

# DOINGWHATWORKS



## Presentation

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

### Explicit Vocabulary Instruction for English Learners

Stoughton High School, Massachusetts • February 2009

Topic: Adolescent Literacy

Practice: Vocabulary Instruction

#### Highlights

- Stoughton High School formed a class specifically for English language learners and brought in the school's reading specialist to work closely with the ELL teacher and provide an intensive supplemental reading class to meet the literacy needs of this group.
- Jill MacKay, the reading specialist, uses explicit, direct instruction focused on developing vocabulary skills and provides students with multiple exposures to new vocabulary words.
- For this lesson, Jill chose a book relevant to the backgrounds and experiences of this multicultural group, selected vocabulary words from the book that would be unfamiliar to students, and prepared visual aids to support the learning of word meanings.
- Vocabulary instruction is scaffolded starting with the teacher defining and explaining the meaning of new words and building on students' prior knowledge through class discussion, moving on to the teacher modeling strategies for determining meaning and using words in context.

## About the Site

Stoughton High School

Stoughton, MA

### Demographics

79% White

14% Black

3% Hispanic

4% Asian

19% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

2% English Language Learners

12% Special Education

Stoughton High School staff work collaboratively to improve students' reading skills and support reading instruction across the content areas. Features of the high school reading program include:

- A schoolwide approach to literacy intervention,
- Explicit vocabulary and reading comprehension instruction across content areas,
- ELL program designed to help students improve their comprehension and vocabulary skills,
- Comprehensive assessment program,
- Benchmarking approach to ensure consistent improvement in classroom and district testing across grade levels,
- Screening practices, diagnostic tests, and a data-driven process for identifying student needs and interventions,
- Ongoing involvement of special needs and reading teachers throughout the assessment process, and
- Intervention options of different intensity levels to facilitate individualized instruction for struggling students.

## Full Transcript

Presentation Title: Explicit Vocabulary Instruction for English Learners

Slide 1

Welcome to Explicit Vocabulary Instruction for English Learners.

Slide 2

My name is Jill MacKay, I am a high school reading specialist at Stoughton High School.

Slide 3

When I first came here as a reading specialist, there were ELL students in my regular reading classes, but we found that that kind of assistance was not particularly helpful to them. They needed more direct, explicit instruction. So last year, we formed a class specifically for ELL students. I do work closely with the ELL teacher to monitor their progress both in their ELL classes and in my class.

Slide 4

An intervention that I give is explicit, direct instruction; I take vocabulary right from the text that I know that they will be using and pre-teach that vocabulary. I also will give them background knowledge on a particular text if I feel that they will not have that due to where they are from. The intensity of the intervention is pretty high, mostly because the ELL students that I work with are at low levels.

Slide 5

I did a vocabulary lesson on the open-ended vignettes of *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros. My goals were for the students to be able to define the vocabulary, for the students to be able to orally read the vocabulary and the definitions accurately, and to use the vocabulary in sentences.

Slide 6

I started my lesson by reviewing vocabulary that I had introduced to the students. I had them copy the words down in their notebooks. I pronounced each of the words for them and read the definitions to them. I would ask questions of the students. Students would volunteer information about what they knew about that particular term already.

Slide 7

I chose this book because it is a book about a Mexican-American girl who feels like she does not fit in where she is, and a lot of my students feel that way about being here in America. It is written at a level that I believe most of them will be able to understand, particularly with my help.

### Slide 8

In selecting the vocabulary words, I've become familiar with words that seem common to me but are not common to my ELL students, and so I chose words such as laundromat. And when I initially introduced that word to them, they said, "Well, we don't call it laundromat. We just call it laundry." And I said, "Well, now in this book they call it laundromat, so you need to know what that word is."

### Slide 9

I then had students use those words in sentences, and I asked the students to try not to use the definition or parts of the definition in the sentences and to make the sentences clear enough so that if it's someone else who would read the sentence, they would be able to understand what the definition was without knowing what the definition meant.

### Slide 10

I've showed students pictures of the vocabulary words. For instance, one of the vocabulary words was the word 'nun,' and I showed students pictures of nuns, and I asked students, "what is this picture of?" And they would look at the vocabulary words on the board and pick out the right vocabulary word that went with the particular picture. I find that with ELL students, in particular, you cannot just speak to the students. You cannot just deliver information orally to them. They need a visual.

### Slide 11

I try to give students everything, either writing it on the board or giving them handouts or demonstrating for them so that it's not just me speaking to them.

### Slide 12

It's explicit instruction that starts off with a lot of modeling from me but then is scaffolded off to the students.

### Slide 13

To learn more about Explicit Vocabulary Instruction for English Learners, please explore the additional resources on the Doing What Works website.