



Semantic Feature Analysis: Classroom Applications (Reading Aids Series)

By Susan D. Pittelman, Roberta L. Berglund, Joan E. Heimlich

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The human mind categorizes information in memory so it can be easily retrieved. By capitalizing on this process, students are helped to learn by semantic feature analysis. The authors relate classroom applications through sample lessons to illustrate the breadth of successful applications.

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Editorial Review

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From Chapter 1

Semantic feature analysis (SFA) is an instructional strategy that capitalizes on the way information is stored by category in memory. The strategy has been used effectively in a wide variety of classroom situations, in school reading programs as well as in most other curricular areas. A versatile tool for vocabulary development, it can be used to extend, refine, and reinforce vocabulary in the content areas.

The SFA procedure requires students to draw on their background knowledge to understand the ways in which words within a category are alike or different. The features of these words are recorded in a matrix or grid, which makes the relationships among them readily apparent. This process leads students to an awareness of and an appreciation for the uniqueness of each word.

In this volume, we present a comprehensive introduction to this semantic-based classification strategy, along with detailed descriptions of eight classroom applications. A theoretical rationale for the strategy's effectiveness and a brief review of research findings are included.

The Role of Word Knowledge in Reading Comprehension Educators have recognized the importance of word knowledge in reading comprehension since at least the 1920s; Pressey & Pressey, 1921). Davis (1944) performed a noted study in which word knowledge was shown to be the most important factor in reading comprehension. This finding was reaffirmed in the 1970s by Thorndike (1971) and by Spearritt (1972). Research in the 1980s confirms that vocabulary knowledge is critical for reading comprehension (Barrett & Graves, 1981; Hayes & Tierney, 1982; Johnson, Toms-Bronowski, & Buss, 1983; Mezynski, 1983; Nagy & Herman, 1987).

The emphasis on imparting new word knowledge as part of reading instruction is based in large part on the understanding that "comprehension is building bridges between the new and the known." (Pearson & Johnson, 1978, p. 24). The relationship between prior knowledge and reading comprehension is among the most important issues in reading research. Research suggests that background knowledge about a topic, particularly understanding of key vocabulary, predicts text comprehension better than does any measure of reading ability or achievement (Johnson, 1984; Johnston & Pearson, 1982). Simply put, the more readers know about the topic to be covered, the more likely they are to understand new material about the topic.

Comprehension no longer is viewed as simply deriving meaning from the printed page; it is seen as an interactive operation in which students process text information by integrating the knowledge and experiences stored in their memories with the words on the printed page (Anderson et al., 1985; Durkin, 1981; Pearson, 1984). Interaction between the reader and the text is a central aspect of the comprehension process. Reading must extend beyond the decoding of words and the literal level of understanding. Readers must take a more "active-constructive" role in comprehending (Pearson, 1985). Comprehension is enhanced when readers have a personal response to text based on their prior knowledge, the information suggested by the written language, and the context of the reading situation (Cook, 1986). If new concepts are to be learned, they must be related to concepts already mastered.

1. An Introduction to Semantic Feature Analysis
The Role of Word Knowledge in Reading Comprehension
Semantic-Based Instructional Strategies
Overview of the Semantic Feature Analysis Process
The Effectiveness of Semantic Feature Analysis

2. Semantic

Feature Analysis As an Instructional Strategy The Semantic Feature Analysis Procedure 3. Classroom Applications of Semantic Feature Analysis Content Area SFA Lessons Reading Instruction SFA Lesson Integrated Reading/Writing SFA Lesson A Semantic Feature Database Lesson

A Final Word References Suggested Readings on Semantic Feature Analysis

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