

Prekindergarten Practice: Intentionally Plan Activities to Build Children's Vocabulary and Language

Purpose

This document provides prekindergarten educators with information about a high-leverage, evidence-based practice recommended in the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) practice guide, [Preparing Young Children for School](#).¹

Introduction

Intentionally planning activities to build children's vocabulary and language is an evidence-based practice with a strong level of evidence for student achievement and a critical foundational skill for early readers. Page 5 of the practice guide states:

The vocabulary children develop when they are 3, 4, and 5 years old plays a pivotal role in their later language and reading development, and subsequent academic success. Learning new words and their meanings helps children understand new information they come across, which helps them learn more words. In this way, vocabulary development is cumulative...The key to vocabulary development in preschool is repeated exposure and opportunities to use new words in a variety of contexts and conversations around themes interesting to children.

For more information, see [Resources for Educators](#) on the WWC.

ESSA Level of Evidence

ESSA levels of evidence are the result of a synthesis of current evidence-based research. Below is the level of evidence for this recommendation:

- **Tier 1 – Strong Evidence**

See the [full practice guide](#), [Practice Guide Review Protocol: Preparing Young Children for School](#), and [Studies Reviewed for the Preparing Young Children for School Practice Guide](#) for more information about specific studies and an overview of the evidence for this recommendation. For more information about levels of evidence, see the REL document [ESSA Tiers of Evidence: What You Need to Know](#).

¹ [What Works Clearinghouse/IES Practice Guides](#) provide recommendations for educators of evidence-based practices to improve student outcomes. WWC/IES Practice Guides were developed by a panel of literacy experts based on reviews of research, practitioner experiences, and expert opinions.

Contact Information:

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How to Carry Out the Recommendation

Listed below are ways to [intentionally plan activities to build children’s vocabulary and language](#). See the pages of the guide referenced next to each instructional practice to find more specific implementation strategies.

- Choose 3–5 unique words to focus on each week and include review of those words in other weeks (39-40).
- Introduce the words and their meanings (40-42).
- Choose activities and materials that will offer children opportunities to practice using the target vocabulary words (43-44).
- Engage in interactive conversations with children to reinforce or solidify understanding of vocabulary words (44).

Connections to Literacy Essential Practices

[Literacy Essentials](#) provide evidence- and research-based approaches educators can use to support early literacy. This resource was introduced to Vermont through work done with [Dr. Nell Duke](#) and includes classroom practices teachers can use daily to implement the recommendations in the WWC practice guides. See the page number referenced next to each Essential Practice to find more specific implementation strategies.

[Literacy Essential Practices for Prekindergarten](#)

- **Essential #1:** Intentional use of literacy artifacts in dramatic play and throughout the learning environment (3)
- **Essential #3:** Interactive read-alouds with a comprehension and vocabulary focus (4)
- **Essential #7:** Extended conversation (6)
- **Essential Practice #9:** Ongoing observation and other forms of assessment of children’s language and literacy development that informs their education (7)