Vocabulary-building strategies and activities

**Surround your students with visual language** - have it displayed in the classroom.
- Classroom instructions
- Posters
- Date, weather display
- New structures, as they are presented in class
- Student work

**Surround your students with oral language** - use it as much as possible in the classroom.
- Greetings - informal as students arrive
  - formal beginnings and endings of lessons
  - to take the roll
  - to greet visitors to the classroom
- Numbers - any time there’s any counting being done
- Classroom management - instructions etc.

**Class Activities - listening focus**

**Jumping game**
(Thanks to Christian Crévola, Damascus College, Victoria)
4 or 5 students come to the front of the classroom, with chairs. From an agreed list of new vocabulary (10 - 15 items) each student secretly chooses 2 words. The teacher calls out words from the list at random and as each student hears the words they have chosen, they stand up, then sit down again. The rest of the class has to identify the words each student has chosen,

**Jumping game variation**
The students at the front of the room choose two words, one to stand up on and one to sit down on. The class has to identify the two words and say which is which.

**Fly Swat Game** *
New vocabulary words are written up on the board at random. Two students are at the board, one on each side, with a fly swat. As the teacher calls out the word, the first student to “swat” it gets a point. When 1 student has 5 points, s/he is named champion and stays at the board while the loser hands their fly swat on to the next challenger.

**Fruit salad** *
Teacher assigns a word from an agreed group, e.g. names of fruits, to all students sitting in a circle. One student in the centre calls out a word - strawberry - and all the students with that word have to change seats. The last one standing calls out the next word. “Fruit salad” means all have to change.
Karuta *
This game involves students slapping their hands down on cards (picture or word) as the teacher calls out new vocabulary items. This can be a small group version of the fly swat game with a student in charge rather than the teacher.

Choral practice of new vocabulary

Disappearing list
Write up a list of up to 12 vocabulary items on the board - new words or this could be a revision activity to practice pronunciation. Teacher and class read through list, repeating after teacher initially then moving on to all reading together. After a few times, one word is rubbed off and the chant continues with the lost word still in the same place in the list, then a second word is rubbed off and so on until the list has disappeared but the class is still “reading” the list in order.

Hiding game
(Thanks to Sue Birdsall, Marist College)
This is a way to practise a list of new words orally. One student leaves the room and another student hides an object (koosh ball, soft toy, pen). When the first student comes back in, the class guide him/her to the hiding place by chanting the list of words, softly at first then getting louder as the searcher gets closer to the hidden object.

Find your partner
Make up a set of cards with well known pairs. (Get the class to supply the pairs - that way you can be sure they'll recognise their partner.)

Give out one each, telling students not to show each other their card. This activity can be done with students at their desks. They take turns to introduce themselves and if their partner is paying attention, they greet their partner and introduce themselves.

A more active version is to have everyone moving round the room asking and giving information about names. This allows students to practise greetings and other politeness conventions.

A group version involves cards with one name at the top and two or three others below, making the activity more complex. Students need to find their friends to complete the task
Another group version uses a set of cards with different “families” e.g. numbers, colours, sports, animals, classroom objects, and with 4 items in each family. Using a structure such as “I have… “ or “I am ….” students have to move around the room to find the other members of their “family”.

Card activities
A set of cards with pictures or symbols and words can be used in many different ways. Microsoft clip art on line, http://office.microsoft.com/clipart/default.aspx and Google images, http://www.google.co.nz/ are excellent sources of pictures.

Matching practice
When students are first learning the new vocabulary, they can practise matching up the cards. This can be a diagnostic or self-assessment activity to see how many they already know or can guess at. An element of competition can be introduced is students then try to do the activity again in a shorter time, or faster than another student/pair/group.

Memory
The cards are spread out face-down on the table and students turn over two cards at random, saying the words out loud as they do so. If they have turned over a pair, they keep the cards, if not, they turn them over again and the next person does the same. It’s important to insist that students say the words out loud as they turn cards over. This means that listening, speaking and reading are practised, not just reading. (If you make the cards up in two different colours, e.g. words on blue, pictures on yellow, the game will be faster as students know they have to turn over one of each colour).

Fish
Deal out the cards (group size which allows each student to have 4 - 6 cards is good). The object of the game is to make pairs which are then put down face up on the table. If a student has one half of a pair (e.g. the word or the picture) in his/her hand, s/he can ask around the table for its pair. e.g. “James, have you got a dog?” This game encourages careful listening. The winner is either the person who gets rid of all their cards first, or the one who finishes with the most pairs.

Noughts and crosses*

This game can be played on the board to practise new vocabulary or structures. The words are written on the grid in English or the target language and two teams take turns to call out their chosen word to achieve a line of noughts or crosses.

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**Secret noughts and crosses**
This time the blank grid is drawn on the board and the teacher fills in the vocabulary on a sheet that only s/he can see. The two teams call out a word and if that word appears on the master sheet, it’s written up with either a nought or a cross. This is another game which rewards careful listening.

**Bingo**
This game can be played on a noughts and crosses grid with each student drawing up their own grid using words from an agreed set e.g. numbers. The teacher calls out the words one at a time and students cross off the ones they have on their sheet – the winner being the first to complete a line of the whole grid.

**Do-it-yourself bingo**
The class establishes a list of vocabulary for the activity, perhaps by brainstorming a list which the teacher writes up on the board. 15 - 20 items is a good number. Then students choose 9 to write on their grid and take turns calling out a word from the list.

**Hatschi Patschi**
(Thanks to Caroline Davidson, Samuel Marsden Collegiate School)
This game encourages practice of question and answer patterns e.g. “What is your name?” The class practises the question and answer, and chooses an unlikely answer, e.g. “My name is Hatschi Patschi”. The class sits in a circle and one (confident) student leaves the room. The others close their eyes and the teacher circles the room and taps one student on the shoulder. This student will answer “My name is Hatschi Patschi” when asked, and when that happens, all students have to change seats. The one left standing becomes the next questioner. This game can be used to practise any Q & A pattern – where you live, age, likes and dislikes, pets etc. etc.

Please write if you have any questions or if you and your class have variations of these, or other games you find effective. This is just a very small sample after all. 
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* Activities marked with an asterisk appear in the introductory video which accompanies the Learning Language Series resources. This video also shows many other classroom activities not mentioned in this handout.

**Video: An introduction to the i Learning Language Series**
(Ministry of Education)
Item number: 10544
Available from Learning Media (orders@learningmedia.co.nz)

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