



RDLA272 Course Syllabus

Title

RDLA272: Vocabulary as a Foundation for Learning

Target Audience

This course is designed for pre-service and in-service teachers of grades K-3.

Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this course.

Course Description

In this course, you will have exposure to cutting-edge research about how word learning shapes thinking, especially in our youngest learners. You will see that how we model, recognize and encourage use of sophisticated vocabulary has lasting effects on children's cognition. You will learn the ins and outs of fostering good word consciousness among your students and will see how it is truly a precursor to vocabulary growth. You will explore book sharing routines that promote steadfast word learning and have the opportunity to look critically at the books we read to and with children as resources for vocabulary exposure. You will step into the classroom of master teacher, Alicia Poulin, and watch as she inspires curiosity in her students and makes essential instructional choices about teaching specific words using PBS Kids digital learning resources. Participants will also look at ways to guide students toward independence as you teach them specific strategies for learning words on their own.

Finally, you will learn to assess student's vocabulary growth in a way that will inform your instruction and keep your teaching practice rigorous yet sensitive to the needs of your learners. Through readings, interactive activities, journal reflections and discussion questions, you will have the chance to collaborate with others while consistently being given the opportunity to reflect on your own accumulation of knowledge.

The course was primarily authored by Jeanne Paratore, Professor of Education and Coordinator of the Reading Education and Literacy and Language Education Programs at Boston University. She is a published expert in the field of emergent literacy and a master lecturer who appears in the course's video lecture segments.

Course Summary

Throughout the course, participants will analyze and respond to classroom scenarios, watch lectures outlining key ideas, read brief, evidence-based descriptions of recommended teaching practices, and visit classrooms via video to observe teaching practices in action and listen as teachers discuss their approach to vocabulary instruction. Course projects include evaluation and selection of traditional and digital resources about energy and motion to use in a classroom and a final reflection tying course ideas together.

Schedule

This course is scheduled to deliver approximately 45 hours of instruction (7.5 hours per week). Participants are expected to complete one session per week over a six-week period. The number of hours identified for the course reflects time spent online learning but does not reflect the total time spent completing offline coursework and assignments.

Requirements

Technical Requirements:

- Word processor
- Internet service provider

- E-mail

Learners are expected to:

- Complete all assignments
- Maintain an online journal
- Participate and actively engage in discussions with fellow learners while contributing to the social construction of knowledge
- Be self-directed and self-motivated
- Ask for assistance when they need it

Course Materials

Required Readings

In each session participants will read two to four articles from professional journals focused on key topics and instructional practices. Articles are provided as downloadable PDFs free of cost, accessed through links provided on the course pages.

Videos

In each session participants will view videos of a teacher implementing focal strategies in a classroom. Videos are linked at point of use.

Text Sets

Successful completion of various tasks throughout the course requires access to texts included in one of the two Multimodal Resource Sets. Depending on their interest, participants select a text set for kindergarten or second grade. They may purchase the texts sets at a bookstore of their choice or obtain them from a local library. Some of the resources are available online.

The Kindergarten Multimodal Resource Set includes:

Traditional Texts:

- Oscar and the Cricket: A book about moving and rolling, by Geoff Waring
- Let's go to the playground by Ruth Walton
- Give It a Push! Give It a Pull!: A Look at Forces by Jennifer Boothroyd
- What's faster than a speeding cheetah? by Robert E. Wells

The Second--Grade Multimodal Resource Set includes:

Traditional Texts:

- Many Ways to Move: A Look at Motion by Jennifer Boothroyd
- Gravity by Jason Chin
- What's faster than a speeding cheetah? by Robert E. Wells

Goals

The goal of this course is to help early childhood educators prepare children for long-term success in reading and writing, and to develop a full and deep understanding of how highly effective teachers act on the evidence to support vocabulary development for all students.

Expected Learning Outcomes

By successfully completing all course requirements participants will:

1. Understand the connection between vocabulary, phonemic awareness, and comprehension.
2. Understand how vocabulary knowledge develops.
3. Understand what it means to "know" a word.
4. Understand the mismatch between what we know about the ways children learn vocabulary and common

vocabulary teaching practices.

5. Understand the concept of word consciousness and know ways to promote it in school and at home.
6. Understand how to select and teach individual words.
7. Understand how to select and teach independent word learning strategies.
8. Understand how to assess vocabulary knowledge and act on assessment findings.

Course Assignments and Projects

Learners demonstrate learning outcomes in six ways:

- Classroom Scenario Analyses: At the beginning and end of each session, learners will complete an analysis of a classroom scenario. This is intended to capture your “baseline” knowledge at the beginning of each session and the growth or change in knowledge at the end of the session.
- Check Your Understanding: Midway through each session, learners will complete a brief, multiple-choice quiz. These serve as a “gateway”; you must respond accurately to progress to the second part of the session.
- Online Journal Prompts: Each session includes one online journal entry in which learners will apply information from the session material provided.
- Discussion Forum Prompts: Each session includes one discussion forum in which learners will discuss information provided in the session.
- Assembling a Multimodal Resource Set: In session 1, you will use a Multimodal Resource Set Worksheet to analyze the quality and affordances of particular resources and make selections for use for teaching a science unit on energy and motion. In session 2, you will complete an analysis of one additional text in the Resource Set. In sessions 3-6, you will use the texts in the Multimodal Resource Set to apply the ideas you learn about in each session.
- Final Project: A Final Reflection -- Apply Understandings to My Own Teaching: At the end of session 6, you will recall and review your notes from course lectures, required readings, videos, online journal entries discussion board conversations and use them to compose a list of “guiding principles” to help plan and implement evidence-based instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics. You will also list a few examples of the kinds of instructional activities or tasks you will implement that align with the principle.

Course Authors

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Why Is This Course Important to Early Childhood Teachers?

From the Authors’ introduction

“As teachers of young children, we routinely delight in the things children say – so much so that their words and phrases often make their way into our conversations with other adults and even into cartoons in venerable publications such as The New Yorker Magazine. Of course, we have always known that vocabulary instruction is an important part of the early childhood classroom curriculum – it’s likely that many of us can even recall learning a “word of the day” as part of our own early classroom learning experiences! But recent research has taught us that developing children’s vocabulary and concept knowledge demands much more than an introduction to an interesting word each day. In the words of William Nagy and Judith Scott (2000, p. 273), two of our field’s most renowned vocabulary researchers:

“Not only are there too many words to teach them to children one by one; there is too much to learn about each word to be covered by anything but exceptionally rich and multifaceted instruction.”

In fact, as researchers and theorists have worked to understand the factors that account for the persistent achievement gap in the performance of children in high and low income communities, they have come to recognize that although expert teaching can be highly effective in closing a skills gap (i.e., differences in phonemic awareness and phonics knowledge) that separates many children on school entry, closing the “knowledge gap” (Neuman, 2006, p. 29) (i.e., differences in words, concepts, and narrative structures) is substantially more difficult. In fact, evidence indicates that “Children who start school behind in these areas are likely to stay behind” (Whitehurst and Lonigan, 2002, p. 21).

I can imagine, as you read this, that you may be thinking that trying to persuade teachers of the importance of vocabulary is somewhat silly. Many of us assume that every teacher knows that vocabulary is important and every teacher emphasizes it in the course of daily instruction. But, in fact, visits to classrooms and analysis of classroom curricula tell us otherwise. These sources of evidence tell us quite unequivocally that the typical early childhood classroom teacher spends remarkably little time on the types of vocabulary instruction that make words “stick” for youngsters who enter school with less well-developed knowledge. Not only do teachers not offer the type of instruction that contributes to vocabulary growth; most deliberately simplify their language structures and word choices, on the assumption that young children will not understand sophisticated vocabulary and syntax.

So, what does all of this mean? In short, it seems that often, although unintentionally, our instructional decisions related to vocabulary and language use and instruction actually may be contributing to the achievement gap, rather than helping to close it. But here’s the good news: at the same time that researchers have uncovered these somewhat discouraging conditions, they have also tested, verified, and documented the types of vocabulary teaching practices and “talk moves” that work – that help children acquire and use interesting, sophisticated, vocabulary and language structures as they read, write, and talk in school and at home. Our job as teachers is to become deeply knowledgeable about these evidence-based teaching practices and talk moves and make them part of our daily routines. That is exactly what we have set out to accomplish in this course. We have strived to do so in ways that you will find engaging and energizing; and we hope that, together, we will grow our understanding and our teaching practices such that as children enter our classrooms each and every day, they do so with the expectation that on this day (and every day!) they will have many opportunities to “play” with and use words to tell us all about what they think and know about their world!”

Sequence of Study

Session 1: Vocabulary as a Pathway to Literacy

Lectures:

- Why does vocabulary matter?
- How does vocabulary knowledge develop?

Readings:

- Collins, M. (2012). Sagacious, sophisticated, and sedulous: The importance of discussing 50-cent words with preschoolers. *Young Children*, 67(5), 66--71.
- Juel, C. (n.d.) Keys to early reading success: Word recognition and meaning vocabulary. Glendale, IL: Pearson Education.
- Wasik, B. & Iannone-Campbell, C. (2012). Developing vocabulary through purposeful, strategic conversation. *The Reading Teacher* 66(2), 321--332.

Video:

- Build Background (Odd Squad) | PBS Teaching Tips

Session 2: Changing the Ways We Teach Vocabulary

Lectures:

- Do Common Vocabulary Teaching Practices Align with What We Know About How Children Learn Words?
- What Should Teachers Do to Teach Vocabulary? Begin with Developing Word Consciousness!

Readings:

- Christ, T., & Wang, S. C. (2010). Bridging the Vocabulary Gap: What the Research Tells Us about Vocabulary Instruction in Early Childhood. *Young Children*, 65(4), 84–91.
- Lane, H. B., & Allen, S. A. (2010). The Vocabulary–Rich Classroom: Modeling Sophisticated Word Use to Promote Word Consciousness and Vocabulary Growth. *The Reading Teacher*, 63(5), 362–370.

Video:

- Use Key Vocabulary | PBS Teaching Tips

Session 3: Reading Books in Ways that Support Word Learning

Lectures:

- How do children learn words from books?
- What book sharing routines support word learning?

Readings:

- McGee, L. M., & Schickedanz, J. A. (2007). Repeated interactive reading in preschool and kindergarten. *The Reading Teacher*, 60(8), 742–751.
- Pollard–Durodola, S. D., Gonzalez, J. E., Simmons, D. C., Davis, M. J., Simmons, L., & Nava–Walichowski, M. (2011). Using Knowledge Networks to Develop Preschoolers’ Content Vocabulary. *The Reading Teacher*, 65(4), 265–274.
- Snell, E. K., Hindman, A. H., & Wasik, B. A. (2015). How can book reading close the word gap? Five key practices from research. *The Reading Teacher*, 68(7), 560–571.

Video:

- Read Together to Build Concept Knowledge | PBS Teaching Tips Animal Adaptations
- Read Together to Deepen Concept Knowledge | PBS Teaching Tips Energy & Motion

Session 4: Teaching Specific Words

Lectures:

- Teaching Specific Words: Which Ones and How Many?
- Teaching Specific Words: Implementing Effective Instructional Strategies

Readings:

- Blachowicz, C. L. S., Baumann, J. F., Manyak, P. C., & Graves, M. F. (2013). Flood, fast, focus: Integrated voices in the classroom. In K. Wood, J. R. Paratore, R. McCormack, B. Kissal (Eds.), *What’s new in literacy teaching*. Newark, DE: International Literacy Association.
- Graves, M. F., Baumann, J. F., Blachowicz, C. L. A., Manyak, P., Bates, A., Cieply, C., Davis, J. R., & Von Gunten, H. (2013). Words, words, everywhere are words, but which ones do we teach? *The Reading Teacher*, 67(5), 333–346.

Video:

- Watch Together to Build Concept Knowledge | PBS Teaching Tips Energy & Motion
- Demonstrate to Inspire Curiosity | PBS Teaching Tips Energy & Motion

Session 5: Independent Word Learning Strategies

Lectures

- Growing Vocabulary: Why Are Independent Word Learning Strategies Important?
- Teaching Vocabulary: Putting It All Together

Readings:

- Baumann, J. F., Ware, D., & Carr Edwards, E. (2007). "Bumping into spicy, tasty words that catch your tongue": A formative experiment on vocabulary instruction. *The Reading Teacher*, 61(2), 108--122.
- Byington, T. A., & Kim, Y. (2017). Jumpstarting preschoolers' emergent literacy: The entomologist tool kit. *The Reading Teacher*, 70(5), 601--604.
- Graves, M. F., Schneider, S. & Ringstaff, C. (2017). Empowering Students with Word--Learning Strategies: Teach a Child to Fish. *The Reading Teacher*, 0(0), 1-- 11. doi:10.1002/trtr.1644

Video:

- Classroom Program 9. Investigating Word Meaning | Annenberg Learner

Session 6: Assessing Children's Vocabulary Knowledge: Are My Students Learning and Growing?

Lectures:

- Assessing Children's Vocabulary Knowledge: Are My Students Learning and Growing?

Readings:

- Dougherty Stahl, K. A., & Bravo, M. A. (2010). Contemporary classroom vocabulary assessment for content areas. *The Reading Teacher*, 63(7), 566--578.

Video:

- Watch Together to Build Concept Knowledge | Energy & Motion
- Connect Home and School | Energy & Motion