

Teaching Newcomer English Learners: Four Powerful Vocabulary Practices (REL Northwest)

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z8GagOVLTY>

Tim Blackburn: Newcomer students in US schools find themselves in a setting that is unfamiliar to them on multiple levels, navigating new social structures school systems and cultural dynamics in addition to learning new content in English. These shifts are significant. As a result it is critical that schools and school systems provide support to newcomer language learners when they need it most at the heart of 21st century college and career-ready standards lies student autonomy. The goal is to equip students with the skills to define their next steps after high school and for newcomer English learners, the goal remains the same but with the added challenge of attending to language development through each discipline.

This video illustrates the first of four recommendations from the 2014 IES practice guide teaching academic content and literacy to English learners in elementary and middle school. The IES panel that authored the practice guide found strong evidence for teaching a set of academic vocabulary where it's intensively across several days using a variety of instructional activities. This video provides classroom examples of four activities to carry out the recommendation.

First, choose a brief, engaging piece of informational text that includes academic vocabulary as a platform for intensive academic vocabulary instruction.

Second, choose a small set of academic vocabulary for in-depth instruction.

Third, teach academic vocabulary in depth using multiple modalities like writing, speaking, and listening.

And fourth, teach word learning strategies to help students independently figure out the meaning of words.

Activity one. Choose a brief engaging piece of informational text that includes academic vocabulary as a platform for intensive academic vocabulary instruction. The IES panel states that accessible yet content rich material is fundamental to providing deep instruction and academic vocabulary. Engaging materials such as magazines, newspapers, or other informational texts anchor in-depth instruction of your learning objectives. The text should be brief, interesting, and engaging for the students, containing a variety of target academic words to focus on. It should connect to a given unit of study and build students knowledge of a topic, providing sufficient detail and examples for students to be able to comprehend a passage. And it should contain ideas that can be discussed from a variety of perspectives. In these examples, the texts connect to anchor themes from the unit of study. Note how the colleagues use grade level text even when some students might not comprehend the reading if asked to read it

independently. In each example, the colleagues incorporate images and scaffolds so that students access the language of the text and understand unfamiliar words.

Activity two. Choose a small set of academic vocabulary for in-depth instruction. Select five to eight words to use for instruction over the course of several lessons. By teaching an in depth smaller set of words useful to students throughout school, teachers will have time to help students learn concepts and nuances associated with the words, and students will be able to use the words in writing, speaking, and listening activities in the classroom. Use the following criteria to choose these words. Words that are central to understanding the text. Words that are frequently used in the text or those that might appear in other content areas. And especially those with multiple meanings, affixes, or cross language potential. The panel mentions a concept that may seem counterintuitive. It states that a student's lack of familiarity with words is not always a sufficient reason for selecting words for in-depth instruction. The goal is to choose unfamiliar words that are central to understanding of the passage.

In the video that follows, note how the teachers build on student background knowledge with images and discussion to emphasize words that are central to your understanding of the text and especially those that are used frequently throughout a text.

Teacher: So around the word capable, I want to think about some sentences that we could use that have capable in them.

Student 1: I am capable to pass a math test.

Teacher: I am capable of passing a math test, that's good. So you can write it, you can draw a line and write it next to the word just like Dinelson is doing. And then whenever you write the word capable today, since that's our key vocab word, I want you to underline it. So underline it on your sheet as well. How else can we use that word in a sentence?

Student 2: I am capable to continue my dreams.

Teacher: I am capable to continue my dreams. I am capable to reach my dreams. I'm capable of reaching my dreams. Because remember, it's not capable to, it's capable of.

Tim Blackburn: Activity 3. Teach academic vocabulary in depth using multiple modalities like writing, speaking, and listening. This activity exposes students to new vocabulary and differing modes. Teachers can create opportunities for students to experience new academic vocabulary so that they understand the connotation of the words and not just memorize them. These activities help students gain a deeper understanding of the target words, and they provide student-friendly definitions of the words and apply them to the context of the text. The vignettes that follow combined reading, writing, speaking, and listening to develop deeper understanding of key vocabulary. Also note how both teachers emphasize multiple uses of the vocabulary terms as adjectives, adverbs, verbs, and nouns.

Teacher: So we got people are protesting and I heard, right, protesting for something about schools? Let's do one more. Daniel, what else do you see? Hey we've got signs, right there, holding signs. What do you think they're protesting about? Equal what? Hey we've got freedom, that's a big key word there, equal rights. So this picture represents our next topic, our next unit. We talked a lot about voting and protesting with voting and now we're going to talk more about equal rights. Right, not just in terms of voting but some other thing.

Tim Blackburn: Activity 4. Teach word learning strategies to help student independently figure out the meaning of words. This activity is grounded in student autonomy. Equipped with the understanding of word morphology, students will read more independently if they have the tools to unlock vocabulary in context. Multiple 21st century language proficiency standards such as ELPA21, WIDA, California English language development standards all emphasize this activity as an essential skill. In addition to providing direct instruction on academic vocabulary words, teach students to independently figure out the meaning of unknown words by using context clues, word parts, and cognates. This will increase students' understanding of how words work and will provide them with a means by which they can figure out the meaning of unfamiliar words.

These video examples show how the teachers allow students to connect their knowledge of their home language to inform their English language development. Thank you for viewing this illustration of instructional practices focused on supporting newcomer students in accessing academic vocabulary.