Using Explicit Instruction to Teach Vocabulary

Earners demonstrate explicit vocabulary instruction to increase students' reading comprehension.

Key Method

Earners select tier-two or tier-three vocabulary from a text, demonstrate explicit vocabulary instruction, and provide students with multiple exposures to the words to increase reading comprehension.

Method Components

Explicit instruction

To read words in a text, students must be able to link the phonology (sound) of the word with the orthography (spelling) of the word. We refer to this as decoding. However, for reading comprehension to take place, students must be able to assign meaning to the words and understand how they function with the other words in the sentence. One key component in a student's acquistion of vocabulary is the intentional teaching of words through explict vocabulary instruction. While the steps involved in explicit instruction are consistent, the order may vary based on the resource. For the purpose of this micro-credential, explicit vocabulary instruction will be delivered in the following order adapted from Nancy Hennessy's fidelity checklist for vocabulary instruction:

- Teacher pronounces the target word/students repeat the word.
- Teacher discusses the word's structure—breaks the word into syllables and/or morphemes (prefix, suffix, root word); provides other forms of the word and parts of speech if grade/subject appropriate.
- Teacher provides a student friendly definition in everyday language.
- Teacher uses visuals and/or gestures as appropriate.
- Teacher provides examples of the word used in a variety of contexts relevant to students; students provide additional examples.
- Teacher and students say, spell, and write the word.
- Teacher provides students with multiple exposures to the target word.

Why Explicit Instruction Is Important

Research strongly supports explicit instruction of vocabulary based not solely on the word's definition, but on layers and associations that students apply to the words as they construct (write) and deconstruct (read) language to build fluency and comprehension; **no** research indicates a positive effect from assigning students the task of looking words up in a dictionary. Educators often erroneously believe the myth that students will acquire greater vocabularies through incidental exposure to words if they simply read more. While this may hold true for a select group of readers skilled in vocabulary learning strategies, struggling readers acquire very few words through incidental exposure during independent reading.

Selecting Tier-Two Vocabulary

According to research (Stahl and Fairbanks, 1986), students can only learn 8-10 words each week through direct instruction because learning requires repetition and multiple exposures (Farstrup and Samuels, 2008). Since teachers can't teach every word through explicit instruction, they must approach word selection carefully and thoughtfully. Words typically fall into three commonly accepted categories:

Tier One—High-frequency words that students already know. With the exception of English learners, students typically do not require explicit instruction for tier-one words.

Tier Two—Words unfamiliar to students that are necessary to understand the current context. These are words students will encounter in the future across academic disciplines, so they are the best choices for explicit instruction.

Tier Three—Words rarely used outside a specific content, but essential for understanding within the content area (e.g., isotope, parallelogram, oligarchy). Tier-three words may also be the focus for explicit vocabulary instruction by the content teacher.

Word Consciousness

One way for teachers to support explicit vocabulary instruction is by creating a word conscious classroom. By modeling the use of precise vocabulary and words that reflect the appropriate nuance or connotative meaning, a teacher demonstrates the importance of vocabulary to students. Other practices of a word conscious classroom include, but are not limited to:

- Engaging students in fun, interactive vocabulary instruction that involves word play.
- Incorporating "turn and talk" time so students use the words with classmates.

- Providing sentence starters that use the target word correctly, but allow the student to complete the sentence with details or description that reflects the word's meaning.

- Asking students to provide a better word to a classmate when peer-editing written assignments.

- Using synonyms or modifying the definition to avoid rote memorization of a definition and to ensure a deep understanding of the word's meaning.

- Providing words associated with the target word in varied contexts (e.g., prime beef, prime meridian, prime number) to deepen understanding of the word.

- Playing word games that allow students to be creative and spontaneous with language.

Supporting Rationale and Research

The Supporting Rationale and Research document linked below includes important resources related to explicit vocabulary instruction. As you interact with these learning materials, take time to reflect on your professional practice.

Top 17 Exposures to Learn New Words. This [resource](#) is a must read for any teacher searching for new ideas to provide multiple exposures to target vocabulary.

Brain-Based Vocabulary Teaching and Learning. This scholarly [article](#) on brain research is easy to read and provides educators with ways to include kinesthetic learning and stories into vocabulary instruction. Dansie, Allison. "Brain-Based Vocabulary Teaching and Learning" *Journal of Inquiry and Research,* September 2016.

Provide Explicit Vocabulary Instruction. [Nebraska Reads](#) provides educators with an introduction to explicit vocabulary instruction.

Attributes of Effective Explicit Vocabulary Instruction. The Iowa Reading Research Center provides a [model lesson](#) for secondary teachers that incorporates the steps of explicit vocabulary instruction.

Vocabulary Instruction Tips and Reminders. Educators can print and use this [handout](#) to provide tips and reminders for explicit vocbulary instruction.

Five Research-Based Ways to Teach Vocabulary. This [resource](#) from the Texas Center for Learning Disabilities takes a deep dive into five research-based ways to teach vocabulary and shares instructional activities that work for all content areas.

Four Practical Principles for Enhancing Vocabulary Instruction. This [post](#) from Reading Rockets synthesizes research on vocabulary instruction into a teacher friendly resource filled with practical classroom examples.

10 Key Vocabulary Practices for All Schools. This practical [resource](#) created by the University of Texas describes explicit instruction strategies used by an elementary teacher and a middle level social students teacher along with supports for EL students.

Why Explicit Instruction? In this [video](#), Anita Archer explains the importance of explicit instruction in general terms the earner can transfer to vocabulary instruction.

Vocabulary Instruction (Second Grade). This [video](#) captures Anita Archer demonstrating explicit vocabulary instruction to a second grade class.

Vocabulary Instruction (Sixth Grade). In this [video](#), Anita Archer demonstrates explicit vocabulary instruction to a sixth grade class.

Explicit Instruction for Specific Words. This [video](#) shows explicit vocabulary instruction in a Pre-K or Kindergarten classroom.

Explicit Vocabulary Teaching Strategies. This [video](#) discussion by Dr. Mary E. Curtis, lead author on the national Student Achievement in Reading (STAR) initiative, explains explicit instruction and the connections between Tier One, Tier Two, and Tier Three vocabulary. In addition, a [full transcript](#) of the video has been provided.

Submission Guidelines and Evaluation Criteria

This micro-credential is divided into three areas: Overview, Artifacts and Evidence, and Reflection. To earn this micro-credential, you must receive "Passing" on Parts One and Three, and "Yes" on all criteria in Part Two.

Part One. Overview

To earn this micro-credential, respond to the following prompt:

- Describe your class demographics (i.d., number of students, grade, subject, ability levels for literacy) and your current teaching assignment.

- Describe how you assess students vocabulary levels and provide the data points you collect to measure growth.

- Briefly explain the challenges you face concerning vocabulary instruction.

This submission is scored either "passing" or "not passing."

Passing: Earner includes a response to each part of the prompt; total response should be at least 200-words and provide adequate detail to help the scorer understand the context for your submission.

Part Two. Artifacts and Evidence

Read the Artifacts and Evidence Submission requirements carefully to ensure a thorough understanding of the expectations for a "Yes" on each task.

Task 1: Selecting Words for Explicit Instruction

Identify between 8-9 Tier Two or Tier Three vocabulary words from a text used with students. Teachers of students in K-3 will select target words from a "read-aloud" text; teachers of students in grades 4-12 will select a reading passage(s) from literary or informational text. From the words you have identified, prioritize them so that you have 4-6 words you will teach using explicit vocabulary instruction.

As evidence for this task, create a document that includes

- the title, author, word count (if available), and the sentences containing the selected tier-two or tier-three vocabulary words.

- the 4-6 selected words along with 2-3 "runners-up" you did not select for explicit instruction but considered. Beside each word provide a rationale for why you included or excluded the word.

Please submit the document with the title "Task 1 Selecting Words" as evidence for Task 1.

Task 2: Planning for Explicit Instruction

To plan for explicit vocabulary instruction, complete the Explicit Instruction Template (located in the resource section) for each of the 4-6 words you have selected. In the Explicit Instruction Template, be sure to provide a detailed explanation of how you plan to provide students with a minimum of four exposures to each word. You will submit evidence of multiple exposures to the target words in Task 3.

Please submit the completed template with the title "Task 2 Explicit Instruction Template" as evidence for Task 2.

Task 3: Providing Explicit Instruction and Multiple Exposures

As evidence for this task:

● Upload artifacts that provide evidence students had at least four exposures to each target word. Your artifacts might include (but are not limited to) student work samples, student writing products, slide decks with images of the words, or audio recordings of students using the words in class discussions or games.

● Upload a video of you providing explicit vocabulary instruction for one of the target words. Be sure to follow the steps for explicit instruction adapted from Nancy Hennessy's fidelity checklist and outlined in the Method Components section of this micro-credential.

Please submit the artifacts and video of the feedback session with the titles "Task 3 Multiple Exposures" and "Task 3 Explicit Instruction Video" as evidence for Task 3.

Artifacts and Evidence Scoring Guide

Tasks	Not Yet	Almost	Yes
Task 1: Selecting Words for Explicit Instruction	Earner does not provide all documents required for Task 1.	Earner does not identify title, author, or sentences from the text containing the selected words. **OR** Earner provides fewer than 4 words or selects words that do not represent good choices for explicit instruction or does not provide 2-3 words considered but not selected or does not include the rationale.	Earner includes title, author, word count (if available), and sentences from the text containing the selected words. **AND** Earner provides a list of 4-6 words and 2-3 words considered but not selected for explicit instruction and the rationale for the inclusion or exclusion of each word.
Task 2: Planning for Explicit Instruction	Earner does not submit the "Explicit Instruction Template" **AND/OR** Earner does not include plans for student interaction with the selected words.	Earner completes the "Explicit Instruction Template" for fewer than 4 words or does not complete all sections of the template for all target words.	Earner accurately and thoroughly completes all sections of the "Explicit Instruction Template" to plan instruction for 4-6 words. **AND** Template includes a detailed explanation of how the earner will provide at least 4 exposeures to the target vocabulary words.

Task 3: Providing Explicit Instruction and Multiple Exposures	Earner does not include evidence of implementation of student exposures to the target words. **OR** Earner does not provide a video demonstrating the steps of explicit instruction as outlined in the Method Components section.	Earner plans for fewer than 4 ways for students to interact with the target words. **OR** Earner provides a video partially demonstrating the steps of explicit instruction for one target word as outlined in the Method Components section.	Earner provides evidence for at least 4 different interactions students have with target words. **AND** Earner provides a video demonstrating all steps of explicit instruction for one target word as outlined in the Method Components section.

Part 3. Reflection

Read the Reflection criteria carefully to ensure a thorough understanding of the expectations for a "passing" submission.

Prompt: Describe the impact of the learning presented in this micro-credential on you as an educator and your students as learners. As part of your reflection,

- complete Nancy Hennessy's "Fidelity Checklist for Reading Comprehension Instruction: Vocabulary," located in the Resource section of this micro-credential.

- explain the components of vocabulary instruction you identified as strengths and those areas you will continue to improve.

- describe at least one instructional strategy you will continue to use to create a word-conscious classroom and your reason for selecting the strategy as a result of earning this micro-credential.

This submission is scored either "passing" or "not passing."

Passing: *Earner includes a response for each part of the prompt (200-word minimum) and a completed fidelity checklist. Responses should clarify and further explain how earning this micro-credential has impacted your professional practice and student outcomes.*