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## Teaching Vocabulary To Ninth Grade Students From Context

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TEACHING VOCABULARY TO NINTH GRADE STUDENTS FROM CONTEXT

By

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Education.

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Introduction**

My life experiences have shaped who I am and how I see the world. I have had teachers who saw me as another one of “those” students and I have had teachers who have seen me as a person. As an educator, I can reflect on those teachers and use my experiences to shape the experiences of my students. It is important for students to be confident in their reading and writing to become successful in school. That is why I need to ask, *How can I improve my ninth grade students’ ability to understand new vocabulary from context in their English class?*

I started college in the Fall of 1998, excited and anxious to start my life, wanting to be on the radio and to play football. Playing football at the collegiate level is an interesting experience. I was at a small school in Southwestern Minnesota, playing with people from all over the country. I started to realize then that not all educational systems were created equal. In other interactions in my life before college, people had similar educational experiences to me. They had been exposed to the same basic ideologies and essentially learned the same curriculum. I had always been on a level playing field academically.

This new experience was different, as my peers from the Southern states and from out West did not have the same educational advantages that I had experienced. Players from urban and rural areas had little in common socially, but academically they shared many similarities. I began to help my fellow teammates with their writing and English assignments, even though I had little experience in those topics myself. I did realize that I could infer meaning from texts easier than they could and my writing was superior to their writing, too. I was not smarter than my friends, but I had more refined skills than they did.

As I moved through college, my interests evolved. I was not as worried about football or becoming the next Howard Stern, instead I became a communicator. I started focusing on the best way to convey a message to an audience. Without knowing, I was slowly becoming an educator. Teaching new skills to one teammate at a time, I was changing how they read literature and wrote papers. Many times the largest obstacle that kept holding up the learning of these young men was vocabulary. Men that could run through tackles and lift hundreds of pounds, were giving up and stopping due to one word on a page. A singular word would send them to their dictionaries. I still witness the same proclivity to giving up when my students run into an unknown word. This is why I am asking, *How can I improve my ninth grade students' ability to understand new vocabulary from context in their English class?*

### **Author's Background**

I grew up in a Minneapolis suburb, attending a small suburban school and learned the things that many suburban students learn, a liberal arts-esque education at the high school level. Like many of my high school friends, I was naive to the academic struggles going on only a few miles away from where I lived. I went to college and started seeing little glimpses of the “real”



world. I did not like school, for to me it was tedious and overrated, a means to an end. That all changed when I started seeing my teammates struggle and drop out of college.

After college I had the opportunity to work in Japan teaching English. I worked for a company that provided conversational English lessons to people wanting to travel or just want to use English regularly. Due to the fact that it was a business and not a school, my students were diverse in age. My youngest student was two years old and my oldest was 94. I used a wide variety of techniques to teach the students, but the one thing that we really focused on was vocabulary. I started to realize that vocabulary was the key to receiving a message. If a person lacks the skill to use that key, the message is lost and remains locked.

I grew up reading. My parents always gave me books for my birthday and Christmas. As a high school student I was reading one or two books a week. My favorite author was Stephen King. My mother had almost all of his books, so I would read into the wee hours of the night, sometimes missing the bus in the morning because I slept through my alarm. My friends did not have the same experience that I had. My best friend, Lenny, had a TV in his room and watched it constantly. When a new word came up in our lessons, I was able to infer the meaning from the context of the story, but Lenny had to look the word up. Years later, I realized that I had acquired and refined a skill set that Lenny never had the chance to build. I had the ability to infer meaning from a text while Lenny was not able to infer the meaning from a text. I was not smarter than Lenny, but I had access to more literature than he did. I do not believe that my vocabulary skills were inherent to me, rather I think that the introduction of literature to my childhood helped me develop my skills faster and easier than my friend.

The skill of understanding words from context is important to communication. Being able to break down an author's intent even if there are unrecognizable vocabulary is a skill that many people and students are missing. When I first started teaching, I was hired to teach an after school credit recovery program. The students needed to make up a ninth grade or tenth grade English credit and they were enrolled into my program. They were not unintelligent students, in fact, most were very smart. They just lacked the motivation to do well in class. One student in particular was very bright and loved vocabulary. I would spend my lesson using "big" words, testing his knowledge and trying to stump him. However, his ability to learn words from context was limited. If a word was used that he did not know, he would take out his dictionary and look it up, missing valuable pieces of the lesson in the process. He enjoyed the daily challenge I laid out for him and little by little I taught him to put the dictionary down and to focus on the words around the unknown word.

I have been fortunate to have parents and teachers who valued the importance of teaching vocabulary skills, not just spelling. I see this problem in my school now, as students are not given the support they need to build vocabulary skills.

### **Reading Scores of Students of Color**

Reading scores for Minnesota students of color have been steadily dropping in the past five years, according to the Minnesota Department of Education website. One domain of the drop in reading score is the lack of vocabulary skills. In my opinion, many students are unable to even make an educated guess at words they see on the test. I have seen students become frustrated due to their lack of skills and give up. The students become so frustrated that I have seen them leave an entire test incomplete or just fill in random answers. Watching these practices

made me reflect on how the students were learning and how I could help build their vocabulary more effectively.

I administered a Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) test last year. The MAP test is a computer based skills test that adapts the assessment to the student's skill level as the test is being administered. It can measure a student's reading, language usage, and/or mathematics skill level. (NWEA, 2011). During the MAP test, I witnessed many students give in to their frustration and literally randomly pick answer after answer. I realize that this example may shed light on many other issues in our school system. However, in my opinion when building a student's skill level in processing new vocabulary from context, many of these issues will not affect the student's test result.

### **Professional Learning Community's War on Words**

When I started teaching, my school had just introduced the Professional Learning Community (PLC) model into the school. All of the teachers from each course would meet two days a week to discuss curriculum of the course. We also used PLC time to discuss data we had collected on formative and summative assessments in our separate classes. I had been hired to teach 9th grade English. One of my 9th grade sections was a supported course, where struggling readers were placed. As a PLC, my 9th grade teaching colleagues and I designed vocabulary lessons that would, in theory, build vocabulary skills.

To build their vocabulary and increase their skills in defining new vocabulary from context, we choose up to six challenging words from each section of a novel. The students would then read a summary of the section where the challenging words had been used with built in context clues. Each student would circle the context clues that we had written into the summary

and infer meaning from their educated guesses. After these two steps, each student would find the dictionary meaning for each word and write a sentence using the word correctly. The activity is set up nicely, but it is a bit like asking the students to present skills that they don't possess. Students that were struggling with the "Finding Meaning" section, skip forward to the dictionary section of the worksheet. Overall, the activity was well intentioned, but lacked the ability to work on the true problem of building vocabulary skills.

I know that we, as a PLC, are missing a step. The students need access to this vocabulary skill set and other ways to learn vocabulary from context. We need to put up a stronger front on this war on words. The problem is building a curriculum that supports the skill set and also fits the other standards expected of 9th grade English teachers.

### **Summary**

There are many barriers that are making it hard for students to be successful in our world. Some of the issues have been around for decades, while others have just arrived. Teaching a person the skills to deduce new words from context will not only give them the power to communicate with other more effectively, but it will also help build confidence in themselves. I believe that approaching the solution to this issue by building skills will make students stronger academically, and will provide them opportunities they may not have had before. In the end, the strategies that are being used in my school are not building vocabulary skills fast enough or with enough of the student population.

### **Introduction to Chapter Two**

Chapter Two will explore the my research into answering my research question, *How can I improve my ninth grade students' ability to understand new vocabulary from context?* I will

focus on research that will guide me in using effective strategies to build vocabulary skills. First, the paper will look at the history of vocabulary education and how people learn new words. Secondly, the paper will address how vocabulary is taught in modern schools. Third, I will research the importance of understanding vocabulary from context. Fourth, I will look at assessment tools that measure vocabulary from context growth. I will look at the effectiveness of the assessment tools in diverse schools. I need to be able to measure how well the students are reacting to each strategy that is used in the classroom. Fifth, I will show and discuss the theory behind teaching vocabulary from context skills to students. Understanding the theory of vocabulary education will help me create strategies to build an effective curriculum. Sixth, I will review and assess different types of vocabulary skill building curriculum. By studying many types of curriculum, I will be able to create a differentiated curriculum to help my students build the vocabulary skills necessary to be more successful readers and in school.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Effective vocabulary acquisition is important to the success of students. I reviewed sources that addressed the question, *How can I improve my ninth grade students' ability to understand new vocabulary from context in their English class?* I approached this question from six directions. First, the paper examines how people learn vocabulary and the history of vocabulary acquisition. Looking at the intentionality of teaching vocabulary to students and how teaching vocabulary has been taught in the past.

Secondly, I studied how vocabulary is taught in schools today. The paper explores who receives specialized vocabulary lessons, how the vocabulary lessons are taught, and if the lessons are effective.

Third, the paper addresses the importance of learning vocabulary from context, as opposed to vocabulary memorization methods. Teaching students the skill set to understand new words from context clues will help them be successful on standardized tests and to improve their communication skills in the future.

Fourth, I show the most effective ways to measure student growth in the skill set of understanding new words from context. To see where a person is going, an educator needs to find out where they have been. This section examines different types of assessments and their effectiveness for ninth grade students. This research was used to create an assessment to administer to the students to measure their vocabulary acquisition.

Fifth, the paper discusses the theory and background of vocabulary pedagogy and what the most effective way to teach vocabulary to 9th grade students. By looking at former research, I gained an understanding of what strategies of learning vocabulary from context reached the students the best. Learning from former studies gave me an opportunity to build on the others' research.

Finally, I researched different strategies for teaching vocabulary skills to students and the effectiveness of the strategies in the classroom. This section helped me create a curriculum that effectively taught ninth graders vocabulary skills in their English class. The curriculum was built using strategies from the resources presented in the paper. Each one offers something that can be incorporated into the new curriculum.

### **The History of Learning Language and Vocabulary Acquisition**

Learning new vocabulary has been apart of every person's life from the first words that were spoken. The common consensus is that vocabulary is a constantly evolving entity. Vocabulary is itself almost like a living thing. So, the question is how and why did educators decide to start to teach vocabulary specifically. Vocabulary is one of the building blocks of language. Learning a new language can be a arduous task and there are many ways that language has been taught throughout the centuries.

The Grammar Translation Method was the first foray into language and vocabulary teaching. The majority of the people that were taught with this method were non-native English speakers (Lai, 2009). The method used the students' basic knowledge base (mainly their native language) as a foundation to build new vocabulary. For most of the 18th century The Grammar Translation method was accepted as the best way to teach new vocabulary (Medina, 1985). Educators would substitute unknown words for words that students already know. Lai (2009) stated one problem with Grammar Translation Method, "...under the (Grammar Translation) method, students tend to be good test takers rather than knowledgeable English-language users" (p. 2). Students were proficient on paper, but lack the flexibility to use new vocabulary on their own. The Grammar Translation Method is still implemented throughout the world and still holds some merit, but there have been more effective strategies created.

Many countries still use and require the use of The Grammar Translation Method when teaching students new languages. A debate is raised when educators use this method when they are teaching in their students' native language. Many scholars believe, as stated before, that the students become proficient in reading and writing the new language, however students lack the skills to produce text in the new language. On the other hand, some students respond well to the teaching style and can actually thrive under the Grammar Translation Methodology.

After many years of learning vocabulary and grammar strictly from re-writing and memorization educators started to ask questions about vocabulary retention and everyday usage. One of the scholars that saw the need for a change in the way students learned vocabulary was Henry Sweet. Sweet used a "practical philology" when teaching, meaning he wanted students to



use what they had learned in their everyday life (as cited in Grenfell, 2002, p. 12). Grenfell (2002) went on to explain,

(Practical philology) lies somewhere between ‘living philology’, which was based on phonetics and psychology, and the ‘practical study of languages’, which meant learning to understand, speak, write, and read a foreign language. In other words, ‘practical philology’ is the area where general linguistic principles are applied to the learning of other languages. (p. 12)

Sweet’s views on learning language were very progressive for his time of the late 19th century. His method of entering the learner into the learning equation changed the way that he approached the learning process. It also changed the way educators started to look at the language learning process.

Sweet used a five step process to teaching language and vocabulary. The language learning process was cyclical and was an ever evolving (Marciniak & Perez-Martinez, 2010, p. 7). The five stage process was based on how a person or student may use language. The stages of his curriculum were; the mechanical stage, the grammatical stage, the archaic stage, the idiomatic stage, and the literary stage (Marciniak & Perez-Martinez, 2010, p.7). Each stage approached a different part of language so that students were able to get a comprehensive education in the language being learned. While Sweet was ahead of the times in his understanding of language learners, his curriculum was still focused primarily on the phonetics and spoken aspects of language.

The next step in language learning theories was the direct method. The direct method, introduced by Sauvuer and Berlitz, was adopted by many language schools in the beginning of

the 20th century (Wisikin, n.d.). The Direct Method requires the student to be totally immersed in the language. No translation of the new words is allowed. For students learning non-native languages, this is an intense and effective way to learn language. The effectiveness of the method can be measured by the success of the co-founder's commercial language schools throughout the world (Wisikin, n.d.). This method is used in many language schools, however the quality of the lesson is totally reliant on the expertise of the educator. If the educator is not proficient in the method, students may become frustrated and try to use their native language to communicate.

My school district has implemented a version of the Direct Method in their elementary schools with Spanish immersion classes. However, this method does not transition very well into the vocabulary acquisition of native speakers learning new vocabulary in their native language. "The preferred type of exercise is a series of questions in the target language based on the dialogue or an anecdotal narrative. Questions are answered in the target language." (Mora, 2017, para. 7). The method stresses the repetition of new words and using those words in an informal manner. While this method seems to be used often to teach new language learners, the overall adoption of this method into the mainstream education system is not likely and would not likely be effective in teaching native speakers new vocabulary.

Another vocabulary and language learning technique is The Reading Method. Unlike the other methods that have been presented, The Reading Method's primary focus was having students read the new language they were studying ("Second and Foreign Language Teaching Methods," 2014). By focusing on reading, the educator was able to build vocabulary quickly. Students were asked to concentrate on reading and basic grammar is taught only to increase the fluency in the students' reading ("Second and Foreign Language Teaching Methods," 2014).

There is also the reemergence of translation in this method to again, increase fluency for the students.

The final method that has had an impact on how vocabulary and language is being taught to students is The Lexical Approach. The Lexical Approach uses chunks of words, or lexical chunks, that are commonly found together to help students find patterns in the text (Islam and Timmis, 2004). Students then find these chunks and are able to learn new words and communicate from the known context Seyyedrezaie and Ziafar (2014) went on to say;

The positive role of lexical chunks has been emphasized by many scholars who maintain that the use of chunks can be considered a good strategy to be employed by language learners to promote their L2 learning. (p. 60)

The Lexical Approach is an effective way to build a student's language ability. On the other hand, like many of the other modern methods, grammar is not stressed in the students' writing or speech.

One bonus to The Lexical Approach is the student's ability to scaffolding their own reading and communication skills in their new language (Maftoon & Ziafar, 2013, p. 61). Students are able to reach higher skill sets due to their memorization of a few lexical chunks. This gives learners the opportunity to learn at a higher level than they currently can reach and increases their ability to learn more lexical chunks.

There are many language and vocabulary strategies that have been used throughout time. Some of the methods have been more effective than others, however in the end educators have used a mixture of many of the methods to be successful in the classroom.

### **Current Vocabulary Acquisition Practices**

How students learn and use vocabulary is vital to their futures. Pikulski and Templeton (2004) stated, “Perhaps the greatest tools we can give students for succeeding, not only in their education but more generally in life, is a large, rich vocabulary and the skills for using those words” (p. 1). How educators approach and build a student’s vocabulary is crucial to the way students see the world. “Our ability to function in today’s complex social and economic worlds is mightily affected by our language skills and word knowledge.” (Pikulski & Templeton, 2004, p. 1). The acquisition of vocabulary is important to the way the students will act in the world and in the future.

Many of the strategies used in schools today are a mixture of the strategies discussed in this paper. However, many educators ponder the question about what vocabulary to teach and what vocabulary to teach to specific groups of students. Sailor (2009) explained a process being used by many schools today, “Response to intervention (RTI) is best understood as a model used to guide efforts to teach (intervention) based on measures of pupil progress (response) and grounded in the idea of prevention” (p. 3). Response to Intervention (RTI) gives educators a tool to help build a foundation for students no matter where the student is starting out. By using an individualized learning plan based off of the students’ skill level, educators are able to support each student in the best way. Loftus and Coyne (2013) went on to say:

...students who start off with higher levels of vocabulary knowledge make greater gains through direct vocabulary instruction than students who start off with lower levels of vocabulary knowledge. Therefore, classroom-based vocabulary instruction does not appear to fully meet the needs of students with low levels of vocabulary knowledge. (p.

8)

Due to the gap in vocabulary knowledge in the classroom, it is important for educators to address the issue by using strategies to support all students. The RTI method is a three-tiered strategy that focuses on students' individual needs in the classroom (Sailor, 2009, p. 4). During Tier 1, students are exposed and taught the general education lesson plan (Harrison, 2015, p. 2). Harrison (2015) argued, "Classroom teachers or instructional assistants conduct Tier 2 interventions. The design of Tier 2 interventions do not supplant Tier 1 instruction, but supplement it. Supplemental instruction supports specific student needs uncovered during Tier 1 instruction and assessment (p. 3). Tier 2 interventions are to support the lesson and scaffold lessons so that students can reach a higher level of learning. Tier 3 interventions are usually done by special education professionals and use intensive monitoring to address each student's specific needs (Harrison, 2015, p. 4). Overall, the RTI strategy uses an individualized plan to reach each student's vocabulary needs. This method is one way to ensure that level of rigor is kept at a high level in the classroom regardless of the vocabulary method an educator is using to teach their students.

### **The Importance of Learning Vocabulary from Context**

Learning how to gather meaning from new words from context is a skill that needs to be developed in our students. This skill is broken down into look at two separate areas. First, defining the term "vocabulary from context." Secondly, the general importance of refining the skill of defining new vocabulary from context.

Heverly (2011) stated that vocabulary lessons in the past and present are not improving the students' vocabulary, but instead confusing the students. "Many could successfully memorize dictionary definitions by the dozens, but I never had the sense that these words actually became

part of the students' lexicons” (Heverly, 2011, p. 98). In the research, students were not learning the words naturally and the new words were not staying with the students in their personal vocabulary. He concluded that students need to learn the vocabulary while the words are being used. This contextual integration is what sears the new words into their lexicons.

To encourage the learning process, a teacher needs to expose students to new vocabulary both verbally and in written forms. Thus, learning “vocabulary from context,” while the new vocabulary is being used correctly and appropriately. Brusinghan and Folk (2012) stated, “incidental vocabulary acquisition plays a prominent role in the comprehension processes of developing readers and adult skilled readers” (Mohamed, 2015, p. 172). They went on to state that skilled readers learn six to twenty-five new words a day and most of the new words learned are from reading. The study does not go into unskilled readers, but there is a need to teach students how to find the meaning of new words from the context of the text in which they are being exposed. In 2009 Elleman, Lindo, Morphy, and Compton stated:

With a deeper understanding of words and expanded vocabulary, children are better able to understand what they read which leads to increases in text exposure. In this way, vocabulary and comprehension have a reciprocal causal relationship as exemplified in Stanovich’s ‘Matthew Effects.’ (p. 3)

Matthew’s Effects refers to the widening of the achievement gap as students learn. Weaker readers fall further behind and stronger readers excel. Building the skills necessary to understand vocabulary from context could help to reduce the vocabulary achievement gap between the races.

With the ever widening achievement gap looming over teachers across the United States, it is important to address the issues that may help close the canyon-esque gap. Toth (2013) said,

“Although fluent reading does support vocabulary development, often by the time this happens, the trajectory that was set as they entered school, be it good or bad, cannot be undone. The gap just grows insurmountable for disadvantaged students” (p. 207). New vocabulary acquisition needs to be supported in the classroom. Teachers need to encourage and challenge students to build their vocabulary as a tool to close the gap between disadvantaged and advantaged students.

To support the learning in the classroom, there must be structural vocabulary activities in place. Intentional versus incidental vocabulary acquisition is one of the issues that is raised when discussing vocabulary curriculum. Incidental acquisition happens by being exposed to new words, but there is no formal support to build the students’ vocabulary, while intentional acquisition has built in curricular support. Baleghizadeh and Shahry (2011) stated that there are two ways to learn vocabulary; intentional and incidental (p. 2). Each is considered to be a reliable method to learn vocabulary; however, each technique has its disadvantages.

Baleghizadeh and Shahry (2011) said, “Having learners guess the meaning of words from context has been found an unreliable approach to vocabulary learning in that learners tend not to have a good sense of the accuracy of their guesses” (p. 3). Although there may be flaws in the incidental learning of new vocabulary, it is an important step to learning to define vocabulary. While Haverly would disagree, Baleghizadeh and Shahry suggested that it is irresponsible to assume students can learn new vocabulary without extra support. Instead they suggested:

...intentional and incidental vocabulary-learning are commonly employed learners’ strategies and that the two are complementary in the sense that learners learn words both by studying specific words and by learning them after encountering them in context.

Therefore, this claim, coupled with the testimony of many language-learners and

teachers, points to the importance of incidental vocabulary-learning as a supplement to overall acquisition of vocabulary. (Baleghizadeh & Shahry, 2011, p. 3)

Having students acquire new vocabulary incidentally is not an effective way to teach students new words, However, both, intentional and incidental, are important to students learning new vocabulary words.

In the same respect, learning new vocabulary only in an intentional manner is not totally effective. Vocabulary gurus Anderson and Nagy (1993) stated, “it is important to realize how inadequate definitions are as the foundation for vocabulary instruction. The unthinking assumption is that knowing a definition is the same thing as knowing a word meaning.” (p. 9). Memorization is not learning. Fisher and Frey (2014) gave an example:

Yet in too many cases, vocabulary instruction is isolated from other aspects of the instructional day, particularly in content area learning. It is far too common to assign students a list of words (usually technical terms) that will be used in a social studies or science unit and then ask them to look up words and write definitions so that they can then compose solitary sentences. (p. 2)

The old-school techniques of assigning dictionary definitions are proving to be insufficient when it comes to vocabulary retention. “...definitions define words using other words. Eventually the circle of words must be broken if meanings are to connect with actions, objects, thoughts, and feelings.” (Anderson & Nagy, 1993, p. 10). Learners need to make connections to retain meaning. Not all intentional vocabulary lessons offer the chance for learners to make connections.

### **Effective Measurement of Student Vocabulary Growth**



Vocabulary has become a point of contention again in our schools due its correlation with reading comprehension (Pearson, Hiebert, & Kamil, 2014). Pearson, Hiebert, and Kamil went on to say, "...vocabulary is a strong predictor of comprehension and the gap in the vocabularies of the "haves" and the "have-nots" is substantial on school entry" (p. 1). Essentially, the debate is different than in the past years. While vocabulary has been taught in the schools, educators are starting to see the true importance of teaching meaningful vocabulary and teaching the skills to build vocabulary knowledge in the students. A student's vocabulary knowledge can be a measurement of how well students will perform in school in the future and how successful they will be financially. Measuring a subject's vocabulary knowledge can be a tricky and exhaustive process. According to Laudauer, Kireyev, and Panaccione (2011):

Other simulations to be described suggest that when and how a word is learned account for most of the difference (in the effectiveness of an assessment). However, it is really the result of all factors, known and unknown, that we want to measure. A measure that accurately captures the developmental course of every individual word for every individual reader, rather than just average levels was the primary goal. (p. 93)

Due to all of these factors, known and unknown, it is difficult to find an accurate measurement in vocabulary knowledge. The consensus is that vocabulary is important to students' growth. Finding an assessment tool to measure multiple aspects of a student's vocabulary knowledge can be difficult.

Edwards, Mauch, and Winkelman (2011) stated, "The MAP tests are state-aligned computerized measures developed by the Northwest Evaluation Association to reflect the instructional level of each student and determine academic progress over time" (p. 68) My plan

will only consist of a semester of curriculum, however the MAP test is given to students starting in the fourth grade through their tenure as a high schooler.

### **Vocabulary Teaching Strategies and the Effectiveness**

Teaching contextual vocabulary strategies at the high school level can be a challenge. For example, just defining “context” is the topic of many journal articles. In one article, Engelbart and Theuerkaf (1999) resolved that there are two types of context in which to learn vocabulary, verbal and nonverbal. Engelbart and Theuerkaf (1999) found that the struggle with learning vocabulary from context comes from three main areas; learning versus retention, single sentence context versus long texts, and the learners prior vocabulary knowledge (p. 68). In general, people learn vocabulary from their surroundings, but the best way to learn has yet to be determined. What has been discovered is that accessing a person’s prior knowledge is an effective way to learn new vocabulary (Engelbart & Theuerkaf, 1999, p. 66). In a diverse school, this may present an issue due to the large differentiation in student experiences.

There are multiple levels of students in each classroom and there are many other variables that can affect learning. Connor, Alberto, Compton, and O’Connor (2014) found that, “By middle and high school years, students are expected to use reading as a tool for learning, finding, and using information. Slow development along any of these dimensions can signal reading difficulties or reading disabilities” (p. 29). During the journey of vocabulary education, it is important to have a good understanding of the students and how they learn. Building a successful curriculum needs to be done with the potential students in mind.

As stated before, vocabulary memorization is a thing of the past. Instead it is imperative for students to learn vocabulary organically, so they can use the vocabulary organically.

Learning vocabulary organically requires students to see the word being used in a text and learning the meaning of the new word from context. Vocabulary is learned in two ways; indirectly and directly (Nelson & Stage, 2007). According to Nelson and Stage (2007), “Indirect vocabulary building pertains to learning words primarily through exposure--through conversations with others, being read to, or reading on one's own” (p. 1). Direct reading is learned from specific instruction. (Nelson & Stage, 2007). While both have their advantages, it is unsure which techniques produces the best results in vocabulary knowledge and retention.

How a student learns is important aspect to learning vocabulary, but a student’s prior knowledge is how a student makes connections to new words. The Newaygo County Regional Educational Service Agency (2004) cites Marzano’s six-step process to teaching vocabulary effectively. Marzano believed that teachers and students should have a symbiotic relationship in the classroom. In his six-step process, Marzano helps educators make the connections for students. The process is fairly simple, yet effective:

1. Provide a description, explanation, or example of the new term.
2. Ask students to restate the description, explanation, or example in their own words.
3. Ask students to construct a picture, symbol, or graphic representing the word.
4. Engage students periodically in activities that help them add to their knowledge of the terms in their notebooks.
5. Periodically ask students to discuss the terms with one another.
6. Involve students periodically in games that allow them to play with terms. (Newaygo County Regional Educational Service Agency, 2004, p. 1)

Marzano suggested building new academic vocabulary off of the students' prior vocabulary knowledge.

The debate over teaching vocabulary in the classroom is alive and well. Many studies have proven either direct or indirect instruction to be more effective. Some studies even suggest that both strategies are equally effective in teaching new vocabulary to students (Webb, 2007). From the evidence that has been provided the best way to teach new vocabulary skills is a mixed approach. Both direct and indirect learning of the vocabulary gives students the ability to learn in a differentiated environment and appeal to different learning styles at the same time.

### **Strategies for Teaching Vocabulary from Context Skills**

Building a student's vocabulary knowledge is a complex endeavor. Students tend to learn and retain vocabulary the best from indirect vocabulary teaching. Indirect teaching gives students a chance to experience new words on their own. The author proposes to teach students the skills to learn words from context more effectively. As stated by Greenwood and Flanigan (2007), "Context clues are very important for broadly comprehending text as well as for specifically learning new words" (para. 4). For students to learn effectively from context strategies, educators need to expose students to many different types of words and how those words relate to each other in a text.

For students to make relations to other words they need to have background knowledge of vocabulary in their current lexicon. Toth struggled with this in a class she was teaching. She states, "...I realized my students didn't have enough background knowledge to build comparison and contrast, so I focused on building connections within the text." (Toth, 2013, 204).

Greenwood and Flanigan (2007) agreed, "...students may 'learn' words as discrete meanings,

but they don't necessarily connect these meanings back to the larger context of the passage." It is the job the of the educator to help students make these connections and slowly build in skills to help students make connections independently. For my research plan, the author will marry the student's' current vocabulary knowledge with tools to define unknown vocabulary.

## **Conclusion**

The research that I conducted answered some of the biggest questions I had at the beginning of this capstone. First, the research showed the ways that vocabulary has been taught throughout the years. My research found six vocabulary methods that are used in education systems. Second, the research showed that there is no magical formula to teaching vocabulary effectively for every student. This leads me to believe that a hybrid of the methods is necessary to teach vocabulary to students. Third, implementing a vocabulary unit is not an effective way to teach vocabulary. The research showed that learning vocabulary is process that is different for each student. A single unit would not give some students enough time to fully learn the necessary vocabulary skills to be successful. Finally, Students need to build skills over time and continue to practice the skills as they learn. The research showed that person's lexicon evolves as they are exposed to new words. By practicing their vocabulary gaining skill set throughout the year, students will grow throughout the year as well.

## **Introduction to Chapter Three**

In Chapter Three, the paper will set out the methodology of the supplementary curriculum. The curriculum that has been created to help students learn the skills to define new vocabulary from context will be described in detail. Chapter Three will contain sample lessons from the unit and how they the lessons will be administered. The paper will describe how the use of a purpose of the different strategies that are implemented in the curriculum. The chapter will also explore why the strategies were chosen and according to research. Finally, Chapter Three will consider the rationale of the curriculum and the overall goal of the supplemental curriculum.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODS**

#### **Introduction**

Ninth grade students are struggling to learn new vocabulary in the Minneapolis area. The students could learn new vocabulary, but they struggled to learn vocabulary on their own. Little by little the author began to realize that they lacked the basic skills necessary to master defining new vocabulary from context.

During the course of chapter three, the author will use the research from chapter two to answer the question, *How can I improve my ninth grade students' ability to understand new vocabulary from context in their English class?* The chapter addresses the setting of the study, the subjects of the study, and the methods used in the study. The chapter also includes examples of the curriculum and a basic unit plan.

#### **Review of Chapter Two**

To start, I researched the importance of understanding vocabulary from context. The paper addressed the history of vocabulary acquisition. Secondly, the paper explored how vocabulary is taught in schools currently. Third, the paper examined how vocabulary is learned and why having strong vocabulary skills is important to a student's success. Fourth, the different assessment tools are used to measure vocabulary from context growth. A tool was needed to measure how well the students were reacting to each strategy that is used in the classroom. So the author created an assessment to measure the growth of the students. Fifth, the paper showed the theory behind teaching vocabulary from context skills to students. Understanding the theory of vocabulary education helped me create strategies to build an effective curriculum. Sixth, the paper explored many different types of vocabulary skills building curriculums. By studying many types of curriculum the author was able to create a differentiated curriculum, to hopefully help the students build the vocabulary skills necessary to be successful in school and in the future.

### **The Curriculum**

The paper introduces a supplemental curriculum that can be implemented in the English classroom. The overall goal is to build vocabulary context skills while continuing with the everyday curriculum. Educators will be able to introduce the supplemental vocabulary curriculum into any unit they teach. The paper suggests the use of a hybrid of curriculum strategies supported by research and semantic gradient activities to implement with students. Semantic gradient activities help student identify new vocabulary words by making connections to their prior knowledge. Greenwood and Flanigan (2007) stated, "Knowledge of a few "anchor words" can aid students in learning the other words along the continuum." (para. 8). Part of the

vocabulary acquisition issue with students is a lack of a strong lexicon. To build the vocabulary knowledge the use of semantic gradient activities, sheltered instruction, and the context building activities already present in the curriculum will support the growth of the students' vocabulary.

### **Setting and Participants**

The research will take place in a suburban school in Minneapolis. It is important to mention that the school's geographic location is on the fringe of the urban area. The population and issues that the schools faces are considered to be more of an urban school. According to Metropolitan State University's website, "urban" is defined by four characteristics. These characteristics are; the school district's proximity to an urban area, at least a thirty-percent population of students of color, at least forty-percent of the student population that qualifies for free and reduced lunches, and at least ten-percent of the student population are English language learners (ELL) ("What is Urban," n.d.). All of these criteria are present in the school where the curriculum will be administered.

The classes in which the curriculum will be administered are the mainstream ninth grade English classes. They consist of a diverse group of students both academically and culturally. According to the Minnesota Department of Education website (2014), the high school where the research will take place is made up of roughly 40% African American students, 33 percent White students, 12 percent Hispanic students, 12 percent Asian and Pacific Islander students, and 2 percent Native American Indian students ("Minnesota Report Card," 2014). Also, 63 percent of the student population receives free or reduced lunches and 14 percent of the student population has been diagnosed with a learning disability or is granted special education services



(“Minnesota Report Card,” 2014). There are between twenty-five and thirty students in each classroom.

### **Procedure**

There is a large focus on vocabulary in most English teachers’ classrooms. As the students read the novels in the class they are constantly exposed to new words. My Professional Learning Community (PLC) already uses roughly twenty-five words per unit on which to test the students. The PLC has created worksheets to help the students build vocabulary skills and to learn the new words. However, the vocabulary words that the PLC has agreed to review are fairly complex and many of the students still struggle with words much less complicated than the choices. The goal is to teach students to make inferences on unknown words so that they can learn new vocabulary on their own and without direct memorization. To accomplish this goal, the curriculum will require implementing weekly exercises to help students build from context vocabulary skills.

Throughout the research process, I was exposed to many different ideas on how to build vocabulary and what skills to teach. Nelson and Stage (2007) expanded on the problem of teaching vocabulary by looking at the instructional techniques used to teach vocabulary. They stated:

...it appears that to date (teachers) have not yet attempted to teach students the multiple meanings for a word. Explicitly teaching students that most words they encounter have multiple meanings that may fall into different semantic categories (e.g., verb, noun, adjective), depending upon the context in which they are used. (p. 2)

Teaching vocabulary has traditionally been one dimensional, when the English language is anything but one dimensional. Words can have many meanings and implications based on the context of the word. To learn vocabulary skills effectively the students need to approach it from many different aspects. One well known and proven technique is reading. Some people believe that requiring students to read is the best way to build vocabulary skills and knowledge. In chapter two, the paper examined the Reading Method as a way for students to acquire in vocabulary. The Reading Method does have its merits, on the other hand, in the author's opinion many students lack the ability to infer the meaning of words they are struggling with. Therefore, the Reading Method must be supplemented with other methods to ensure the skill is learned.

Heverly (2011) believed that the best way for students to learn vocabulary is with reading. Heverly argued that a student needs to be exposed to more words before they can learn skills to infer meaning. While Haverly has a great point, the Reading method alone is not feasible in all classroom settings. Educators that teach cannot always assign work outside of classroom due to the urban school demographics and socio-economic issues. The urban atmosphere does not always allow for assigned reading outside of the classroom, due to students' home lives and their responsibilities to their families. Consequently, the method needed to adapt Heverly's ideas and somehow apply it to the reading done in the classroom.

Another article written by Greenwood and Flanigan (2007), built on the idea that Haverly discussed. Not only are the students in Greenwood and Flanigan's study learning new words, they are also using critical thinking skills to use the new words. They stated, "Students need to see and discuss various levels of context explicitness so they can eventually determine for themselves how supportive the context is" (Greenwood & Flanigan, 2007, p. 250). Greenwood

and Flanigan came up with a idea called gradient semantics. With gradient semantics, students are exposed to “shades of meaning” within a group of synonyms (Greenwood & Flanigan, 2007). Students can then build upon their pre-existing vocabulary, making it easier for them to make connections to the new words. While this exercise seems to be effective in many schools, Again, the semantic gradient strategy will not fit the immediate needs of the urban students without some adaptations to fit the school’s student population.

Sheltered learning techniques have be beneficial to the acquisition of new vocabulary. Park (2008) described Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) as;

SIOP provides a detailed (operational) description of sheltered instruction (in which content is made accessible, or sheltered for language learners), and provides teachers practical step-by-step guides: from lesson preparation and instruction to implementation of the lesson that will enable ELLs to understand their grade-level content lessons. (p. 2)

SIOP uses scaffolding to build the students’ knowledge of the new words. This method would also be beneficial to native language speakers learning their own languages. While most SIOP models use all eight sections (lesson preparation, building background, comprehensible input, strategies, interaction, practice/application, lesson delivery, and assessment=), the curriculum that is being created will address only the interaction and the application sections, due to the majority of the students being native speakers. Park (2008) wrote “Through interaction, students have opportunity to practice the target language, negotiate meanings, clarify ideas, ask and answer questions, and give and justify opinions” (p. 4). It is important to plan time for students to interact with new vocabulary and also practice the use of the new lexical chunks.

The curriculum that is being proposed is a hybrid of the methods from Chapter 2. Gradient semantics uses a student's knowledge to build new vocabulary and build contextual awareness. The idea of gradient semantics is solid, however gradient semantics cannot stand alone as a vocabulary tool in a high school classroom. Gradient semantics activities are a great way to scaffold the vocabulary learning. There is an example of a gradient semantic activity provided in the Appendix (see Appendix B). The example provides the students an opportunity to build their vocabulary by using context clues and their background vocabulary.

Along with gradient semantic activities a vocabulary test and activities created by the author's Professional Learning Community (PLC) will be used. The PLC activities use a direct and indirect teaching technique. Students use from context skills and find dictionary definitions. The worksheets do not build on of a meanings of a word, but they do address the use of the vocabulary in books we are reading. Each quiz has an activity worksheet (see Appendix E) that allows students to practice their direct and indirect vocabulary skills.

Not as a part of my study, but as a teaching tool my PLC created an assessment to collect data to measure student progress. the PLC created formative and summative assessment tools. There will be up to four formative quizzes (see Appendix C) and a summative assessment (see Appendix D) for each unit. The words are taken from the stories that we read and they are chosen for their everyday use. Each new word is practiced by the student in four ways; learning the word from context, creating an informal definition, finding a formal definition, and using the new word in sentence. They are then assessed on the new words that they have learned.

### **Frequency of the Curriculum**

The curriculum will be implemented for one unit, however, the curriculum can be used in any unit. The curriculum is intended to be a support to the ninth grade curriculum already taught in the school. The curriculum will be given to the students up to three days a week. So that it will stay a supplement to the curriculum already in place. Each time the new vocabulary program is introduced the lesson will last no more than fifteen minutes and no less than five minutes.

### **Summary of Chapter Three**

Chapter Three discussed the integrated curriculum and how it will take place in the classroom. It contains an explanation of the subjects involved in the study, where the study will take place, and when the study will take place. Chapter Three also considers the research that led me to the curriculum that will be implemented.

### **Introduction to Chapter Four**

Chapter four will focus the integrated curriculum's materials and strategies to build vocabulary skills in ninth grade students. The chapter will explain the vocabulary curriculum framework, including strategies, interventions, and assessments. The chapter will also include a comprehensive curriculum guide. This curriculum guide will help the reader use the strategies in an effective and efficient way. Each section will be supported by the research was collected during the capstone writing process.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESULTS**

#### **Introduction**

Acquiring new vocabulary from context is a skill that many students lack in today's schools. I saw the students struggle with and get distracted by new vocabulary in high school

level classrooms. When presented with the question, *How can I improve my ninth grade students' ability to understand new vocabulary from context in their English class?* The author decided to create a supplemental curriculum to support the acquisition of new vocabulary from context in ninth grade students.

This chapter will focus on materials and strategies to build vocabulary skills in ninth grade students. The chapter will explain the vocabulary curriculum framework, including strategies, interventions, and assessments. The chapter will also include a comprehensive curriculum guide. This curriculum guide will help the reader use the strategies in an effective and efficient way. Each section will be supported by the research was collected during the capstone writing process.

Chapter Three explored the rationale of the support curriculum and why the specific curriculum was designed for ninth grade students. Chapter Three also addressed the setting of the proposed curriculum; including the setting, student demographics, and the proposed methods for the student group. Chapter Four will be a guide to the curriculum and how to implement the integrated curriculum.

### **Background for Integrated Curricular Framework**

Vocabulary education can be a controversial topic in the education profession. Most educators agree that students need vocabulary support, but there is some disagreement about how to teach new vocabulary to students. A person's vocabulary is constantly changing and evolving.

People acquire new vocabulary through many processes, however not all of these processes are able to be replicated in the classroom.

Traditionally vocabulary was taught using the Grammar Translation method. When using the Grammar Translation method, students are given unknown words and those words are then compared to words that the student already knows. The issue with this method was how the student retained the new vocabulary words, "...under the (Grammar Translation) method, students tend to be good test takers rather than knowledgeable English-language users" (Lai, 2009, p. 18). Teachers in the United States school systems have been using this method to teach students for centuries; however, students only learn the basic definition of the word and lack the ability to use the words in real world situations. While students' rote knowledge thrives under the Grammar Translation method, it is not a perfect fix to teaching new vocabulary in the classroom.

Another vocabulary teaching method that was adopted by educators is called the Direct Method. The Direct Method is very much in use in the United States school system. The Direct Method requires the students be totally immersed in the unknown vocabulary. While this method is great for people that do not speak the language they are learning, it is not a perfect match for native language speakers learning new vocabulary. While unknown words may be defined from context in an immersed curriculum, it is difficult for educators to incorporate new words and context clues within the lesson.

The Reading Method asks students to learn unknown vocabulary from reading literature and other types of texts. (Marciniak & Perez-Martinez, 2010, p. 9) The reader is responsible for their own vocabulary acquisition. This method empowers the students, however there is little support from the educator and can result in mixed messages for the students. The Reading



Method relies heavily on the Grammar Translation method. When students come across a unknown word they often find the definition in a dictionary. The reliance on a quick definition for an unknown word does not force the student to use the vocabulary and the unknown word can be quickly forgotten.

Finally, the Lexical Approach teaches students to define unknown words by using “lexical chunks.” These lexical chunks are groups of words that are often used together, or chunked together. The students memorize the chunks and can determine meaning of unknown words by recognizing the words around the unknown vocabulary. Again, the Lexical Approach relies on many of the same techniques from the Grammar Translation method.

As I mentioned in Chapter Two, an effective vocabulary curriculum should be a hybrid of the aforementioned methods of vocabulary learning. By combining multiple methods students learn new vocabulary in different ways and can make multiple connections to one unknown word. The methods mentioned will give students the chance to learn and practice vocabulary acquiring skills. By using parts of each method, students will be able to gain the ability to define unknown words with minimal effort.

### **Curriculum Framework**

Students at the high school level are struggling with the ability to understand unknown words. The framework that is proposed is supplemental to an existing ninth grade English curriculum. Although the Minnesota State Standards do not list a vocabulary acquisition as a required skill set, learning how to decipher unknown vocabulary is important to a student’s academic success and text comprehension. Gaining the skills to break down unknown words only increases how well students understand the text they are reading. According to Elleman,

Lindo, Morphy, and Compton (2009), "... children are better able to understand what they read which leads to increases in text exposure. In this way, vocabulary and comprehension have a reciprocal causal relationship..." (p. 3). The stronger vocabulary a student has the better they are at reading, and the more successful they are academically. Focusing on the students' vocabulary will only help students in the long run.

### **Strategies and Interventions**

In the world of education, general vocabulary education falls under the English umbrella. Math, science, and other subject area teachers do teach vocabulary; however, their lessons are usually specialized, specific to those subject areas, or Tier 3 words. According to the Common Core State Standards (2014), "Tier Three words are specific to a domain or field of study and key to understanding a new concept within a text" (p. 33) In English and other Language Arts classrooms, teaching vocabulary has become part of the regular curriculum. Most of the time the focus is on Tier 2 words, "Tier Two words (academic vocabulary) are far more likely to appear in written texts than in speech, and they appear in all kinds of texts: informational texts, technical texts, and literary texts" (Common Core State Standards, 2014, p. 33). Many educators teach how they were taught, but as the author presented before, many of the original vocabulary teaching strategies are outdated and ineffective. The purpose of this capstone is to present a vocabulary curriculum that will help students understand unknown words from the context of any text.

To support the purpose of the capstone and a curriculum that a teacher may be teaching, this vocabulary curriculum will be integrated into a curriculum that is already in place. A curriculum that is totally immersed in vocabulary is not beneficial to learners, because it directly

mirrors the Grammar Translation Method. Students need to be exposed to unknown vocabulary organically, while they are reading, as well as memorizing dictionary definitions. There must be a happy medium between the Grammar Translation Method and Reading Method for the curriculum to be successful.

To start, it is recommended by the author that educators find ten to thirty mostly Tier 2 words that are present in their current curriculum or unit. The vocabulary that is chosen should be a mixture of difficult words and words that the students may have seen before. The words can present in the literature that is read or the words can be related to the subject matter. It is important to use words that are connected to the main curriculum, so students can make meaningful connections to the new words. The words that are chosen will be the lexical chunk for that unit. For example, the novel *Of Mice and Men* is broken into three parts. A group of teachers may choose to pick ten words or less per section, giving students an opportunity to thoroughly study up to thirty words. Capping the vocabulary to ten words at a time ensures that students will not become inundated with new vocabulary and they will be able to make connections with each of the words.(see Appendix C) for examples of vocabulary for the short story “The Scarlet Ibis” and the novel *Of Mice and Men*, both are texts that are used in my Expectations Unit, my first unit of the semester.

The next step to the integrated curriculum is to create a sample worksheet that incorporates a mixture of the methods from the being of the chapter. The worksheet is made up of four parts. Part one uses the Reading Method to expose the students to the words in text. Even though the students will see the unknown vocabulary in the main text or within the main curriculum, this part asks the students to find the context clues that point to the meaning of the

unknown word. In this section of the worksheet it is normal for students to struggle with finding the context clues, however it is integral for the students to practice the skill of inference and why they think a word might have a certain definition. All of the new vocabulary words are underlined and students are asked to circle the context clues for each word. My professional learning community (PLC) that created the worksheet decided to only use six words for each of the units that we teach. We found that ten words per sheet was too rigorous and less than six words did not challenge the students enough. Educators must choose the amount of words that best fits their students, however the number of words per worksheet should be consistent for every unit. Each word is underlined in the summary. It is also important to mention that the PLC decided to use a summary of the story to embed the known words as a reading support strategy, but the words could be embedded in any type of text.

Part two of the worksheet asks the students to infer the meaning of the words. Again, this part uses the Reading Method. Students are asked to find the meaning of the new vocabulary from their current knowledge of the word. Students tend to struggle with this section of the worksheet. Most students want to look right at dictionary to define the list of words. The students' action comes from their desire to know the vocabulary as soon as they are exposed to it, however students will not always have access to dictionaries or even to the internet when they are exposed to unknown vocabulary. Part one and two help build students' vocabulary inferencing skills.

Part three of the worksheet is directly from the Grammar Translation Method. Students are asked to find the dictionary definition of the new vocabulary word and write a new definition on the line in their own words. The purpose of this step is to get students to make connections

with the words they already know. This allows students to make a cognitive connection to the word and give students a chance to find meaning on their own. Refer to Appendix D for an example of part three. During part three, it is important to give students a dictionary or definition that is to their lexile or reading level. Students should not need to look up unknown words from the practice word definitions, it would create more barriers. A teacher should make sure

The final part of the worksheet requires the students to create a sentence that uses the word correctly. This section of the worksheet demonstrates the Direct Approach. While the students are not immersed in a different language, students are required to create a sentence while using the previously unknown word. This section also reflects the assessment and is used to scaffold the assessment for the students.

The other practice worksheet uses semantic gradients. According to Greenwood and Flanigan (2007), Semantic Gradients rely on lexical grouping or chunks to build upon the vocabulary knowledge students already have. This allows students to build connections on their own. This intervention uses the Lexical Approach to build vocabulary. To challenge ninth grade students, Greenwood and Flanigan's needed to be adapted. An example of the intervention that uses similar strategies to Greenwood and Flanigan can be found on Appendix A. A separate worksheet would need to be created for each of the units, however students will have an opportunity to create another layer of lexical connections.

The Semantic Gradient or "The Context and Chart" worksheet is made up of three parts. To complete the assignments students will need a basic understanding of the new vocabulary words or access to the definitions of the new vocabulary. The first two parts of the intervention requires the students to fill in the blanks of sentences that are written in the context of the story

from which the words are drawn. The example given in Appendix E is created from the short story “The Scarlet Ibis” by James Hurst.

The last part of the Context and Chart worksheet gives students a chance to make connections to their current lexicon. The educator would ask the student to put the new vocabulary words on synonym and antonym scale. Students should be encouraged to complete the scales with their prior knowledge, however students can also use a thesaurus when extra scaffolding is needed. This part of the Context and Chart worksheet can also be used to differentiate the lesson and give students a chance to build their individual vocabulary.

### **Curriculum Matrix**

In this integrated curriculum, vocabulary words need to be drawn from a teacher’s current curriculum. Educators should look for words that are high frequency, but may be unusual to a high school student. When choosing words it is important to also find words that can easily be used in a sentence. Students will be using the words in a paragraph for their summative assessment, therefore it is essential to set the students up for success and add rigor to the curriculum. In one unit, I teach the short story “The Scarlet Ibis” by James Hurst. Here is a list of the words that were chosen from the short story: invalid, imminent, precarious, uniform, infallible, and reiterate. These words are used frequently in literature and pop culture, as well as, attainable for a high school student to use.

It is important to find words that are accessible to the students that a person is teaching. If educators were to choose words that are too easy students will not be challenged by the assessment. On the other hand, if the words are too difficult students will not be able to complete

the assessment. Similarly to the curriculum that an educator already has in place, they must be aware of their students' needs and ability to make this supplementary curriculum successful.

Vocabulary activities are a good way for students to be exposed to and make secondary connections with the new words. Once the vocabulary words have been chosen there are the two aforementioned worksheets to create to prepare the students for the assessments. However, the calendar mentions to a few activities for the teacher to put into action within the classroom. Some of the activities that are mentioned are; the vocabulary with pictures activity (see Appendix H), the comic strip activity (see Appendix F), and the draw your definition activity (see Appendix G). Each activity engages the students in different ways, but continues to build the skills that the students need for the assessments.

The vocabulary with pictures activity uses the Grammar Translation Method to practice the words, but it introduces a visual element that is not found in the dictionary. This activity also allows the students to differentiate the particular definition of the word that will be on the assessment. For example, for the "The Scarlet Ibis" unit the word invalid is introduced to the students. Most students read the word as /in-val-id/, an adjective that means void or not working. However, the text uses the word /in-vuh-lid/, a noun that is a person that is sickly and weak. By showing pictures with the words, students are less likely to be confused by homographs, homonyms, and in the case of "invalid" heteronyms.

Vocabulary with pictures starts with a list of the words that the students are currently practicing. The educator would then prepare a picture that symbolizes each word. The students would take turns choosing the picture that correlates with each picture. After the students have put the word with the picture, the educator would lead the students in defining the word again

and discussing how the new word might be used in a real life situation. This activity allows students to interact with the new vocabulary, as well as, allowing students to ask the teacher direct questions about the words.

The comic strip activity uses the Reading Method and the Direct Method to practice the new vocabulary. This activity also gives students a chance to practice the skill assessed on the exams, in addition to visualizing the word. Each student is responsible for creating a comic strip that uses the new words in two or three sentences. Students then illustrate the sentences that they have written. Students are not required to be artistic, however they are encouraged to put some effort into the drawing. At the end of the work time, the teacher should collect and share some of the comic strips with the class. This gives the students a chance to see the words used many different ways and lets them reflect the way they are using new vocabulary.

The 4-pictures-1-word activity uses the Grammar Translation Method to build student knowledge. The 4-pictures-1-word activity is based on a mobile phone application that was popular a few years ago. The game would show the player four pictures that would help the player identify the word. The mobile phone application would give the players blanks for every letter of the word, so that the player could narrow down their vocabulary and find the answer easier. Teachers should assign the vocabulary words to students, so that every word is practiced during the exercise. In the end, players would fill in the blanks to find the word that fits the visual clues.

When students do the 4-pictures-1-word activity they find or draw pictures that hint at, but does not give away the word that they were assigned. Students can use magazines to cut out pictures that hint to the missing word or if they can draw clues so that the other students can



identify the vocabulary word being used. When the students have finished, the educator can use a document camera to project the students' assignments on to the board. The class should take turns identifying the words that are represented in the activity.

### **Using the Calendar**

How an educator wants to implement this supplemental curriculum is up to the individual teacher. Each classroom is different and has different needs, both academically and behaviorally. With that said, a matrix (Appendix A) has been provided to demonstrate how the curriculum could be administered. The attached calendar was planned and designed for a diverse, urban school that has a large number of students on free and reduced lunch programs. It is also important to note that the calendar is only written for one unit during the 2016-2017 school year and not the entire 2016-2017 school year. The unit is the first of the school year so some of the times in the calendar are inflated for instructional purposes. Students will be able to complete their assignments more quickly during future lessons.

Educators should be able to adapt the curriculum to fit the needs to their own students. The author found that using this curriculum more than three times did not result in the students scoring higher on their assessment. For the author's classroom, reviewing and practicing the new vocabulary words two to three times before a formative assessment allowed students the confidence and knowledge to be successful on the summative assessment.

### **Introduction to Chapter Five**

The final chapter will be a general reflection of the vocabulary curriculum and the research process used to create the curriculum. First, the capstone will review the literature that was used during the creation of the vocabulary curriculum. The author used many different

sources and vocabulary methods to create the curriculum. The literature review will the give the author and the reader a chance to consider the research process. Next, the author will reflect on the capstone writing process. This will entail details about the evolution of the paper, as well as things that the author could have done differently.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

#### Introduction

I set out on this research project to better understand how students learn new vocabulary. Rather than rote teach the students new vocabulary, as many schools did for so many years, I posed the question, *How can I improve my ninth grade students' ability to understand new vocabulary from context?* After researching different vocabulary learning theories and strategies, I came to the conclusion that a vocabulary curriculum must embody multiple strategies to be effective.

First off, this chapter addresses the major findings from my research and the writing process. The section goes through the impact that the capstone has had on me as an English teacher. This part also shows how the paper helped me build students that are more confident with unknown vocabulary.

The second section approaches the implications for the curriculum. The curriculum could be easily inserted into most ninth grade curriculums, however there are some situations that are less ideal for the curriculum. This section discusses those situations and possible recommendations on overcoming those obstacles. It also discusses the use of the curriculum outside of the English content area.

The next section reviews the research and the different strategies used throughout the history of teaching vocabulary. This section addressed the relevance of the research to my curriculum and how it influenced the creation of the curriculum. Finally, this section explains how the research affected the final curriculum.

The paper then discusses any recommendations for further research. This section looks at limitations that may arise within the curriculum and how to overcome the presented limitations. The capstone then, examines what direction other researchers may want to expand on and what questions I had while completing the paper.

The final section is a reflection on the capstone writing process. The paper discussed what was learned by the author during the process and how the expectations of the capstone evolved throughout the process. This section also looked at how I would share my findings with other educators

### **Major Findings**

First, there is more to vocabulary than spelling tests and matching quizzes. The research process for this capstone was more arduous than I thought it would be. After a short time I realized my research just scratched the surface of the research that was out there on teaching vocabulary. I became annoyed with the teachers that passed off their multiple choice vocabulary tests as vocabulary instruction. Educators owe it to themselves and their students to look at other vocabulary strategies that could enhance the vocabulary learning experience.

Secondly, I found that there is not one perfect vocabulary method. Each method has its strengths and weaknesses. I designed the integrated curriculum to be a hybrid of vocabulary methods that complement each other. The methods that I used are familiar to teachers and build off of traditional vocabulary curriculums, while adding a contextual element.

Finally, I realized that the best way to teach vocabulary from context is to treat vocabulary as a skill. When students write essays or want to become better readers, teachers scaffold the specific skill set until the student can master the assignment. I had always been

taught vocabulary as a secondary skill set. The paper shed light on the influence that vocabulary has on a student's writing and reading confidence. By teaching vocabulary with fidelity and integrating the curriculum with vocabulary students can learn new words organically.

### **Implications**

The major implication of the proposed integrated curriculum is the use outside of the English classroom. Sheltered instruction has been a popular teaching strategy for many years. That type of instruction has spanned across many disciplines and has found its way into many types of classrooms. The integrated vocabulary instruction that is proposed in this paper has the same flexibility. Teachers of all content areas could easily adapt the worksheets in the appendices to fit any vocabulary they may want the students to learn. Students in the Science of Social Studies classes would be exposed to the new vocabulary words organically and in context. Students would be more likely to make connections to the words and not just regurgitate dictionary definitions onto quizzes. Making connections to the words, makes it easier to retain the vocabulary knowledge.

### **Connections to Literature Review**

Before addressing the literature and research it is important to remember that the curriculum that has been proposed is a supplementary curriculum. It is not intended to take over the entirety of a unit, but instead the curriculum should use vocabulary from the existing curriculum. The purpose of the using this curriculum as a supplement gives students an opportunity to see the words in multiple times and in multiple situations. Students are exposed to the new and unfamiliar words many times to increase the chance of lexical retention.

Unfortunately, the literature was not definitive as to what strategy was best to teach new vocabulary. In fact, the research showed that there is not a best way to teach vocabulary. The research did show a progression of strategies and explained their place in a student's vocabulary acquisition. I found every strategy had a place in vocabulary education and building a student's vocabulary. For example, the Grammar Translation Method gives students the ability to learn many words at a time, by making connections or substituting words that students are already familiar with. Lai (2009) stated that students become good at assessments, but lack the skills to use the new words in a practical manner. Each strategy that I researched had similar pros and cons. Overall, the strategies that I researched needed to be molded into one solid vocabulary plan.

The curriculum that was created reflects many of the strategies found in the research. The worksheets in Appendix A use the Grammar Translation Method, the Direct Method, and the Lexical Method to get students to understand new words. The Direct Method asks for the student to be immersed in a new language. While immersing students in language is easier to do with non-native speakers, creating sentences with blanks forces students to use unfamiliar words.

### **Recommendations**

As a whole the integrated vocabulary curriculum that is proposed is pretty versatile, however there are times where this curriculum may be difficult to administer due to the educator's current curriculum. For example, my PLC only uses this integrated curriculum in four of the six units in their current curriculum. There are some limitations to implementing the vocabulary curriculum.

One of the limitations is finding vocabulary words that are challenging for students in the current curriculum. If a teacher is familiar with the novel and has taught it for a couple of years,

they are going to find it easier to find words in which students may not be as familiar. Teachers that have used novels within their curriculum before are more likely to know some words that students struggle with every year. If the novel is relatively new to the teacher it will be harder to choose words, because they may not have the experience of seeing the students struggle with the novel's vocabulary.

As a recommendation to the issue of finding words in novels, the author would say that the teacher should concentrate on tier 2 words. Tier 2 words tend to challenge students and are widely used in everyday language. Tier 3 words are too specialized and seldom used in daily use. The author is not saying that tier 3 words are unimportant, but instead they should not be a part of this type of vocabulary curriculum and assessment. Tier 3 words are too difficult for students to use organically in their own paragraphs.

Another limitation that arises with this vocabulary curriculum is implementing the curriculum with a unit that does not use a novel. The author teaches a couple of units that do not use novels, but use short stories instead. The unit that the author teaches is heavy on student choice, so the students are not reading the same material. Due to the fact that the students are seeing different vocabulary words, it is difficult to choose words in which all of the students will be exposed. The curriculum requires that the students see the new vocabulary word in their reading, as well as in the worksheets and semantic gradient sheets.

One recommendation the author has is to take the opportunity during units when not using a novel to teach other important writing skills. For example, the author teaches Greek words during a Mythology unit. In another unit the author focuses on grammar and the use of literary devices. The use of the proposed curriculum is not impossible in each of these

situations, but it makes it difficult for students to make connections to the literature if the vocabulary words are not present in the literature.

Finally, the effectiveness of this integrated curriculum needs to be measured on a larger scale. I have completed informal studies that show growth in a student's ability to use unknown words effectively, however I have not measured a student's ability to understand new vocabulary from context. If this curriculum is truly teaching students to build a vocabulary specific skill set, then it is important to find a way to measure the growth of that skill. It would be a good idea to do an action research study on the growth of the students' vocabulary over the year.

### **Reflections and Results**

This curriculum is designed as a supplemental curriculum to build student vocabulary and vocabulary acquisition skills. Differentiation is important to the success of this curriculum, both in the words that a teacher chooses and in the way the teacher presents the words. It is important for the educator to know and understand how their students learn.

As I think about the capstone process, I am grateful that I chose the topic of vocabulary. I have seen a change in the way that I teach vocabulary in the classroom. I can see a difference in the way students respond to the lessons. My lessons are more intentional and the students are benefiting from my knowledge. I am glad that I chose vocabulary acquisition as a topic, because it has made me a better teacher. Let me explain my reasoning.

As a White male that grew up in the suburbs, I was taught primarily by white teachers that were taught by white teachers. I was given spelling tests and "educated" guess vocabulary quizzes. All vocabulary was taught using the Grammar Translation Method that had been passed down the U.S. educational pipeline for centuries. Not only had I learned vocabulary in that way,



but I was taught in similar ways in other subjects. When I studied urban education at Metropolitan State University, I was challenged to look at education and teaching in a different way and I have. However, I never changed my predisposition toward teaching vocabulary. I still taught vocabulary in the same dry manner that is the Grammar Translation Method.

Writing and researching this capstone has given a different perspective on how I teach vocabulary. I see vocabulary as bridge to other learning. I have seen students shut down, because they do not understand a word in a piece of literature. Helping students get over that barrier by teaching them the skills they need to get over that obstacle. This skill set is often not intentionally taught and even less seldom taught with fidelity. Giving students the skill and confidence to read through an unknown vocabulary word will help them throughout their lives.

In the future, I plan sharing this integrated vocabulary curriculum with the faculty in my building. This will give my colleagues an opportunity to use the vocabulary strategies in their classrooms. The more that the students are exposed to the curriculum's skill set the more confident the students will become.

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## Appendix A

### Expectations Unit Matrix

Sep 05: Labor Day

Sep 12: Hand out and demonstrate the “Scarlet Ibis Vocabulary Practice Sheet” (30 minutes)

Sep 15: Hand out and demonstrate “Scarlet Ibis Semantic Gradients” Worksheet (30 minutes)

Sep 20: Practice Scarlet Ibis vocabulary with pictures (10 minutes)

Sep 23: Scarlet Ibis formative exam (20-35 minutes)

Sep 26: Handout and complete “Of Mice and Men Vocabulary #1 Practice Sheet” (25 minutes)

Sep 28: Handout and complete “Of Mice and Men Semantic Gradient #1” Worksheet (20 minutes)

Sep 30: Practice Of Mice and Men vocabulary #1 with pictures (10 minutes)

Oct 4: Of Mice and Men Vocabulary #1 Practice “Vocabulary Comic Strip” (30 minutes)

Oct 6: Of Mice and Men Vocabulary #1 formative exam (20-35 minutes)

Oct 10: Handout and complete “Of Mice and Men Vocabulary #2 Worksheet” (15-20 minutes)

Oct 13: Handout and complete “Of Mice and Men Semantic Gradient #2” (15-20 minutes)

Oct 18: Practice Of Mice and Men Vocabulary #2 with pictures (10 minutes)

Oct 21: Of Mice and Men Vocabulary #2 formative exam (20-35 minutes)

Oct 27: Expectations Unit Vocabulary practice, Draw your Definition. (30 minutes)

Oct 28: Expectations Unit Vocabulary Summative (20-35 minutes)

## Appendix B

Name \_\_\_\_\_

### “The Scarlet Ibis” Semantic Gradient Worksheet

Invalid	Imminent	Infallible
Uniformly	Precariously	Reiterate

**Set I: Basic contexts:** Find the best word to fit into the blanks.

The storm was \_\_\_\_\_.

Doodle’s brother thought he was \_\_\_\_\_.

Doodle asked his brother to \_\_\_\_\_ the directions.

**Set II: Richer contexts:** Using the context clues, find the best word to fit into the blanks

Brother’s arms moved \_\_\_\_\_ when he rowed. Doodle tried to match the pace, but couldn’t keep up.

As they ran through the fields the cart rode \_\_\_\_\_ on two wheels. The narrator knew it was dangerous, but he wanted to scare Doodle.

When Doodle was born no one knew he would be able to speak. As it turned out Doodle was able to speak, but he was still an \_\_\_\_\_.

**Set III: Matching gradients to go with Sets I and II**

healthy		ill	
unlikely	probable		
faulty			flawless
	unpredictable	constantly	
safely			recklessly







## Appendix E

### “The Scarlet Ibis” Vocabulary Activity Sheet

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

- |            |               |               |
|------------|---------------|---------------|
| 1. invalid | 3. imminent   | 5. precarious |
| 2. uniform | 4. infallible | 6. reiterate  |

**Part 1—Context Clues:** For each underlined vocabulary word, box the context clues that help you guess the meaning of the vocabulary word and draw an arrow from those clues to the word. The first one has been done for you. This is a brief summary and plot synopsis of the story that will begin our unit called “Expectations”.

“The Scarlet Ibis”, by James Hurst, begins with our narrator telling us about his memories of Doodle, his younger brother. The narrator, known only as Brother throughout the story, is now a grown man. The narrator is six years old when his brother is born. Doodle is born an invalid: he is quite sickly, weak, and unable to move well on his own. Most of the family thinks that he will die young. Slowly, Doodle grows bigger and stronger and by the time he is two he is finally able to crawl. The narrator is an average young boy who loves to play outside, explore the wilderness near their home, and play games. He desperately wants a sibling who can share these things with him and act like a “normal” boy, in a uniform way as the other kids he knows. However, Doodle is too weak for most of these activities. Brother reiterates that he wanted a brother who could keep up with him, reminding the reader of this fact many times throughout. Brother sets out to teach Doodle to walk; Brother believes that he is infallible and that nothing can harm him or get him down. Teaching Doodle to walk proves to be a precarious endeavor; there are many times that Doodle is put into danger, either physically or emotionally, trying to walk. The story ends under dark skies promising to release rain, a thunderstorm imminent, and Brother’s belief in his infallibility put to the ultimate test.

**Part 2—Educated Guess:** Based on the context clues, make an educated guess about the definitions. Be sure to take into consideration the part of speech of each word.

- |                   |                     |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Invalid _____  | 4. Infallible _____ |
| 2. Uniform _____  | 5. Precarious _____ |
| 3. Imminent _____ | 6. Reiterate _____  |

**Part 3—Parts of Speech and Definitions:** Label each vocabulary word with its correct part of speech and dictionary definition. Be sure to choose the part of speech and definition that reflect the way in which the word is used in the passage on this handout. Also, make sure you understand the definition you write down.

1. invalid ( noun): \_\_\_\_\_ an invalid is a person who is weak or disabled by an injury or illness \_\_\_\_\_
2. uniform (\_\_\_\_): \_\_\_\_\_
3. imminent (\_\_\_\_): \_\_\_\_\_
4. infallible (\_\_\_\_): \_\_\_\_\_
5. precarious (\_\_\_\_): \_\_\_\_\_
6. reiterate (\_\_\_\_): \_\_\_\_\_

**Part 4—Word Work:** Write one sentence per word using that word correctly in the sentence. Be sure that your sentence shows that you know what the word means, but don't define the word again.

1. invalid: \_\_\_\_\_
2. uniform: \_\_\_\_\_
3. imminent: \_\_\_\_\_
4. infallible: \_\_\_\_\_
5. precarious: \_\_\_\_\_
6. reiterate: \_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix F

#### Vocabulary Comic Strip

- |            |               |               |
|------------|---------------|---------------|
| 1. invalid | 3. imminent   | 5. precarious |
| 2. uniform | 4. infallible | 6. reiterate  |

Instructions: Choose **3** words from the word bank above. Using full sentences create a comic strip that uses the words correctly. Underline every word that you use. Make sure to use lots of color when drawing your comic strip. Remember to build context clues into your sentences.

Example:

The teacher reiterated to David that leaning back in his chair was precarious. Although, the teacher told him repeatedly David thought he was he infallible and he could never fall. Boy was he wrong.



## Appendix G

### Draw Your Definition

- |            |               |               |
|------------|---------------|---------------|
| 1. invalid | 3. imminent   | 5. precarious |
| 2. uniform | 4. infallible | 6. reiterate  |

Instructions: Fold your paper so that there are six even squares. For each word draw a picture that symbolizes each word from the word bank. Write the each word and the part of speech on the back of its drawing. When you're done, see if the people around you can get the answers right on your page.

## Appendix H

### Vocabulary with Pictures

\*This would normally be put on a PowerPoint or Google Slide.

invalid  
imminent  
precarious  
uniform  
infallible  
reiterate



invalid  
imminent  
precarious  
uniform  
infallible  
reiterate



invalid  
imminent  
precarious  
uniform  
infallible  
reiterate



invalid  
imminent  
precarious  
uniform  
infallible  
reiterate

