**12 Power Words**

**This strategy for improving student test performance is one that Larry Bell includes in his book *Twelve Powerful Words That Increase Test Scores and Help Close the Achievement Gap***

Sometimes students miss test questions not because they don’t know the answer, but rather because they don’t know the question. Often students do not understand the vocabulary used to elicit their response. On our classroom assessments, we try to avoid this problem by stating questions very clearly and explaining the steps. (Many times, we even give the rubric we will use to grade it to the students ahead of time so that they can be sure to include all of the pertinent information and steps in the process.)

For example, after teaching a unit on alternative energy, we would expect our students to be able to exhibit the higher order thinking skills of evaluation. Our question might look like this: “*Choose an alternative energy source. Describe the benefits and the problems associated with it. Explain why you think it would be a good alternative source of energy*.” The question is pretty clear and the student knows what to do to answer it correctly – (we told them how - right in the question). We have met the state objective for our science unit and we know that the students have mastered the appropriate skills. Three months later the state assessment rolls around and we find the same learning objective being tested. This time, the question states: *“Evaluate solar power as an alternative energy source.”* Many of our students don’t know what the question means. Others might understand the question, but have no idea of the steps involved or where to begin. Now, according to the state, they have not met the learning objectives that they clearly demonstrated on our classroom assessment.

Explicit teaching of “Power Words” helps all students …

* To better understand what each question means
* To become familiar with words that require higher order thinking skills
* To relieve test anxiety
* To achieve better on tests

This is especially important for ELLS as it helps to develop their Cognitive Academic Language (CALP). Remember that ELL kids can develop the social interaction language easily within a short time, but struggle for as long as 10 years with the academic vocabulary. CALP is not developed independently by students. It is abstract, specific, and not often used. The only way for students to learn it is in the classroom.

**What teachers can do:**

* Spend 7 a few minutes a day introducing these words
* Use them with students on a daily basis.
* Include these words on classroom tests to make student more familiar with them.
* Ask students to use the words in their written responses to homework.
* Have students make up their own questions utilizing these words.

Educator Larry Bell has compiled a list of 12 words that are prominent on the high stakes tests that we expect students to pass:

**WORD STUDENT FRIENDLY PHRASE**

1. Trace List in steps

2. Analyze Break apart

3. Infer Read between the lines

4. Evaluate Judge

5. Formulate Create

6. Describe Tell all about,

7. Support Back up with details

8. Explain Tell how

9. Summarize Give me the short version

10.Compare All the ways they are alike

11. Contrast All the ways they are different

12. Predict What will happen next?

These are the words that stump students when they take standardized tests. Students may feel intimidated or confused by these words causing them to answer a question incorrectly when they know the answer.

By incorporating these words in your student’s daily life you will be helping to boost their academic achievement