

Greetings¹, I am Sabina Neugebauer and I am a faculty member in early childhood education at Temple. Today I want to talk about how parents with children in grades K-6 can support their children's language and vocabulary development at home.

First I want to mention strategies teachers' use to teach vocabulary, as many of them can be easily used by parents and then **I want to talk about what parents, in particular, can do to augment and further support word learning** by encouraging children's enthusiasm and attention to words.

Research-based practices that teachers use in school to support word learning include explicit instruction on specific and carefully chosen vocabulary words. These practices include:

- 1) **Providing a friendly definition** of a word and an example sentence, such as, we are going to learn about the word "glimmer", glimmer means to sparkle and shine!" "Wow look how Liza's necklace glimmers and shines"
- 2) **Exposing students to the word across various contexts**, perhaps including examples and non-examples of how that word might be used with picture cards or giving students the opportunity to evaluate the use of the word in different situations, for example, does water glimmer and shine, why or why not? or by elaborating on the words different shades of meaning "What might in mean to have a glimmer of hope." Helping students identify synonyms and antonyms related to the word can also help them develop a richer understanding of the words distinctive meaning. These discussions helps students develop a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the word's meaning.
- 3) **Providing students with opportunities to say, and use** the word in a variety of contexts for example encouraging students to make personal connections to the words or having students describe a picture or something in a book using the word. What is something you have seen glimmer or shine? Can you think of a time when you saw something glimmering? Tell me about it."
- 4) **Selecting words to focus on should be about instructional bang for your buck.** These words are usually carefully chosen, because they appear in the curriculum text as content words (phases of the moon wax and wane) and words that help students talk about those content words (cycle, analyze, change, shift). Teachers identify words that will help them teach the content but also that will facilitate these rich conversations about words that create a snowball effect where students through discussions of antonyms and synonyms are building their word networks exponentially. Book reading is a great place to select these words.

¹ **Note:** My two segments are intended to a) capture how teachers support oral language and vocabulary development that parents can also use and b) elaborate on practices parents can uniquely engage in at home that extend oral language and are easy and engaging.

While parents can engage in similar activities at home, parents can play a unique role in encouraging students' interest in and awareness of words more broadly in ways that are easy, can occur during everyday activities, and can be fun.

1. Create a word Rich Environment

You want your child to be immersed in a rich language environment. You can do this at meal times, during play time, when talking about their work for school. Encourage your child to speak more during everyday conversations. Try to ask questions that aren't "yes" or "no" questions that encourage short answers and instead ask why and how questions that keep the conversation going so your child builds richer language and longer, more complex answers.

2. Use book reading together as an opportunity to build knowledge of new labels for known concepts as well as building knowledge of new concepts

- a) Book reading together is a great context for vocabulary learning because it brings out much richer and rarer words than everyday conversation. Just yesterday my daughter and I were reading a book with the word Haberdashery-- a store that sells men's accessories (I rarely use this in my own talk and am even less likely to use rarer words given shelter in place rules). Make the most of this time by making book reading interactive with open-ended questions, discussion of unfamiliar words, encouraging children to ask questions about word meanings and the ideas they capture.
- b) Vocabulary learning is as much about learning new labels for known concepts as it is about learning new concepts. Reading together is also a great way to build knowledge of new concepts, particularly through reading non-fiction books. These books are excellent for talking about new ideas, and helping students learn the words and language structures they need to express that knowledge.

3. Make Words Fun and empowering

Children will love language if they come to see it as important for describing and capturing their own experience, the experience of others, and fun. To increase students' attention to the power of words you and your child can do word searches with a word that is part of the content provided by their teacher, words that come from their favorite books, or words that will help your child talk about feelings, emotions, or ideas they want to express. You can have a word challenge of the week where your child has to count how many times the word you chose appeared in materials around the house, in media they are exposed to or in conversations (TV, dinner time, skype/zoom calls, etc). Create a word jar where they can put a deposit slip with the number of times they heard the word and the context in which it was said. This will make them more aware of words in their environment, expand their understanding of that specific word, and make them more aware of different word parts, for example, glimmered, glimmering, glimmers as well as increasing their enthusiasm for being a big word user.

Other ideas for making words fun and powerful is inviting young children to play games like Applause, Applause a game where no materials are needed! In Applause applause children indicate, by level of applause, how much (a lot, a little bit, not at all) they would like to be described by certain words. Their clapping, for example, might reveal whether they would like to be described as exuberant, recalcitrant, or menacing. You want to encourage children to give a good explanation for why he or she applauds the word recalcitrant

Another kind of engaging word play is exploring Idioms, clichés, and puns because they contain "hidden" meanings behind the literal meanings. It is deliciously playful to examine what it means to "miss the boat" or "beat around the bush" or "bark up the wrong tree" or "fly by the seat of your pants"? Children love to explore phrases such as these by writing down what they mean, drawing pictures to represent the phrases (sometimes depicting the literal meaning and sometimes depicting the figurative meaning), and acting them out. This can be a morning activity, a fun daily conversation during family meals or something to do with siblings.