

Myth 9: “Our vocabulary grows just by being at school.”

The Truth

Whilst students encounter a large number of words on a day to day basis in each subject, it would be naïve of us, as educators, to assume that all our students recognise and understand these words. To ensure that we give all our students the best life chances, using an explicit vocabulary instruction model in our classrooms provides the best foundation and builds knowledge.

Vocabulary should never be seen as an isolated skill, as it is based on all areas of communication – reading, writing, speaking and listening – and is a vital building block for success both in school and in wider society.

Having a good vocabulary base is important due to the following reasons:

- It improves reading comprehension: research shows that “to ensure reading comprehension, you need to know 95% of words in a text.” (Alex Quigley) Improving vocabulary will improve students understanding of novels, textbooks and non-fiction texts such newspaper articles and letters.
- It is important to language development: children who develop a rich vocabulary tend to be deeper thinkers, express themselves better and read more. Improving language and literacy skills early in life will help them to be more successful academically and communicatively.
- It is important in communicating ideas: successful communication is dependent on a strong vocabulary base. Hirsch calls existing knowledge “mental Velcro” – the more you know, the more ‘hooks’ you have to hook onto new words.
- It helps you express yourself in writing: having a good vocabulary to draw upon can help you write more effectively. When writing, students need to use a more formal tone – rather than conversational language – so therefore need a rich vocabulary to draw upon words that we don’t use in everyday talk.

What you will see in practice:

1. Use “I say, you say” to ensure that students hear and speak the new word.
2. Ask students to write the word and definition into their book.
3. Model the word in a sentence and ask students to note this model in their book.
4. Ensure that there is an opportunity within the lesson for students to use this word in their own work and highlight in their book so that we can check that it has been used correctly at a glance.

This could be in one of the following ways:

- using the word within their own sentence
- through question deconstruction
- annotating diagrams and model

Did you know?

Success in future life: researcher Johnson O’Connor found that “a person’s vocabulary level is the best single predictor of occupational success.”

Further info

www.theconfidentteacher.com/2018/02/cracking-the-academic-code/