

Components of a Strong School-Wide Vocabulary Development Program: The Larger School-Wide Context for a Coherent School Literacy Plan

Recommended by Kate Kinsella & Kevin Feldman, April 2007

- 1. Fluent, wide reading across the subject areas**
Fluent, wide reading for students at all proficiency levels, with integration of supplementary non-fiction selections in English language arts curricula and reading intervention curricula.
- 2. Explicit research-informed instruction across the subject areas**
Explicit research-informed instruction of vocabulary across the subject areas, with robust, consistent and recognizable practices so that students can devote their cognitive capital to learning rather than adjusting to "chameleon pedagogy."
- 3. Balanced instruction in content area classes (outside of English/ELD)**
An informed effort in science, math and social studies to balance instruction of 1) lesson specific terminology (e.g., *plasma, polygon, pharaoh*) directly linked to content standards in math, science and social studies and called out by the publisher with 2) high-use academic words (e.g., significant, policy, production) that also appear in lesson content but are not explained by the publisher. These high-use terms are likely to appear in subsequent reading material and tasks and are critical for competent academic reading, writing and speaking but they are routinely neglected by publishers and teachers across the grade levels. See the Coxhead (2000) academic word list <http://language.massey.ac.nz/staff/awl/awlinfo.shtml>.
- 4. Balanced instruction in English language arts/ELD**
An informed effort in English language arts and ELD to make vocabulary instruction amount to far more than literary terminology and low-incidence words derived from narrative reading selections. Much of the unfamiliar vocabulary derived from a narrative selection can be potentially interesting yet rarely used for either academic or social purposes. Students need a "theme word bank" consisting of words that are useful for engaging in literate discussion and writing about a narrative selection's theme, plot and character development. These critical words are rarely directly employed by an author within a story or novel. Thus, students may be reading a story placed during the apartheid era in South Africa that never states the term apartheid or equally vital words to competently discuss the theme and characters such as prejudice, class privilege, racism, equality, etc. To bolster their academic vocabulary, students also need carefully targeted instruction in high-incidence academic words and word families, not necessarily linked to a core literary selection. If vocabulary

development is largely or exclusively in service of promoting reading comprehension of narrative texts, less proficient readers and English learners are often served a fast-food lexical diet instead of a nutrient rich lexical diet. For

5. Narrow reading of informational texts

Narrow reading of informational texts in English language arts and reading intervention. When students read more than one article on a topic, they have exposure to recursive critical vocabulary. For example, two articles addressing teen use of social websites are likely to include similar terms such as socializing, utilize, safety precautions, risks, impacts, appropriate, etc.

6. Development of word knowledge

Development of word knowledge. Students become more productive learners of new vocabulary when they have a more informed understanding of how words work. Students develop more efficient word attack skills when they have knowledge of common prefixes, suffixes and word roots. They also have an easier time developing a clear mental model of a word when the teacher helps them grasp not only the meaning but also how a word is employed in a sentence. Truly knowing a word involves being able to apply the word with appropriate syntax and grammar.

7. Develop context analytical skills

Much emphasis is placed in English language arts on developing students' ability to derive meaning of a new word using context clues. However, research indicates that authentic texts (rather than contrived texts) rarely provide students with adequate context to truly understand and learn a word. Context analysis skill development should equip students with skills to recognize various context clues that provide some insight to meaning but build in the critical step of confirming meaning after analysis. Skilled readers do not stop to analyze a new word's meaning; they continue reading to see if information is provided and to see if the word seems important and warrants clarification. If so, a skilled reader rereads a section, tries to analyze the context and identify any available clues to meaning, then confirms in the dictionary.

8. A focus upon high-incidence Latin prefixes and suffixes

High incidence academic English vocabulary and the most common academic word families are largely Latinate in origin: they either come directly from Latin or French via Latin. Focus on high-incidence Latin prefixes and suffixes that will help students access meaning of academic words before teaching relatively low-incidence word roots from Greek, Norse, or Anglo Saxon that may be interesting but less vital in terms of bolstering students' ability to exploit meaning from context before confirming with a dictionary. Latin prefixes (e.g., anti, pre, re) alter the meaning of a word while

suffixes help students identify the kind of word (e.g., -tion = noun, -ate = verb). More often than not a striving reader or English learner will not recognize a word root in a polysyllabic academic word (e.g., elaboration, discriminate) but knowledge of common prefixes and suffixes in academic vocabulary derived from Latin will help them to get a sense of what kind of word it is and a clue to meaning before they confirm in the dictionary.

9. A focus upon high-incidence academic word families

Focus on high-incidence academic word families that travel across grade levels and subject areas and that are vital to academic writing proficiency. Teachers need to consider the age and language proficiency level of their students when addressing an academic word family. When teaching upper-elementary or lower-level EL students about making scientific *hypotheses*, it would make sense to limit instruction to the verb form, *hypothesize* so that students understand the foundational action: *I hypothesize that ...* At higher proficiency levels, it would make sense to make sure that they can also use the noun form and state: *I made this hypothesis because ...*

10. Structured opportunities to apply newly taught words in speaking and writing

Integrate routine opportunities for students to apply newly-taught words in structured speaking and writing tasks. Two critical phases of the vocabulary instructional routine should be structured oral practice followed by structured written practice before students are asked to independently generate statements utilizing the target word. Students should also be prompted to use new lesson terms through structured discussion and writing tasks that include the target terms in linguistic frames (i.e., sentence starters) that increase the odds that students are mindful of the appropriate grammatical and syntactical application of the word.

11. Meaningful, frequent assessment

Assess students meaningfully and regularly on high-incidence academic words, in addition to the assessments provided by publishers that are linked directly and exclusively to terms related to content standards. Implement a school-wide "Do Now" classroom protocol that starts the class session with a brief, generative assessment task. A meaningful, five-minute assessment task can be written on the board with a prompt to begin immediately when the bell rings. Students can complete the task independently (2-3 minutes), then be cued to compare notes with a partner (30 seconds) before checking their understanding when the teacher facilitates a brief subsequent discussion (2 minutes). Formats include; Yes-NO-Why?, translation, Show you know sentences, and Image-explain. All require thoughtful application of new words, not simply memorize-regurgitate.

12. Teach students productive study systems

Introduce vocabulary study systems appropriate to learners at various grade levels and in various subject areas. It would be helpful if teachers from different subject areas got together to align their study methods to be as similar as possible to make sure that all systems are equally viable and to make it easier for students develop a productive note-taking and study approach. Simple, yet powerful techniques such as verbal rehearsal (e.g. RCRC or "Read, Cover, Recite, Check) work well for studying vocabulary words, notes from a lecture/lab/etc., and sections of a text.

13. Provide appropriate dictionaries

Provide appropriate dictionaries in every classroom. Make sure that you have "learners' dictionaries" appropriate for the age level and proficiency level of the students you serve. Longman has a strong sequence of dictionaries for grades 4-12, ranging from an introductory academic word study dictionary to an advanced dictionary. The *Longman Study Dictionary* is well suited for mixed-ability classrooms with ELs in grades 4-8. The *Longman Dictionary of American English* is well suited for ELs and other students performing at grade level in grades 7-9. The *Longman Advanced Dictionary of American English* is appropriate for students in grades 9-12 who actually are performing at grade level. All three dictionaries are excellent resources for teachers to effectively prepare for vocabulary instruction. See the Longman dictionary website for details: <http://www.longman.com/ae/dictionaries/>.

14. Accountability for explicit instruction and meaningful assessment

Accountable instruction and support across the subject areas and grade levels. All teachers will benefit from professional development that supports them in better understanding how to effectively teach vocabulary and how to make informed decisions about words that warrant more time and attention. However, unless teachers in every classroom feel that they are being held accountable, many will fall back upon familiar habits rather than make strategic decisions in their students' best lexical interest. Teachers can feel their feet held to the proverbial fire through clearly articulated lesson observation goals, task-based department and grade level meetings, requests for evidence checks of implementation such as students' notes and performance on quizzes, etc.

15. A school-wide ethos that a powerful command of vocabulary and academic language is vital to academic and social mobility - It is EVERYONE'S responsibility!