

# Using Preschool Literature for Purposeful Teaching of Vocabulary

Presented by:

Gina Gibson, M.H.S., CCC-SLP

&

Lisa Zartman, M.S., CCC-SLP

Columbia Public Schools ECSE Program

# Why Teach Vocabulary?

The driving forces behind our focus on mindful vocabulary instruction within the Columbia Public Schools ECSE program.

# Why Teach Vocabulary?

1. Neuman, Susan B. & Wright, Tanya S.; *The Magic of Words: Teaching Vocabulary in the Early Childhood Classroom*

“Studies have documented that the size of a person's vocabulary is strongly related to how well that person understands what he or she reads.”

2. Christ, Tanya & Wang, X Christine; *Supporting Preschoolers' Vocabulary Learning Using a Decision-Making Model to Select Appropriate Words and Methods*

“Teachers can naturally facilitate children's vocabulary learning using a variety of strategies, including making conversation and posing thoughtful questions. But there is also an important role for direct instruction.”

# Why Teach Vocabulary? (cont.)

3. Kelley, Beth Spencer; Evidence-Based Practices for Explicit Vocabulary Instruction

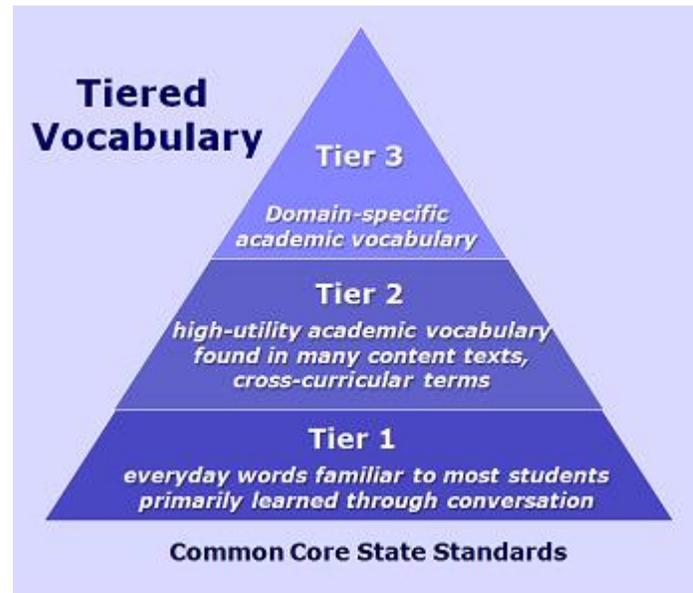
There are three important research based facts: “Effective vocabulary instruction is explicit. Effective instruction requires careful selection of vocabulary targets. Effective vocabulary instruction is intentionally designed.”

4. Lane, Holly & Allen, Stephanie; The Vocabulary-Rich Classroom: Modeling Sophisticated Word Use to Promote Word Consciousness and Vocabulary Growth

“Vocabulary is a critical factor in the development of reading skills. Vocabulary knowledge has long been identified as one of the best predictors of reading comprehension (Davis, 1972; Thorndike, 1917), reading performance in general, and school achievement (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002, 2008). Receptive vocabulary is also a predictor of decoding skills (Ouellette, 2006). The more words the reader knows, the easier it will be to read and understand what is read (Blachowicz, Fisher, Ogle, & Watts-Taffe, 2006; Kamil, 2004; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2000).”

# Tiered Vocabulary

- Tiered Vocabulary is an organizational framework for categorizing words and suggests implications for instruction. (The three-tier framework was developed by Isabel Beck and Margaret McKeown.)



# Tier One Vocabulary

- Tier one consists of the most basic words. These words rarely require direct instruction and typically do not have multiple meanings. Sight words, nouns, verbs, adjectives, and early reading words occur at this level. Examples of tier one words are: book, girl, sad, run, dog, and orange.

# Tier Two Vocabulary

- High frequency words that occur across a variety of contexts
- Relatively frequent in spoken and written language of adults
- Likely to require instruction
- Often:
  - Sophisticated synonyms for known contexts
- Generally Tier two words are the most important words for direct instruction because they are good indicators of a student's progress through school. -
  - FOR ECSE students - even those these may seem to be above some of our students' current vocabulary level it's still important to provide exposure to Tier 2 vocabulary.

# Tier Three Vocabulary

- Tier three consists of low-frequency words that occur in specific domains.
- We usually learn these words when a specific need arises, such as learning evaporation during a preschool science lesson.
- Tier 3 words are not good candidates for explicit instruction because they are useful in limited contexts.

Effective instruction requires careful selection of vocabulary targets.

TIER 3

peninsula isotope  
swoon evaporation

TIER 2

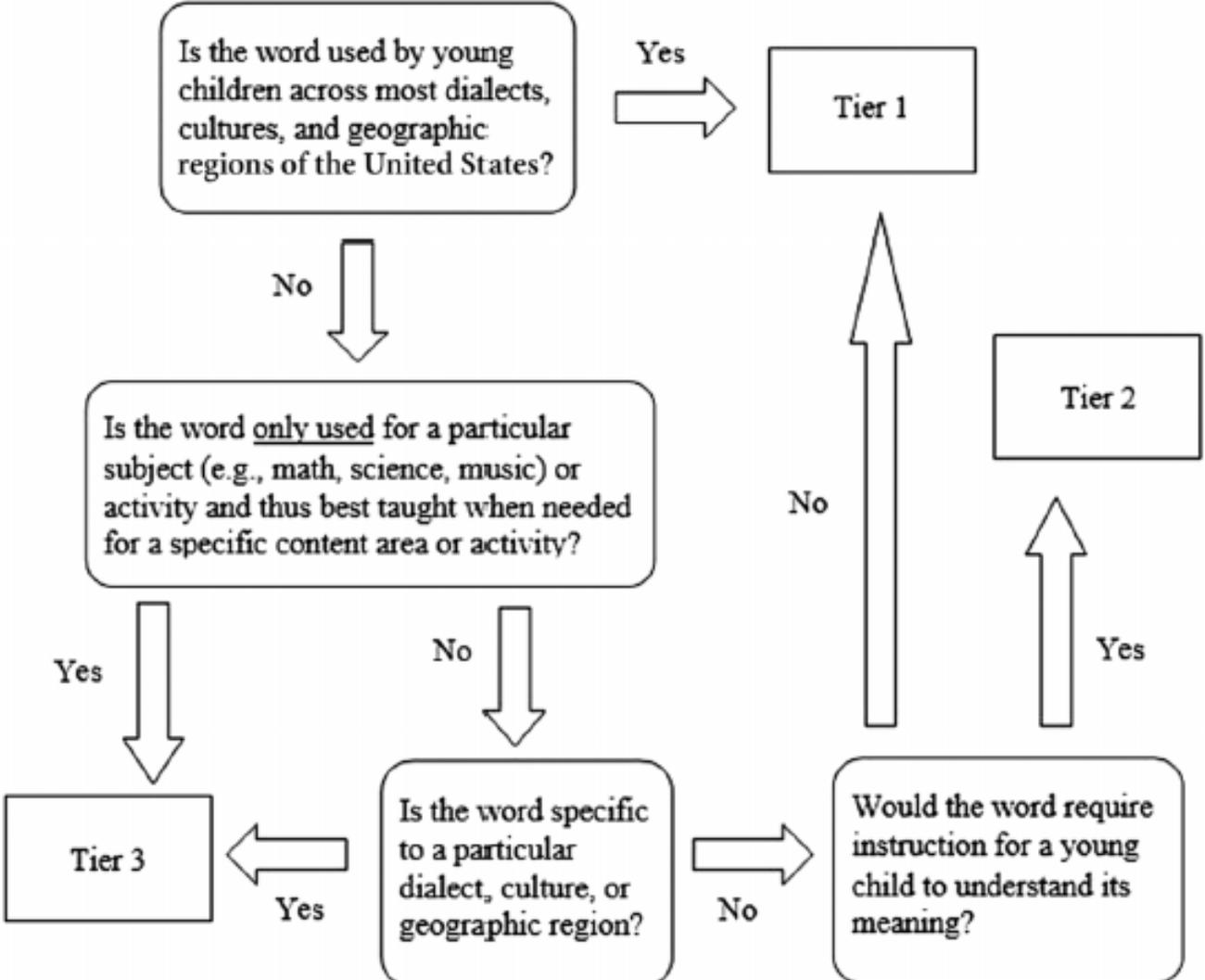
speedy protect  
enormous wise selfish  
thrilled imagine  
soar ridiculous

TIER 1

table barn run  
clock baby happy

- Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002) provide a model of robust vocabulary instruction that categorizes words into tiers.
- Tier 2 words are the best candidates for explicit vocabulary instruction within a regular education classroom.
- SLPs will need to select the best words to teach within the broad category of Tier 2 words.

**Figure 1.** Target word tier flowchart. Definitions (i.e., Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3) have been adapted from *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction* (Chapter 1), by I. L. Beck, M. G. McKeown, and L. Kucan, 2002, New York, NY: Guilford Press. Copyright © 2002 by Guilford Press. Adapted with permission.



# Selecting Vocabulary Targets for the preschool classroom

## Our Method:

- First, we identify and write down all words within the book that most students are NOT likely to know. From this list of words, select a few words to target.
- For our example lessons we chose 5 nouns, 2 verbs, and 2 concept words. In addition, we chose a “magic word” for each book (see below for information regarding “magic word”).
- We have also provided you with an lesson plan example with 20 target words.
- Considerations for choosing vocabulary:
  - Consider words that are used frequently throughout the book
  - Consider words that will likely be used within the students’ daily life at home and at school.
  - Consider words that name a category rather than an object/item within a category (for example, in a farm book you may select “animals” as a target word in addition to, or instead of, “cow”.)
  - Consider words that name parts of objects/items. (for example, “tail” may be chosen as a target word in addition to “cow”)

# Selecting Vocabulary Targets – cont.

- For students who are at risk – Teachers would typically choose Tier 2 vocabulary words as targeted vocabulary. Typically developing and ‘at risk’ students will likely acquire Tier 1 words without significant direct instruction.
- For students with severe developmental delays teachers will want to directly target a variety of Tier 1 words as these students may need direct teaching to learn Tier 1 vocabulary.
  - These classes should also think about ways to include Tier 2 words with their instruction. This may include choosing to highlight the words within book reading, stopping to define words during reading, giving synonyms or using a strategy such as the “magic word”.

# Magic Word

One way to highlight a vocabulary target is by having the students “listen for” a specific word during book reading.

Before you begin reading a book tell the students that the book has a “magic word” and when they hear the magic word they should let you know. (i.e., shout out “magic word”, raise their hand, ring a bell – may vary by class.).

Once the students hear the “magic word”, have the class repeat and define the word. Use other meaningful teaching methods to help the children make sense of the word

- Pantomime the word – or use any other means to make the word meaningful – i.e., pretend to buckle a seat belt if the magic word is ‘buckle’.
- Create opportunities throughout the day for the children to practice using the word. For example, if the “magic word” from the Rainbow Fish is ‘silent’, talk about being ‘silent’ in the hallways, practice giving ‘silent High Fives’ during greeting time, etc.

## Tips:

- Write down the magic word and the definition on a post it and put it in the front of the book
- the definition should include only words that your students already understand

# Teaching Vocabulary Targets

## 1. **Connect the vocabulary word to the context of the story.**

“Pablo said that his quills protect him. They keep him safe. “

## 2. **Give opportunities to repeat and produce the word.**

“Protect. Say protect... Protect means to keep someone safe.”

“What word means to keep someone safe? ... Protect!”

## 3. **Make connections between the word and children’s lives.**

“You might wear a helmet to protect you when you ride your bike! Your helmet keeps you safe.

When you are in the car, you put your seatbelt on to protect you. “

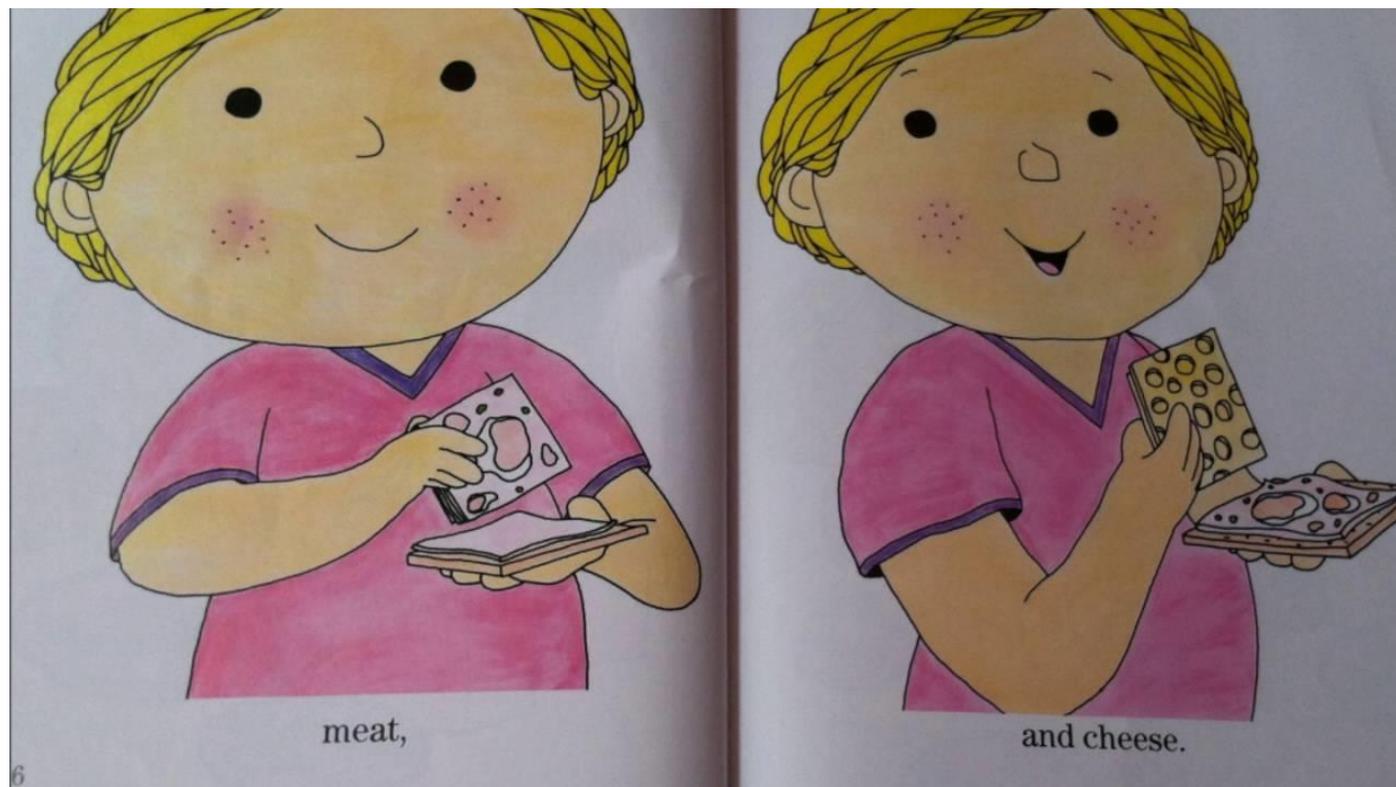
## 4. **Provide an intervention activity.**

“Pretend you are putting on your seatbelt. ... Click! Great job!”

## 5. **Ask children to provide the definition of the word.**

“Tell me, what does protect mean? ... To keep someone safe.”

# Book Selection





So she chopped and grated and grated and sliced. Next she opened her can of tomato sauce and spread it all over the pizza dough. On top of that, she put some grated mozzarella, some sliced pepperoni, some chopped olives, some mushrooms, some onions and garlic, eight small anchovies, and . . . some other stuff. But no pickled eggplant.

The Little Red Hen looked at her pizza. It looked just right. She put it in the oven and sat down to sip a cup of chickweed tea.

# Using Targeted Vocabulary Across the Curriculum- Examples from The Snowy Day

**Sensory Motor Group:** (activities are designed to be repeated each day for the 2 week unit)

- Climb over a **mountain** (of blankets), jump over a **stick**, then toss a **snowball** into the **empty** bucket.
- Yoga: **Mountain** pose—feet planted 5 breaths in 5 breaths out.
- Sensory Motor Group provides a good opportunity to work on action words.

*Target vocabulary is highlighted in yellow. Supplementary vocabulary is highlighted in blue.*

# Using Targeted Vocabulary Across the Curriculum- Examples from The Snowy Day

## Circle Time Activity Ideas:

- Retell story using props
- Have children listen for and then define the magic word
- Take time to explain new words as they come up in story reading.
- Message of the Day activity—Each day write a different message on a whiteboard.
  - Good morning. It's cold outside (picture of snow)
  - Be Safe: Use walking feet (picture of a child using walking feet and a picture of a child running and falling—stick figures)
  - Do you have a pocket today?- kids can put their picture on yes / no or simply make tally marks on the board. Count how many students have pockets and how many don't have pockets.

*Target vocabulary is highlighted in yellow. Supplementary vocabulary is highlighted in blue.*

# Using Targeted Vocabulary Across the Curriculum- Examples from The Snowy Day

## Planning and Recall Ideas:

Go on a planning **adventure**. Form a line and follow a leader **around / under / through** classroom obstacles. Find something to **climb** over (i.e., wooden steps, small table, step stool, pile) then as you get to each area children can break off and make their plans.

Have items in a bag that rhyme with **snow** and some that don't. Children pick an item from a bag and if it rhymes with snow they make a plan. If not, pick again. (i.e. go (green light), toe, bow, mow, sew, no, crow, blow, throw, slow, dough,).

Target vocabulary is highlighted in yellow. Supplementary vocabulary is highlighted in blue. Adventure (highlighted in pink) is the magic word for this lesson

# Using Targeted Vocabulary Across the Curriculum- Examples from The Snowy Day

## Work Time Ideas:

Have laundry line for children to hang up **wet** **clothing** items.

**Snow** in messy table—or if no snow, try **ice cubes** and **shaving cream**.

**Window** markers to draw on the windows—squirt bottles to clean them off

Outside—find all the items on the playground you can **climb** on before free play

Go on a **stick** hunt

*Target vocabulary is highlighted in yellow. Supplementary vocabulary is highlighted in blue.*

# Using Targeted Vocabulary Across the Curriculum- Examples from The Snowy Day

## Small Group Ideas:

**Wet** /Dry Sort: Have pairs of items (i.e., wet sponge / dry sponge, wet sock / dry sock). Have students sort items into containers labeled with “wet” or “dry” pictures

Shaving Cream: Provide people figurines to walk through the shaving cream “**snow**” creating **footprints** and make snow angels. Provide **sticks** to draw / write in the snow. Encourage students to make a “**mountain**” from the shaving cream

Use empty playdough containers (or similar containers that you can't see through). Have them filled with feathers, cotton balls, counting bears, **sticks** and some empty containers. Shake and have students predict which containers are **empty** (some will be loud / soft). Have kids open containers and use tongs to empty the container)

*Target vocabulary is highlighted in yellow. Supplementary vocabulary is highlighted in blue.*

# Using Targeted Vocabulary Across the Curriculum- Examples from The Snowy Day

## Large Group Ideas:

Have containers with 1 large **ice** cube in each. Add different materials to each container (i.e., salt, warm water, nothing, sugar). Make predictions as to which ice cube will **melt** first. Watch throughout the day. Make observations and write them down on an experience chart.

Expanding Expressions Tool(A multisensory approach for oral language and vocabulary development) Choose one word per unit (this unit maybe **window**) and have children talk about the word's category, parts, composition, definition etc.

**Pocket** Surprise Activity. Sing a song to the tune "The More We Get Together"

Something's in my pocket, my pocket, my pocket. Something's in my pocket, oh what could it be? Come and join me. Then everyone will see. What's in my pocket, oh what could it be?

(Teacher wears an apron with large pockets, where she hides a surprise – could hide other vocabulary targets (i.e., **stick**, **snowball**.)

*Target vocabulary is highlighted in yellow. Supplementary vocabulary is highlighted in blue.*

# How to Adapt Vocabulary Instruction to Different Classrooms

- Choose fewer target words for students who require more repetition of instruction in order to learn.
- Choose words that are more familiar or more functional for students.
- Provide tactile input for kids with vision impairments (e.g., give them items to feel or touch as you read the book)
- Change words within a book. (e.g., don't need to read the text word for word – can substitute more common words as appropriate or provide synonyms)
- Provide more opportunities for students to listen to a book when working with students who have severe disabilities.

# Tips for effectively using books for vocabulary teaching.

- Repeated interactive read-aloud technique is a research-based approach to comprehension and vocabulary development in preschool and kindergarten. McGee, Lea M., & Schickedanz, Judith A. (2007)
- Within our program teachers read the target book multiple times throughout the two week period. In addition, supplemental books that share the same theme or vocabulary are included. These may contain a rhyming book and a non-fiction book.
- Teachers should attempt to choose books that represent different cultures/ethnicities.
- In addition to the target books, place books with similar vocabulary in the book area, incorporate rhyming and non-fiction books when possible.
- Have children listen for rhyming words while story is being read.

# Beyond Labeling

Labeling is great, but we want our students to be able to think about words and language in different ways. Look for opportunities to have students

- define words
- learn about synonyms. For example, point out that ,“mad and angry mean the same thing”
- use words within daily routines and transitions (i.e., if you are learning the word “round”, have students eat round snacks, look for round items as you are walking in the hall, etc.)

# Ways in which CPS ECSE staff have begun to adopt this initiative

- . *Creation of adapted classroom books for kids with vision impairments.*
- Use of snack time placemats that have vocabulary targets printed on them. (For example, if learning about community helpers, the teacher will make placemats with a fireman and a police officer and talk about putting the crackers next to the fireman.)
- Use of storytelling with real items as props so students have practice using targeted vocabulary and gain experience with the actual materials (i.e., bring in a real hose during a garden unit)
- Learning environment adaptations to provide students with opportunities to use newly learned vocabulary (i.e., turn a classroom area into a camping site when reading Bailey Goes Camping)
- Use of multisensory teaching opportunities (i.e., add oatmeal to the sensory table while reading The Three Bears or put real snow in the sensory table while learning about The Snowy Day.)
- Purposeful planning and implantation of activites to teach Tier 2 vocabulary (i.e., offered a 'disgusting' snack to give students the opportunity to hear and use the word disgusting)

# Take aways...

- ***Plan ahead!*** Pick out the words you want to teach ahead of time. Write some notes on the definitions you want to teach and the ways you are going to teach the words.
- ***Get active!*** Give students lots of chances to respond and participate. Activities that are quick and fast-paced keep kids interested. Have students answer questions as a group so that everyone gets a turn. Students who need extra practice can be called on before or after choral responding.
- ***Consider your students.*** *Vocabulary targets for each class may look different. Try to choose words that most of your students don't know, but also select some words that your struggling learners can find success with.*
- ***Share vocabulary targets with families and staff.*** *Post the words in the classroom or share so everyone knows the targets.*

# References

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