



Indicator Explanation



CORE FUNCTION	EFFECTIVE PRACTICE	INDICATOR
Instruction	Provide rigorous evidence-based instruction	3B.13 Teachers in all subjects emphasize vocabulary development, both general vocabulary and terminology specific to the subject as demonstrated in their curriculum and pacing guides and classroom walkthroughs.

Explanation: Teachers in all subjects can reinforce and build literacy skills and should include it in their lesson plans. One way to reinforce literacy is the building of vocabulary. Teachers should be reinforcing the vocabulary of learning as well as build the vocabulary specific to learning the subject they teach. Never assume students know the language associated with learning such as diagnose, predict, contemplate, analyze.

Questions: Could someone walk into any classroom in the building and see a list of vocabulary words that are specific to the subject/lesson being taught? Is there an obvious section in the lesson plan that shows where the teacher is teaching specific vocabulary? As an observer sits in the classroom, is the language being used educational language and do students understand and use that vocabulary? Is content specific vocabulary reinforced multiple times until all students can use it correctly and understand its meaning?

Vocabulary is the 4th rung of the literacy ladder and is described as understanding definitions within content so to correctly use words when speaking, reading, and writing. Why is teaching vocabulary so important? Cavazos (2021) states, “Language is the foundation of all learning and identifying ways to bolster language through curriculum and instruction, such as oral language and written expression, vocabulary, and foundation skills, can have a disproportionately positive effect on poverty and achievement” (Redding et al., 2021, p. 118). Researchers have determined that it takes at least 12 times for a new vocabulary word to be learned and reinforced before it sticks.

Direct instruction or explicit instruction is the specific teaching of a concept or lesson in a structured and sequenced manner. It does not happen “on the fly” but rather is the result of prior planning and development of a lesson plan. Direct instruction involves activating prior knowledge by doing a quick review of a previous lesson, using a “hook” or some method of piquing the interest of students into what is coming in the new lesson, and then typically involves teacher directed whole class instruction. Teachers will want to cover specific subject/content vocabulary prior to the lesson to ensure all students understand any new or unfamiliar vocabulary which will be presented in the lesson. This vocabulary can then be reinforced during the lesson. Repeated use (at least 12 times) of the new words and their meanings is important for the new vocabulary to become cemented in students’ knowledge.

Let’s consider math. Frye et al. (2013) say this about teaching and using math vocabulary:

If children hear math vocabulary in context and then practice using it, they may be better able to understand the underlying math concepts. The panel believes there is evidence of a positive relationship between math-related talk and children’s math knowledge. As one part of math-related talk, teachers can use open-ended questions to prompt children to think about how to describe their ideas mathematically and to increase the amount of math related dialog in the



classroom. If a child can describe his or her method for solving a problem to someone else and then hear other children describe their approach to a problem, all the children may learn to apply their math knowledge in new ways. Teachers can reinforce this idea by encouraging children to look for opportunities to use their developing math skills throughout the school day. (p. 42)

When teachers explicitly teach vocabulary, students can apply the correct vocabulary to a new concept. Teachers may begin with the vocabulary the student already knows, and then apply the new vocabulary to the concept. It is important to use the new vocabulary to embed it in their “cognitive wells.” It is also important for the student to hear the word pronounced correctly and not just see the word because knowing how it is pronounced gives the student a way to remember the word. If they can’t pronounce it, they are less likely to remember it.

The National Reading Panel (Shanahan, 2005) created a synthesis of the research on vocabulary and created the following list describing how to teach vocabulary:

- Provide direct instruction of vocabulary for a specific lesson
- Repetition and multiple exposures to vocabulary are important
- Vocabulary learning is effective when it entails active engagement that goes beyond just hearing the definition

The explicit teaching of vocabulary should be a part of the lesson plan, intentionally taught during direct instruction, and then reinforced in multiple ways.

References

- Frye, D., Baroody, A. J., Burchinal, M., Carver, S. M., Jordan, N. C., & McDowell, J. (2013). *Teaching math to young children: A practice guide* (NCEE 2014-4005). National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE), Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. <http://whatworks.ed.gov>
- Shanahan, T. (2005). *The National Reading Panel Report: Practical Advice for teachers*. THE NATIONAL READING PANEL REPORT: Practical Advice for Teachers (ed.gov)
- Redding, S., Cavazos, L., Layland, A., Twyman, J., & Vuong, B. (2021). *Opportunity and performance: Equity for children from poverty*. Information Age.