

Professional Development in Academic Vocabulary for Eighth-Grade Teachers of American History

Frequently Asked Questions

Overview of the Study

A. What is the purpose of the proposed U.S. Department of Education funded study?

1. **Academic vocabulary** consists of words that are primarily used in academic disciplines (science, history, geography, mathematics, literary analysis, etc.) and is sometimes called the formal language of schools. The ELA Common Core State Standards stress academic vocabulary and language across the grade spans. Researchers and curriculum developers have been working on innovative methods to teach both academic vocabulary and content material in science, history, and mathematics to English learners.
2. The purpose of the proposed study is to improve academic vocabulary instruction of eighth-grade social studies teachers of American history by means of a professional development program called *Teacher Study Group (TSG) in Vocabulary*. These techniques are useful for both teaching academic vocabulary that cuts across the disciplines (e.g., words like conflict, equilibrium, advocate) and words that are more or less unique to a discipline such as American history.
3. The study will be conducted during the 2015-16 school year, 2016-17 school year, and 2017-18 school year. During each school year, different schools will be participating in the study.

B. Who is eligible to participate?

1. We need a minimum two schools from each district.

C. What are the benefits of participating in the proposed study?

1. Two recent large-scale field trials on the use of the *Teacher Study Group in Vocabulary* indicate significant positive benefits for teachers' working knowledge of effective vocabulary instruction, their teaching practice, and their students' vocabulary outcomes (Gersten, Dimino, Jayanthi, Kim, Santoro, 2010; Jayanthi, Dimino, Gersten, Taylor, Hammond & Newman-Gonchar (in preparation).
2. All teachers and facilitators will receive a copy of the book, *Learning How to Improve Vocabulary Instruction through Teacher Study Groups* (Dimino & Taylor, 2009).
3. Teachers participating in the *TSG* professional development program will acquire lesson plans to teach academic vocabulary words that incorporate research-based principles.
4. All participating schools will receive one-year institutional membership to National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS).

D. How will the study work?

1. Participating schools will be randomly assigned to the Experimental condition (teachers participate in the *Teacher Study Groups*) or the Control condition (teachers do not participate in the *Teacher Study Groups*).
2. Students (with parental consent to participate in the study) will be administered reading assessments. The research team will administer these assessments.
3. *All* participating teachers will receive a remuneration of \$500.00 for their participation.

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Specifics About The Professional Development Program And The Study

A. What is the *Teacher Study Group in Academic Vocabulary* program?

1. The *Teacher Study Group in Academic Vocabulary* program is a concentrated professional development effort designed to build teachers' working knowledge of research-based academic vocabulary instruction, improve their teaching practice, and increase their students' achievement in academic vocabulary.
2. The *TSG* program is outlined in the book, *Learning How to Improve Vocabulary Instruction through Teacher Study Groups* (Dimino & Taylor, 2009).

B. What happens in a *Teacher Study Group*?

1. Eighth-grade teachers will meet twice a month for 75 minutes at their school site with a facilitator at a time that is convenient to them.
2. During each session, a five-phase process is used to collaboratively work on building practical working knowledge of evidence-based practices in teaching academic vocabulary to eighth-grade students. The five-phase process entails: (1) *Debrief*, (2) *Discuss the Focus Research Concept*, (3) *Compare the Focus Research Concept with Practice*, (4) *Plan Collaboratively lessons for teaching academic vocabulary*, and (5) *Assignment for Classroom Instruction*.

C. What happens if a school is randomly assigned to the *Experimental group (TSG group)*? What are the expectations for teachers in *Experimental schools*?

1. Eighth grade teachers **will attend** ten 75-minute *TSG* sessions in academic vocabulary held at the school site.

D. What happens if a school is randomly assigned to the *Control group* rather than the *TSG group*? What are the expectations for teachers in the *Control schools*?

1. Teachers will **not participate** in the 10 *TSG* sessions in academic vocabulary.

E. What else do ALL teachers in the study (i.e., both teachers in the *Experimental* and *Control schools*) have to do?

1. Teachers must sign an informed consent.
2. Teachers must complete one survey in Fall 2016 and one survey in Spring 2017.
3. Teachers will complete a brief survey (monthly) on professional development activities they attended and academic vocabulary they taught in their classes.
4. Teachers will be observed teaching one American History class in the fall and two in the spring.
5. The *TSG* professional development sessions will be audio taped to help the research team refine the process.
6. Teachers will provide final grades in American History for their students.
7. Teachers will allow for the administration of student tests in Fall 2016 and Spring 2017.
8. Teachers will assist in distributing parental consent forms to their students.

F. What is expected from each school/school district?

1. School and participating student demographic data will be collected from the school database (e.g., EL status, free and reduced lunch, AYP status, ethnicity).
2. Schools/school districts will assist in identifying the facilitator (a member of the school's staff, excluding eighth-grade teachers or a district office employee) to lead the 10 *Teacher Study Group* sessions at each school. The facilitator will receive \$750 dollars remuneration.

G. How will confidentiality of student, teacher, school, and school district information be maintained?

1. Data will not be reported at the individual level. All information gathered will be aggregated as experimental and control group data (e.g., teachers in control condition did...).
2. Teacher, student, school, and school district names will not be identified or released in any of our reports.