VOCABULARY CONCEPTS

Construct Progression

**DOMAIN:** LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNICATION

**CLAIM:** Students can acquire and integrate vocabulary, concepts, and the structure of language in increasingly complex ways.
Domain: Language Development and Communication  
Construct: Vocabulary Concepts

**Background Information**

The purpose of this progression is to assess children's conceptual understanding and use of vocabulary, specifically the knowledge that words represent concepts, are related to one another, and can be used to understand other words and communicate meaning clearly. The progression aims to assess children's knowledge of words that are school-related (i.e., words learned during instruction or through school interactions) and not words that children come to school already knowing). The skills in this progression can be demonstrated via spoken or written language or through other means such as drawing.

It is important for teachers to assess vocabulary from a young age because vocabulary is critical to reading comprehension and success in school. Vocabulary skills are also typically reflected in state K – 3 standards. For example:

- Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases
- Explore word relationships and nuances in word meanings
- Use affixes as a clue to the meaning of a word
- Distinguish shades of meaning among words

**Rationale**

Research in the field of vocabulary development informs us that a child’s knowledge of words’ meanings impacts their reading comprehension and future academic success (Chall, Jacobs, & Baldwin 1990). Vocabulary development is particularly critical among English Language Learners as “English language learners (ELLs) who experience slow vocabulary development are less able to comprehend text at grade level than their English-only peers [...] and are at risk of being diagnosed as learning disabled (Christ & Wang 2010). Additionally, we recognize that focusing on the improvement of vocabulary development advances educational equity because “a well-developed vocabulary correlates with greater reading comprehension and general academic success” (2010).

The development of this construct emphasizes the use of “vocabulary needed in school” and asserts that “given enough time and purposeful instruction,” word learning can occur for “all students across academic domains.” The claim also highlights the importance of the conceptual understanding behind the learning of vocabulary rather than the acquisition of specific words. We chose to use the term “school-related” vocabulary versus strictly “academic” vocabulary in order to include words that are necessary for school but might not be related to a specific discipline. Additionally, the claim is clear about this progression emphasizing words that are taught and not words that children come to school already knowing. Our hope is that by focusing on school-related vocabulary, the disparity between language exposure outside of the school environment is minimized.
## Domain: Language Development and Communication

### Construct: Vocabulary Concepts

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| Children understand that a word carries meaning within specific contexts. | A. Connects a word to its related concept | Child identifies the name label for a concept (e.g., an object, symbol, idea, action, event, emotion) or indicates the object when a name label is provided. | Raley drops his fork on the ground and says, "I dropped my fork."  
Ten minutes before lunch time, Anoki asks, "Is it lunch time yet? I am hungry."  
When asked to get the stapler, Jessica goes to the writing area and picks up the stapler. |

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| B. Uses school-related words appropriately in one or more contexts | Child uses a school-related word within one or more contexts. | During a social studies activity about maps, Hassan draws a map of his bedroom and labels it "Map of Hassan's room."  
When learning about the solar system in science, Elena says, "The sun is part of the solar system."  
During a lesson on sea species, Miguel says, “Liones marinos are my favorite ocean mammal.”  
Note: While this skill involves using a word in one or more contexts, we've only included one context in our examples because of the difficulty of observing word usage in multiple contexts in one day. |

| Children understand that they can use many words that are closely related in meaning to describe the same concept. | C. Uses multiple words that are closely related in meaning to describe a single school-related concept | Child uses multiple words that are closely related in meaning to describe a single school-related concept. | When learning about the arctic, Kendra describes it as cold, snowy, icy, and frozen.  
Malik learns about the way things feel (consistency) in the science center while making gak. The teacher says, "The gak is sticky, isn't it? "Malik says, "Yes, it's gummy and gooey."  
Tam draws a picture of a dog and shows it to the teacher. The teacher says, "Tell me about your picture." Tam says, "It's a dog. This is my new Dalmatian puppy." |

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<td>Children understand that the same school-related word has multiple meanings depending on the context.</td>
<td>D. Determines the appropriate meanings of <em>multiple-meaning words</em> by using context</td>
<td>Child uses context to determine the meaning of a word that has more than one meaning.</td>
<td>When the teacher says, &quot;We are going to talk about things that <em>sink</em> and things that float,&quot; Mikayla walks over to a tub of water in the science center that has corks, feathers, pennies, etc. next to it rather than to the classroom <em>sink</em>.</td>
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<td>E. Uses at least two meanings of <em>multiple-meaning words</em></td>
<td>Child uses at least two meanings of a <em>multiple-meaning word</em>.</td>
<td>When reading a book about animals, Alejandro says, &quot;<em>Dogs bark</em> and cats meow.&quot; Later, when on a nature walk, Alejandro says, &quot;The <em>bark</em> on this tree is really rough.&quot; While playing in the writing center, Sosha says, &quot;I'm writing a <em>letter</em> to my mom.&quot; The teacher asks, &quot;What is another way to use the word 'letter'?” Sosha replies, &quot;My name starts with the letter 'S'.&quot; During a discussion about the Post Office, Pilar says, &quot;You have to put a <em>stamp</em> on a letter to mail it.” Teacher reminds Pilar about <em>multiple-meaning words</em> and asks her to say a sentence that uses a different meaning of the word <em>stamp</em>. Pilar says, &quot;I use rubber stamps in art to make pictures!&quot;</td>
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<td>Children understand the meaning of a school-related word is related to other words with similar meanings, roots, or affixes regardless of</td>
<td>F. Determines the meanings of <em>unfamiliar words</em> by using known words and knowledge of word structure (e.g., roots, affixes, compound words)</td>
<td>Child uses known words and knowledge of word structure (e.g., roots, affixes, compound words) to develop a reasonable definition of an unfamiliar word.</td>
<td>During a unit on weather, Derik sees the word <em>snowmobile</em> on a picture card. When the teacher asks what a <em>snowmobile</em> is, Derik says, &quot;Snow is cold white rain in the winter and a <em>mobile</em> is like my car, so I think it's a car for driving in the snow!&quot; When playing in the dramatic play area, the teacher asks Sangeeta, &quot;Why don't you <em>undo</em> the doll's hair?&quot; Looking puzzled, Sangeeta asks, &quot;What does <em>undo</em> mean?” Teacher reminds Sangeeta that she can use...</td>
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| Understanding context. | the meanings of the parts of the word to figure out what the word means. Sangeeta replies, "Do means to fix her hair and her hair is braided. Does undo mean to take the braid out?"
| | After Juan writes his/her name on the board in very small letters, teacher asks him to rewrite his name so everyone can read it. Juan then asks the teacher, "Re means to do again. Do you want me to write my name again?"
| | Children understand that words and phrases can have a literal and non-literal meaning. G. Recognizes both literal meanings and non-literal meanings (e.g., language that is nuanced, more precise or descriptive, has shades of meaning) of words and phrases | Child recognizes the literal and nonliteral meanings of a word or phrase. A child fans herself and says, "I'm melting." Latoya replies, "Me too. It's so hot today!"
| | | Renee acts out the words said and whispered and then identifies whispered as the more precise word.
| | | When Xochitl asks to use the bathroom, the teacher says, "Yes, but you have to be quiet. They are taking a test in the next room." Xochitl responds, "Okay, I will be as quiet as a mouse."
| | | When provided with a story, Becca edits the story as by replacing the word big with the word gigantic and replacing the word laugh with the word giggle.
RESOURCES


