

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION: IMPROVING VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION

Purpose	Reading specialists, language arts curriculum coordinators, and principals can use this tool to plan classroom observations to help content area teachers embed vocabulary instruction into classroom lessons.
Materials	Systematic Observation and Reflection Plan
	For individual review:
	<i>Middle School Math: Vocabulary Building Lesson and Related Materials</i>
Media	For individual review:
	<i>Explicit Vocabulary Teaching Strategies</i> , interview with Mary Beth Curtis, Harvard University. (7:43)
	<i>Greek Myths: Understanding Word Roots and Meanings</i> , multimedia presentation with teacher from Pocomoke Middle School. (4:32)
	<i>Building Vocabulary in Middle School Math Class</i> , multimedia presentation with teacher from KIPP San Francisco Bay Academy. (5:52)
	This tool and related media and materials are located in the Doing What Works Library (https://dwwlibrary.wested.org/). For assistance, contact dww@wested.org .
Topic	Adolescent Literacy
Practice	Vocabulary Instruction

Classroom Observation: Improving Vocabulary Instruction

Systematic Observation and Reflection Plan

This tool provides a systematic approach for planning a classroom observation to help content area teachers reflect on current practice and embed vocabulary teaching in regular classroom instruction. It provides written documentation of the observation, observer review and feedback, and teacher reflection and action planning.

Use this tool to plan an individual observation occurring once or twice a year to help a content area teacher embed vocabulary instruction. In addition, if there is a schoolwide commitment to a year-long process for improving and sustaining vocabulary instruction within regular classroom instruction, the tool can be used to guide ongoing observations, follow-up staff meetings, and long-term instructional planning throughout the school year.

Prior to the observation process, the teacher should review the recommended media resources (i.e., the expert interview on *Explicit Vocabulary Teaching Strategies* and multimedia presentations of classroom lessons on *Greek Mythology* and *Building Vocabulary in Middle School Math Class*), as well as the sample material, *Middle School Math Vocabulary Building Lesson*.

Pre-Observation Goal-Setting (Tool Part 1): The observer and teacher meet to set specific goals for the observation and review the teacher's lesson plan for embedding vocabulary instruction into a content lesson, selection of vocabulary words and strategies, and student learning objectives.

Classroom Observation (Tool Part 2): The observer conducts the observation noting what vocabulary strategies were observed, highlights of the lesson, and suggestions for how to improve the embedding of vocabulary learning into upcoming lessons.

Teacher Reflection (Tool Part 3): The teacher writes a self-reflection on what happened during the lesson, including positive features and disappointments or unexpected outcomes.

Observation Review and Improvement Plan (Tool Parts 4 and 5): The process concludes with a follow-up conference between the observer and teacher to discuss the teacher's self-reflection, review the observation, and collaborate on identifying short- and long-term instructional actions to improve vocabulary practice embedded in classroom instruction.

Systematic Observation and Reflection Plan

Observer: _____

Date/Time of Observation: _____

Teacher: _____

Grade Level: _____

Content Area: _____

Topic Focus of Lesson:

Text/Story Used During Lesson:

Embedded Vocabulary Goals:

Selected Vocabulary Words:

Part 1: Prior to Observation

Observer and teacher review lesson plan together.

Lesson Plan Review	Observed	Not Observed	Notes for Discussion
1. At least one lesson goal is focused directly on embedding vocabulary instruction into the lesson.			
2. At least one explicit vocabulary strategy is identified in the lesson plan.			
3. A list of new words and other relevant words to be highlighted during the lesson is provided.			
4. Adequate time is allotted to introduce and teach new vocabulary words.			
Vocabulary Word Selection	Observed	Not Observed	Notes for Discussion
1. Teacher has assessed the vocabulary load of the text to be read for the lesson.			
2. New words are selected from the text for this lesson.			
3. Relevant words from previous lessons are included in the lesson.			
4. Relevant words from a schoolwide list of cross-cutting words are included in the lesson.			

Part 2: Classroom Observation

Explicit Vocabulary Instruction (embedded in content lesson)	Observed	Not Observed	Notes for Discussion
1. Teacher provides explicit vocabulary strategies embedded into the content lesson.			
2. Teacher reviews words learned from previous lessons and a schoolwide list, if relevant to the lesson.			
3. Teacher provides a list of new words students will encounter in the text.			
4. Teacher introduces new words and explains the meanings of these words.			
5. Students are asked to share what they already know about the meanings of new words.			
6. Teacher builds on students' prior knowledge of word meanings.			
7. Teacher uses active and generative activities to embed and support vocabulary development during the content lesson (e.g., word sorts, games, word riddles, art/drawing, sentence challenges, etc.).			
8. Teacher uses informal opportunities as words arise during the lesson to explicitly teach word meaning.			
Practice Opportunities	Observed	Not Observed	Notes for Discussion
1. Repeated exposure to new words is provided during the lesson.			
2. Students encounter the new words and relevant previously learned words in multiple contexts, including oral and written activities.			

3. Teacher provides sufficient time during the lesson for students to practice new words.			
4. Practice is extended over time through the use of word walls or other activities/resources.			
5. Computer-based activities are used to provide students with extended practice, when appropriate.			
6. Practice is extended through homework assignments given at the end of the lesson.			
7. Teacher provides students with in-class time and opportunities for independent practice of newly learned vocabulary strategies.			
Scaffolding Student Strategies	Observed	Not Observed	Notes for Discussion
1. Teacher scaffolds students in developing strategies to make them independent vocabulary learners.			
2. Teacher models using context and word analysis cues as a strategy for determining word meaning.			
3. Teacher models strategies for using word structure and components (prefixes, roots, suffixes) to derive the meaning of unfamiliar words.			
4. Reference materials such as computer software, textbook glossaries, reference books, and dictionary/thesaurus are available in the classroom.			
Assessment of Student Learning	Observed	Not Observed	Notes for Discussion
1. Teacher encourages students to demonstrate understanding of word meaning through a variety of oral and written activities embedded into the content lesson.			

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2. Teacher regularly monitors student understanding by conducting frequent informal checks of individual and small group work throughout the lesson.			
3. Teacher uses formal written assessments to document student understanding.			

Part 3: Teacher Self-Reflection

Teacher reflects on lesson, indicates level of satisfaction with vocabulary components, and provides explanation/comments.

Embedded Vocabulary Instruction Components	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Not satisfied	Explanation/Comments
Lesson plan				
Vocabulary-related goals				
Word selection				
Introduction to and clear explanation of new words				
Repeated exposure to new words				
Use of explicit strategies				
Use of informal teaching opportunities				
Opportunities to practice new and previously learned words in a variety of oral and written contexts				
Modeling strategies for defining word meanings, e.g., context cues				
Providing students with strategies to make them independent vocabulary learners				
Encouraging multiple ways for students to show understanding				
Frequent informal checks of student understanding				
Formal assessment to document student understanding				
<i>Other:</i>				

Part 4: Observation Review

Observer and teacher review lesson and identify common areas of agreement and areas needing further discussion or clarification.

Observer Feedback	Teacher Self-Reflection	Areas of Agreement	Areas Needing Further Discussion

Part 5: Plan for Improvement

Teacher collaborates with observer to set improvement goals and identify short- and long-term actions for embedding vocabulary instruction into regular classroom instruction.

Improvement Goal	Short-Term Action	Long-Term Action