



Best Practices for Vocabulary Instruction in the Elementary Classroom **Course Syllabus**

Catalog Description

In this workshop, participants will examine best practices for building the breadth and depth of vocabulary for both comprehension and written expression in grades three through five and the ELA Common Core Standards or state-adopted standards for vocabulary development in the elementary grades. Participants will learn the importance of creating a word-conscious learning environment that encourages motivation and interest in learning new words. They will learn how to model and to encourage independent word-learning strategies that their students can apply while engaging in wide and varied reading. They will also explore the value of instructing students in grades 3-5 how to infer the meaning of words from context and word parts. For their final project, participants will incorporate components of a balanced vocabulary program by designing a vocabulary lesson based on a classroom text—either fiction or non-fiction.

Prerequisites

This is an introductory workshop for teachers, technology specialists, curriculum specialists, professional development specialists, or other school personnel. Participants are expected to have regular access to computers, and proficiency with email and current web-browsers.

Goals

This workshop will enable participants to explore best practices for engaging and motivating students in grades three through five to build vocabulary. Participants will examine teaching strategies for building both the breadth and depth of students' vocabulary for comprehension and written expression.

This workshop will enable participants to:

- Create a learning environment that encourages motivation and interest in learning new words—word-consciousness
- Encourage independent word-learning strategies while engaging in wide and varied reading
- Design explicit instruction in the definitional and contextual meanings of words
- Evaluate text and select words to study that are critical to comprehension and frequently appear in a wide variety of texts
- Design vocabulary instruction to teach concepts central to content area studies
- Implement instruction that addresses how to infer meaning through structural analysis, including inferring meaning from common Greek and Latin roots
- Informally assess students' vocabulary knowledge to inform further classroom instruction
- Incorporate a balanced vocabulary program into their language arts and content area curriculum

Assessment and Course Requirements

Each session includes readings, an activity, and a discussion assignment, which participants are required to complete. Participants are expected to be engaged in course activities for approximately 30 hours during the six-session course.



Course Products

Two assignments are due for course credit. An assignment is due in the third week of the course. As a final project, participants will design a vocabulary lesson that addresses ELA Common Core Standards for vocabulary standards and that are based on a classroom text that is either fiction or non-fiction. Participants will select words by using the criteria presented in the workshop and plan for explicit instruction in both the definitional and contextual meaning of the words. Finally, participants will devise an informal assessment to determine students' understanding of word meanings.

Discussion Participation

Participants will be evaluated on the frequency and quality of their discussion board participation. Participants are required to post a minimum of two substantial postings each session, including one that begins a new thread and one that responds to an existing thread. Postings that begin new threads will be reviewed based on their relevance, demonstrated understanding of course concepts, examples cited, and overall quality. Postings that respond to other participants will be evaluated on relevance, degree to which they extend the discussion, and tone.

Workshop Sessions

Session One: Challenges and Solutions of Effective Vocabulary Instruction

In this session, participants will:

- Learn how to promote word-learning behaviors during read-alouds and classroom discussions about interesting and unfamiliar words
- Learn the capacities demonstrated by students who meet the ELA Common Core Standards
- Learn how to promote word consciousness in a rich verbal environment
- Discuss strategies for encouraging students to apply word consciousness to their own independent reading

Session Two: Selecting Words to Teach

In this session, participants will:

- Learn how to select Tier Two words that are most necessary for comprehension and have the highest utility
- Begin the final project by selecting Tier Two words from a text that they can use in their classroom
- Discuss the utility, as well as the challenges, of using the Tier Two criteria for selecting words for rich instruction

Session Three: Providing Explicit Instruction for Specific Words

In this session, participants will:

- Learn how to provide vocabulary instruction in both definitional and contextual information in order to improve comprehension
- Read about strategies for teaching the core meanings of words such as generating synonyms and examples
- Read about strategies for teaching for contextual knowledge such as exploring how a word functions in different contexts
- View how a teacher draws on students' background knowledge to build word meaning and discuss what participants could bring back to their own classroom
- Select activities that address the definitional and contextual information about the words for their final project
- Complete a reflection and/or assignment designed by the facilitator.

Session Four: Teaching Concepts for Content Area Vocabulary Development

In this session, participants will:

- Understand that word meanings are effectively learned in relation to other word meanings
- Identify key concepts in non-fiction necessary for understanding text
- Understand that word discussions around graphic organizers are an effective instructional strategy to teach key concepts in content areas
- Explore examples of graphic organizers and choose one that participants can use for their final project



- View a video of a teacher using a graphic organizer to focus discussion about the meaning of a concept and explain how this teaching tool helped students better understand the concept

Session Five: Teaching Word Learning Strategies

In this session, participants will:

- Understand that structural analysis—understanding word roots and affixes—provides information for inferring the meaning of words
- Learn how to teach common Greek or Latin roots, especially as they appear in content-area words and concepts that are part of the curriculum
- Explore an online dictionary to better understand the value of using one in their classroom
- Reflect on how the teacher's breaking the concept into roots contributed to student understanding in the video

Session Six: Assessing Vocabulary Knowledge

In this session, participants will:

- Learn ways to assess vocabulary knowledge informally in the context of curriculum to inform instruction
- Modify an informal assessment, the knowledge-rating checklist, for the final project
- Complete the final project

Final Project

One way to incorporate vocabulary instruction into your present language arts and content area curriculum is to consider classroom texts as opportunities to explicitly teach new vocabulary for comprehension. For the final project, participants will select a text (fiction or non-fiction) used in their classroom curriculum and design a lesson to provide direct instruction for the vocabulary words they identify in that text. Participants may begin their final projects as early as Session 2, completing the parts of the project that are identified in the individual sessions. They will use the template provided to guide the lesson plan.