing related words and their meanings.

Examples of ways to discuss semantic features and make links with world knowledge for topic words could include:

1) **Giving the Child a Description**

Explaining as appropriate:

- a) what the thing referred to by the new word looks like,
- b) the sound it may make,

5) Giving the Child In

should enable the adult/listener to come to a quicker understanding of what the child is trying to say. However, the most relevant semantic features of a word will vary with context. Discussion with the ch

4 WAYS OF BRINGING THE WORD TO MIND (WORD-FINDING).

Semantic and phonological information may not be available in a complete form when the child needs to say a word, and the word may not be 'found' at the right moment - called **word-finding difficulties**. This is when the child appears to know the word they want to use but they are unable to say when they need it. Sometimes they have a 'tip of the tongue' experience: at other times they just cannot think of the word at all. Often, the child

