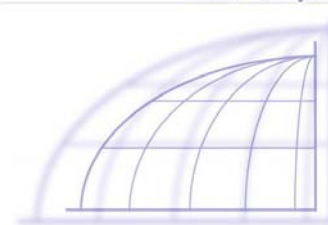# Printout of MindLadder® Advisor
Section B-5[•]

R-6: Verbal Tools and Concepts

We have two vocabularies: Receptive and expressive. The receptive vocabulary is used to understand, or decode, information and the expressive is used to produce, or encode, information. We use the first to understand the thoughts that others communicate to us and the second to generate and communicate our thoughts to them. Recognizing and using words correctly are two different mental activities. As a result, the knowledge construction function of verbal tools and concepts is best seen as having two distinct forms, one for Communication (see C-6) and one, as discussed here, for Reception (R-6). At the transformation stage, a lack of verbal tools and concepts can affect the ability to establish relationships (T-14) and work with abstract situations and problems (T-13). Also, lacking labels or words to attach to concepts affects the student's memory (T-8) because it is easier to hold on to concepts or remember them if we have a precise word to represent the concept.

Let's look now at this function at the reception stage: The availability of verbal tools and concepts affects the ability to register and gather information. If a student does not understand the words used in a problem or a direction, she will not know what to do. Doing the best in a difficult situation the student will often try to guess the meaning using any of the available contexts if possible. The results are often immediate as the learner proceeds to operate incorrectly on the task or to operate correctly on the task while being unsure that this in fact is the case. For example, a student who is asked to place a block between two objects may place it beside one of them because of a lack of understanding of the precise meanings of between and beside. A student who is asked to write his name on the top left hand corner of a test sheet may write his name on top, but not understand the concept of left and right and thus appear as though he did not follow directions. One may confuse his lack of understanding with a lack of attention (R-2). It is important to distinguish between the two so that

the teacher will consider each possibility and address the appropriate function for mediation. Sometimes the student's difficulty is so significant that the teacher suspects a hearing loss, because the child appears confused and doesn't understand when spoken to. But the problem most often is not with perceiving but with the lack of requisite verbal tools and concepts.

To develop this knowledge construction function discuss the role and function of verbal tools and concepts with your students. Why do we need them? What do they enable us to do? Have the students try to communicate with each other with no conventional, agreed upon verbal tools or concepts. For example, they can divide into explorers and natives and imagine meeting on a beach on a far-away island. See what happens when students switch to sign language. You, and they, will often be able to detect that concepts quickly start to guide their signing, their facial expressions and their body language as they attempt through patterns and the use of often exaggerated positive and negative facial expressions to reliably get information across to another person. Have fun with this activity and use it to help your students get a sense of the foundational need for verbal tools and concepts in any higher level human communication.

Helping your students to develop verbal tools and concepts and mediating their use is something you can do in all your learning activities. Encourage students to ask about the meaning when they do not know a word. Help students to acquire new words by connecting them to the experiences and activities that they have in the classroom. By introducing new vocabulary along with a student's experiences, you enable your students to understand concepts more easily as they can attach more meaning to the concept this way than when you simply tell them the meaning of a word. Also when introducing new words relate them to something your students already know or to other words already in their vocabulary. For example, you can relate the word atmosphere to the word air. When presenting new information or material encourage active involvement and discussion so your students will have an opportunity to actually both hear and use the new words.

Remember to introduce and use words in meaningful contexts in order for the children to remember them for later use. It is much easier for children to learn concepts and labels in active learning classrooms than in the more traditional passive classrooms. Also, using visual materials such as graphs, charts, maps, films, videos, computers, or other illustrations can help you to elaborate and add meaning to verbally presented information.

Sometimes for some children it may be necessary to reduce the length and the complexity of your material. That is, you may need to rephrase material or your oral language to make it shorter and simpler. But remember also, to encourage language development, you must use language at just a slightly higher level than the child is at to promote growth. Therefore, adjust your language according to the individual needs of a particular student.

As learners develop this knowledge construction function they acquire an understanding that every area of knowledge will have its own verbal tools and concepts. They learn to expect new vocabulary and concepts whenever they start learning a new subject area or academic discipline. This enables students to be proactive and to go looking for new words and concepts rather than waiting to be caught in situations where they need them but don't have them. Students' growing awareness of this knowledge construction function, and their ability to use it whenever they encounter a new content area, contribute to their growing autonomy as learners (C-10).