

## **Strategies and Activities to support vocabulary and word finding difficulties**

### Supporting learning of key curriculum concepts/vocabulary

- Identify key vocabulary for a given topic. Send this information home to be reinforced. Explain different uses of words when relevant (e.g. “in this instance, ‘needle’ means a sewing needle not an injection/syringe” and show a picture).
- Check prior knowledge by getting the student to draw a mind map of what they know already about a topic/vocabulary
- When teaching new words always draw attention to information about the meaning, sound structure and how it is used in a sentence.
- Practise saying the word (and not just once!)
- Show how we might use the word in an everyday context, not just in the specific subject context
- Make posters or index cards to show the meanings of the words and how they relate to each other. Alternatively use a scrapbook/exercise book and have a page for each key word. Put a picture of the word/write the word in the middle, and around it add information about: Put the word/picture in the middle of the page and talk about:- Where you might see it, Who might use it, What parts it has / what it is made of, Words that sound similar, Words that have a similar meaning, Words that mean the opposite, What category it belongs to e.g. clothes, animals, feelings, What sounds it has in the word, What it looks like (shape, colour, size etc.). You could use the strategy prompt cards mentioned below to help.
- At the end of each session, review knowledge of the key words and concepts
- Review and reinforce these words on a regular basis

### Word Finding Difficulties

When the student can't think of the word he wants to say, encourage him to use the following strategies:

- describe what the word means;
- think about the sounds in the word or what it starts with;
- think about where he has used the word before;
- try to say the word in a sentence;
- think of associated words.

When the student is familiar with these strategies, he should be encouraged gradually to use them without prompting. The use of a strategy card as a reminder/prompt can be helpful.

There are some useful strategy prompt cards here:

<http://www.speech-therapy.org.uk/word-finding-difficulties>

<https://speechiespeaks.wordpress.com/2012/11/05/visual-cues-for-describing/>

Ann Forrester & Sarah Wilkins, Speech and Language Therapy – August 2016

## Vocabulary activities

Make a **scrapbook, to practise classifying things**. For example, using catalogue pictures/advertisement flyers etc. Have a double page for a particular **category**, and the student can find, cut out and stick in, pictures from that category e.g. food, garden tools etc. This is to help him with his descriptive skills, so he can describe what sort of thing he is thinking of when he can't recall a word.

Play **barrier games** (the same idea as Battleships) where he would have to describe things carefully to someone else, so that they could do the same thing. For example, he could have a line drawing and so could the other person. As the student colours his in, he has to tell the other person what to do so that their picture ends up the same. This is to help him in his descriptive skills, but also to help him understand that he has to give enough information to the other person.

**Picture lotto** – each time you turn a picture over to see if it matches one on your board, you have to say what the picture is. Why not make your own lotto for the vocabulary/topic you are targeting?

**Happy Families** – make 4 copies of pictures of objects related to the vocabulary/topic you are focusing on. Play happy families where you have to request the object from each other to collect the set.

**Picture books** – use books with busy pictures such as Usborne first 1000 words or Where's Wally. Take turns to ask each other to find an object.

**Snap** – make picture cards of the vocabulary you are targeting. Have two copies of each picture. Play snap – but each time you turn a card over, you need to name the picture.

Other useful **category games** include:

- I-spy,
- 20 questions,
- “What am I?”
- “My auntie went to market...”

**Sorting** - Use pictures/objects/words in a range of categories (e.g. fruit, veg, furniture, tools, toys, bodyparts, vehicles, animals, food, clothes, jewellery, sport etc). Sort them into boxes/hoops/piles according to:

- semantic category (fruit,veg,furniture,tools,toys,bodyparts)
- characteristics (sweet,hot/cold, size, function)
- colour, then colour & size (harder!), then colour, size and shape (even harder!)

Ask the child to name category/sub-category.

Ask the child to give examples of other things that could also go in that group.

Ask the child if a given item could go in that group – if it does, can they explain why?

If it doesn't, can they explain why not?

Make mind maps of your categories.

**Odd one out** - Put three pictures/objects/words in a row– two must go together, the rest must not. Vary the reason why they go together (e.g. same category / colour / opposites shape / found in same place / used for the same thing etc.) Ask the child to identify which two go together and why? Ask the child why the others don't go together?

**Same/different** - Use a range of pictures/objects/words. Take turns to choose two items (out of a bag / turn the pictures over). The other person has to identify as many things that are the same and as many things that are different about those two items. Challenge each other to think of a certain number e.g. 10!

**Links in the chain** - One person starts off by saying the name of an item. The next person adds another word – this can be any word but it must be related in some way! Take turns to add another word until you think of anymore to add to your chain. You could ask each person to say why their word goes with the word before.

Examples:

rain - sun – sea – river – boat – car – bike .....

tiger – lion – cat – dog – pig – chicken – beef – potato – butter – cheese.....

**Pass the object** - Pass an object round the group. Each person has to say something about the object. Write down each comment and then when no one can think of anything more to say, the ideas can be organised into groups: Category; function; parts/materials; visual/sensory features; associated words; location; sounds within the word. Are there any of these aspects that have been left out? Are there any aspects that could have more information? Use the headings next time you ask the children to describe/define something.