

Semantic Feature Analysis as Vocabulary Intervention

You are the ESOL teacher supporting a social studies teacher’s fifth-grade lesson, focused on branches of government. To help students tie this information to prior knowledge, you pull a small group of intermediate and advanced English learners who have experienced challenges with prior concepts and vocabulary, and have them complete a semantic features chart comparing several branches of the federal government. You note the students’ cultural backgrounds, including ethnicities, beliefs, families, and communities, and consider ways in which students’ own unique perspectives might influence their perception of American government. You have students work together to determine which concepts or “features” apply to which branches (see example following), providing individualized support to make sure students understand the language used in the chart as they work to analyze concepts and features. The social studies teacher comments that students’ command of the content is far stronger in this unit than in previous ones, so you decide to implement semantic feature analysis with this small group each week as new concepts are introduced. You deliver semantic feature–related instruction for 30 minutes each week, focusing on academic language and new vocabulary concepts, and you keep data on how students perform during the 30 minutes of instruction and how they do on the weekly classroom assessments. You meet with the grade-level team every 2 weeks to review this data and determine how effective this new approach is.

Sample Semantic Feature Analysis Chart

	Executive	Legislative	Judicial	Elected by the People	Elected by Electors	Appointed
President						
Executive Agencies						
Senate						
House of Representatives						
Supreme Court						
Lower Courts						