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An Investigation on the Effect of Context Method Versus the Traditional Dictionary Method on Vocabulary Development

Laurie Ault
The College at Brockport

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SUBMITTED BY:

Laurie Ault

APPROVED BY:

T. Morrow
Thesis Advisor 12/7/82 Date

Second Faculty Advisor

Chair, Graduate
Policies Committee
AN INVESTIGATION ON THE EFFECT OF CONTEXT
METHOD VERSUS THE TRADITIONAL
DICTIONARY METHOD ON VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

THESIS

Submitted to the Graduate Committee of the
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
Faculty of Education
State University College at Brockport
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science in Education

by

Laurie Ault

State University College at Brockport
Brockport, New York
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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of a context approach to vocabulary instruction versus a more traditional dictionary method of vocabulary instruction. Research favored the use of context for teaching vocabulary in a meaningful way. Words acquire meaning for a person after they have been seen and heard in relation to familiar concepts. A student's personal experiences should also be fully utilized in both vocabulary and concept development.

This study combined the areas of personal experience and use of context. The study involved thirty high school students who were randomly assigned to two groups. One group used the context method and the other group used a dictionary method. Thirty-two words were presented over a four-week period. An experimenter designed vocabulary checklist was used as a pretest and a posttest. A correlated t test was used to examine the mean gain scores of both groups. Analysis of the scores demonstrated that the use of context for vocabulary instruction was a significantly more effective method than the use of the dictionary.

A context approach which draws upon a student's personal background can offer teachers an alternative method of vocabulary instruction.
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Chapter I

Statement of the Problem

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of a context approach to vocabulary instruction versus a more traditional dictionary method of vocabulary instruction. This study investigated an alternative method to classroom vocabulary development.

Need for the Study

Educators have long been concerned about the quality of vocabulary study. Vocabulary development entails more than presenting new words to students. An effective program utilizes words repeatedly in a variety of classroom activities and discussions. Innovative instructional methods have been sought to aid vocabulary development in the classroom. These instructional concerns have dealt with the quality of a student's vocabulary in terms of that student's ability to recognize a word or group of words and to remember that word for further classroom and personal application.

One process which facilitates the learning of new vocabulary is the use of context clues. The importance of the relationship of context clues to the reading act is documented in research studies (Askov & Kamm, 1976) and most texts on reading
Hypotheses

The null hypotheses investigated in this study were as follows:

1. There is no significant difference between the two
methods of vocabulary instruction (context versus dictionary) with respect to mean gain posttest scores on the vocabulary checklist test.

2. There is no significant gain from pretest to posttest scores of the context group with respect to the vocabulary checklist test.

3. There is no significant gain from pretest to posttest scores of the dictionary group with respect to the vocabulary checklist test.

Definition of Terms

Terms used in this study were as follows:

Concept A complex of common characteristics derived from experience which can be retrieved from long term memory as word meaning (Angelotti, 1978, p. 12).

Prior Knowledge/Experience All that memory has retained of one's life encounters. It provides the dimensions of meaning that a word can hold for an individual (Angelotti, 1978, p. 12).

Context Method This method utilized the target words in meaningful sentences. This method required that the subjects read a three sentence passage in which each sentence used the target word in a defining context. The context of the sentences were of a simple sentence structure and contained common words to make the context familiar. Each subject was asked to respond in writing at the end of the paragraph with a word or phrase
from his personal background experience that further exemplified the target word.

**Traditional Dictionary Approach** This method consisted of listing the target word's definition, using a synonym or antonym, and writing a sentence using the word.

**Target Words** These were the words taught during the treatment period. Ninety percent of the students had to get the vocabulary item correct on the pretest before the word was eliminated from the study. Those words not deleted were designated as target words.

**Checklist Vocabulary Test** This test consisted of two sentences using the chosen vocabulary word. One sentence used the word correctly in context; the other did not. A third option was the word NEITHER. This was never the correct response but allowed the student to express the fact that he had no knowledge of either of the choices and eliminated guessing. For example:

a. The gooey bramble stuck to the roof of his mouth.

b. The bramble got caught on Mary's coat.

c. NEITHER

The checklist was read by the teacher if necessary to eliminate reading difficulties.

**Limitations of the Study**

The original sample consisted of 40 students at the high school level in one inner city high school. Ten subjects were
dropped from the study due to excessive absenteeism.

Summary

The literature reviewed showed that there was a need for innovative, creative ways to aid vocabulary development. Research favored the use of context for teaching vocabulary in a meaningful way. A word acquires meaning for the student after it is seen and heard in relation to familiar concepts. However, the use of context or the dictionary alone does not give words meaning. This meaning comes from the combined experience of the writer and the reader. Using a method which would utilize both context and a student's personal experience would guide each learner to the information available in his conceptual base.

This study combined the areas of personal experience and use of context as a method of classroom vocabulary development.
Chapter II

Review of the Literature

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of a context approach to vocabulary instruction versus a more traditional dictionary approach. This investigation dealt with four areas in relationship to vocabulary development:

Concept Development

Schema Theory

Use of Context/Experience

Vocabulary Studies

Concept Development

Vocabulary development entails more than presenting new words to students. An effective program utilizes the new words repeatedly in a variety of classroom activities and discussions. Innovative instructional methods have been sought to aid vocabulary development in the classroom. These instructional concerns have dealt with the quality of a student's vocabulary in terms of that student's ability to recognize a word in another context, to evoke and label concepts from a word or group of words and to remember that word for further classroom and personal application.

Words presented out of meaningful context are of little use
to students. New words to be learned must be related to and integrated into larger meaningful concepts. A word acquires meaning for a person after it is seen and heard in relation to familiar concepts. Words taught directly or meaning gained from context will become a person's own through repeated exposure. It is then that students are able to acquire multiple meanings and shades of meanings for words.

Vocabulary and concept development entail creating a classroom environment that will facilitate both by a variety of modes such as reading, listening, speaking and writing. Each student has his own set of personal experiences that teachers must fully utilize in both vocabulary and concept development.

"A psychological component involved in language behavior is formal concept acquisition for the developmental process whereby a verbal symbol with particular culturally accepted meaning comes to represent a definite conceptual content for the individual" (Sutton, 1963, p. 537).

The teacher can foster cognitive development of the child best when he realizes that the child has learned a variety of concepts as represented by a large vocabulary before he enters school. The many gaps which still exist in his verbal response system must be filled in as naturally as possible. Development of vocabulary, recognition and use of many words are necessary for concept attainment.
Koeller (1981) states that information-processing strategies for vocabulary development will advance concept building because meanings are explored, established, and extended when these strategies are employed.

Meanings associated with a word become a meaning cluster or concept. Reder (1980) indicates that "concreteness" of concepts must be defined individually, because comprehension depends upon each person's conceptual framework (schema) to make referents clear. Ruddell (1974) concurs noting that comprehension must be accounted for by each listener's and reader's background, cognitive strategies, interests, and values.

Deighton (1959) observes that it is unfortunate that some words exist for the reader merely as words. These words need to be tied into one's personal experiences. The psychology of learning has established that concepts are learned gradually. They acquire layers of meaning year after year as they are encountered in varying contexts, and as the learner has new experiences with them (Deighton, 1960).

Langer (1967) views the development of vocabulary as having a direct and important relationship to the process of conceptualization. A child's progress in reading comprehension is dependent upon possession and development of concepts. There is an inter-relationship among the processes of thought, of conceptualization, and of the use and development of word meanings.
The mental processes involved may well have a unified function which is dependent upon prior experiences, that is, upon already developed concepts.

Coulter (1972) regards the terms 'vocabulary' and 'concept' as closely related. He defines them in this manner:

A reading vocabulary is that fund of terms which one recognizes in print. The concept is a mental set or idea for the vocabulary term; it is frequently triggered by the recognition of the verbal term. Therefore, the context in which the word is encountered has considerable bearing upon the concept which the reader will evoke. As an example, the word products will suggest one concept in a social studies context and quite another if the student is reading about the process of multiplication (p. 112).

Dale (1972) is concerned that in the attempt to improve the quality of reading, vocabulary development has been neglected. Words are a critical aspect of concept development. Vocabulary can be developed by using all the communication processes of reading and writing, speaking and listening, and visualizing and observing. Since words are the names given to experiences, then experience is a necessity in vocabulary and language development.

Gipe (1978-1979) ascertains that one way of viewing the learning of a word meaning is to treat each new word as a concept and to teach the word as a concept. This would include defining the word, providing examples and instances in which the word is used appropriately, and providing for application
of the word's meaning.

**Schema Theory**

A recent area of research which may have important implications for vocabulary development is the schema theory. This theory seeks to explain how new information acquired while reading is meshed with old information already in the mind. It is helpful to think of a schema (singular of schemata) as a concept, although it is meant to be more inclusive than a concept. It can be viewed as a network of concepts (Durkin, 1981).

These concepts include those underlying objects, situations, and sequences of actions. The way a particular concept is stored is not by remembering that event in its totality down to its most basic components, but by identifying those aspects of the event related to other concepts already stored. The underlying assumption of schema is that the written text does not in itself convey the meaning, but interacts with the previously acquired knowledge of the reader in retrieving or reconstructing meaning (Sheridan, 1978). The meaning is constructed with the help of both the printed word and the individual's schemata. Comprehension is then seen as an interactive process in which both text and world knowledge play key roles (Rumelhart, Lindsay, & Norman, 1972).

Schema theory provides concepts and vocabulary to make
predictions about what takes place during reading. When reading, one selects the appropriate schema and variables or slots which fill the particular cases so that the material to be comprehended can be accounted for. Then the reader verifies that those schema do indeed account for it (Rummelhart & Ortony, 1977, p. 11).

The acquisition of new word knowledge is based, in part, on the fact that "comprehension is building bridges between the new and the known," i.e., for new concepts to be learned, they must be related to concepts already known (Pearson & Johnson, 1978, p. 24). Based on recent information-processing theories (Lindsay & Norman, 1972; Massaro, 1975), the importance of prior knowledge and the way it is stored and retrieved has prompted a new focus in vocabulary research on determining appropriate vocabulary teaching techniques. Taylor, Thurlow, and Turnure (1974) reported that elaboration of word meanings, when accompanied by paragraph summaries, resulted in improved vocabulary development. Pany and Jenkins (1978) noted that having students practice reciting word meanings before reading a story was a more effective vocabulary teaching strategy than either having students infer word meanings from the context of the story or telling students the meanings of words as they read the story.

The majority of research in the area of schema theory has dealt with reading comprehension. However, schema theory
suggests that vocabulary instruction be given greater emphasis than it currently is receiving. If words are labels for schemata, then the more words a child has, the more precise he can become in selecting appropriate schemata.

**Use of Context/Experience**

The relationship between use of context and reading vocabulary development has long been the subject of speculation by reading theorists. Most theorists have stressed the importance of teaching students to use context. The two classic articles on contextual aids are those by Artley (1943) and McCullough (1943). While their groupings or classifications of contextual clues differ, both list direct use of the reader's experience and prior knowledge as an important component.

Baldwin, Ford and Readance (1981) state that traditional vocabulary exercises fall short of demonstrating to students the effective use of word connotations. The exercises do not take into account the diversity of existing vocabularies and prior experiences that students possess. The presentation of words in isolation deprives students of the opportunity to learn subtle variations among similar words in a more naturalistic way by comparing and contrasting them in meaningful context. Also traditional exercises do not reflect depth in learning of any given thought.

In a review of literature on vocabulary acquisition,
Manzo and Sherk (1971 - 1972) concluded that any technique which drew attention to word parts or word meanings would positively influence word acquisition. They questioned which techniques would also develop increased word awareness or vocabulary enrichment. Their concluding suggestions emphasized the knowledge approach that "if we think of word learning as an extension of basic language learning, teaching vocabulary may be a relatively simple matter of exploiting experiences as a means of teaching vocabulary, and exploiting and using vocabulary as a means of getting the most from experience" (p. 88).

"Exploiting experiences" as a way of teaching vocabulary is not a new idea. A number of writers over the years have stressed the importance of providing children with experiences and relating those experiences to vocabulary concepts (Carroll, 1964; Dale, 1972; Dolch, 1953).

Instructional methods that relate reader's personal experiences to the acquisition of new vocabulary words are recommended extensively in the literature (Harris & Smith, 1976; Herber, 1978; Pearson & Johnson, 1978; Spache & Spache, 1977).

Angelotti (1978) states that in terms of vocabulary teaching, it is as critical to develop a student's background of experiences as it is to provide appropriate materials. "As the connections between new language and old are being made, known meanings are associated with the new word--significantly increas-
ing the odds that matchups between word symbols and concepts will be realized" (p. 12). Concept formation and abilities to associate concept and word symbol in a variety of contexts are critical elements of vocabulary growth. Dale (1969) voiced the concern that "One of education's hazards lies in the way in which words are learned. Often they are floating items unattached to real experience, and as a result the knowledge is merely verbal. The shell of meaning is there, but the kernel is missing" (p. 33).

One direct method of avoiding this is tying the vocabulary to student experience. If the meanings of words depend on the experiences behind them, an approach to teaching vocabulary which relies heavily on experience would foster depth of word meaning and subsequently correct interpretation in reading. Given classroom constraints word meanings have to be developed by means of secondhand experiences. They have to be introduced in a vicarious experiential context (Duffelmeyer, 1980).

Frazier (1970) notes that "Experience may be said to have been fully experienced only when it has been worked through in terms of language. The meaning of experience has to be extracted, clarified, and codified, so to speak" (p. 176).

Burroughs (1982) ascertains that emphasis on context explicitly connects vocabulary study with the larger goal of teaching students to read. Having students write extended
definitions of several sentences, the definitions are as much interpretations as definitions. The vocabulary test becomes a reading test. In the world beyond schooling, students will never meet context-free words; they will never meet lists of four-syllable words. But they will most certainly meet familiar or unfamiliar words in context.

Duffelmeyer's (1981) concern is that along with the school's responsibility for vocabulary growth there is the responsibility for accurate evaluation. Guidance in vocabulary development includes learning whether instruction has resulted in a clear understanding of the words studied. He recognizes the relationship between experience and word meaning; meanings arise out of experience. From an instructional standpoint this implies that the meaning of the word is made clear by indicating an experience associated with it. From the aspect of evaluation, the fact implies that if a student clearly has the meaning of a word, he should be able to associate it with an experience.

Instantiation is an area that has been investigated in relation to word meaning or context. There is considerable evidence that the meaning of a word which people encode depends upon the context in which the word occurs (Anderson & McGraw, 1973; Anderson & Ortony, 1975). Anderson and Ortony have argued that "it is impossible that the sense of an utterance could consist solely of a concatenation of the dictionary
readings of its individual words" (p. 168). Instead, they propose that a word can take on "indefinitely many fine gradations in meaning" (p. 177) and that these fine gradations in meaning are constructed through an interaction of incoming information and existing knowledge. One specific hypothesis arising from the body of literature on context sensitivity is the instantiation hypothesis which holds that "if the context is rich and if the message is processed deeply, a noun may be identified with a single real or imagined thing" (Anderson & McGraw, 1973, p. 303). Thus, general terms in sentences are said to be encoded on the basis of an exemplar or instantiation suggested by the context of a sentence and prior knowledge.

Vocabulary Studies

Historically, research on word knowledge and vocabulary acquisition has focused primarily on two main topics: (1) a verification that word knowledge per se is an important component in reading comprehension, and (2) an investigation into the discrete skills involved in vocabulary acquisition. In the last ten to fifteen years, however, researchers have also begun to examine the efficacy of specific teaching strategies for the development of vocabulary knowledge. Some of these strategies have involved the previously mentioned areas of concept development, the use of context and drawing upon the student's prior knowledge.
Langer and Nicolich (1981) investigated the strength of organization of existing knowledge as it relates to key concepts and vocabulary contained in content area textbooks. The subjects were 36 high school seniors from Long Island. Three concept words were chosen for each of the two passages to be read. Students were then asked to free associate with the stimulus concept words chosen. The first passage was then read silently and students were asked to write down all they could remember about the passage. The same procedure was followed for the second passage. Each free association response was categorized to indicate the level of prior knowledge it reflected. Findings indicated that level of prior knowledge was strongly related to the recall of the passage.

Ahlfors (1979) conducted a study in which 80 sixth-grade students were randomly assigned to one of four groups: Definition Group, Context Group, Experience Group, or Control Group. For each of five weeks the treatment groups were presented 10 targeted vocabulary words. The Definition Group practiced dictionary definitions through exercises and puzzles. The Context Group had vocabulary words presented within sentences; they were asked to determine meanings of the words from the sentences and then to use the words in their own sentences. The Experience Group created semantic maps for targeted words. They were then asked to write a definition for the words related to
their own experiences. The Control Group read stories and answered comprehension questions with no particular mention of any vocabulary words. All four groups were given stories to read which incorporated the targeted words. All subjects were given a comprehension test, a multiple-choice definition test, an anomalous sentence test, a modified cloze test, and a free-recall test at the end of the weekly treatment. Delayed multiple-choice definition tests and anomalous sentence tests were also administered. Analyses showed that the Definition and Context treatments were superior to the Experience treatment and the Control Group. The Context treatment proved to be a consistently effective technique on all dependent measures with the exception of the multiple-choice definition test, on which the Definition treatment excelled. These findings are consistent with those of Gipe (1978-1979) and also those of Jenkins, Pany, and Schreck (1978) and Pany and Jenkins (1978).

Gipe (1978-1979) conducted a study to examine the effectiveness of four methods of teaching word meanings. The methods employed were the association method, the category method, the context method and the dictionary method. It was hypothesized that the vocabulary retained by the students would differ according to which of the four methods they experienced, and that the context method would produce the greatest increase since this method incorporated suggestions for concept develop-
ment and drew upon personal experience.

The subjects for this study were 113 third graders and 108 fifth graders in a midwestern school. The subjects were divided into four groups. Each group utilized each of the methods for a period of two weeks. The total study lasted eight weeks. Evaluation tasks were given at the end of each week to each group. The results of the weekly evaluations as well as the posttest indicated that the context method was significantly more effective than the other three methods for both third and fifth graders.

The purpose of Crist and Pettrone’s study (1977) was to determine the relative effects of two methods of instruction in teaching the conceptual meaning of fifteen unfamiliar words. The subjects were 70 college undergraduates who were randomly assigned to two 35 subject groups.

In one method the controlling stimulus was a sentence with the unfamiliar word deleted. In a second method of instruction the controlling stimulus was the definition of the unfamiliar word. The primary objective was to determine how the subjects would perform when the controlling stimulus was not the same as it was during the treatment period. When tested with fifteen new contexts the results clearly showed that the subjects who studied contexts did better on the posttest than the group that saw only definitions.
A replicative study (Crist, 1981) using a single subject design was conducted. Two college students were taught a 60 item English vocabulary. They met with the experimenter for approximately 20 minutes each day for ten days. For each of the 60 words, one subject was exposed to five one sentence contexts. Care was taken to ensure that all five contexts for each word had the same basic meaning as contained in the definition. The other subject was exposed to definitions averaging eight words taken from a standard college dictionary.

Again, the data from this replicative study indicated that the subject's scores on unfamiliar context tended to be higher when they had been exposed to contexts rather than definitions. The subject exposed to definitions was not as effective in identifying the word that fit the context.

These studies have implications for vocabulary development in that they suggest acquiring word meanings through context results in a greater degree of generalization to new contexts than would occur if subjects encountered an unfamiliar context after exposure to definitions.

Duffelmeyer (1980) used an approach to vocabulary development which combined presenting words in a meaningful experiential context and drawing upon the students' own personal experiences or "prior information."

The subjects were 56 college students enrolled in a
reading/study skills course at a midwestern university. The experiential group observed students acting out ten investigator prepared skits that were designed to convey the meanings of the ten target words. Following the dramatization the students were asked to volunteer a personal experience which would also convey the meaning of the word. The control group employed a traditional approach in which vocabulary was taught through structural analysis and dictionary usage.

Duffelmeyer's hypothesis was then an experiential approach to vocabulary instruction would prove more effective than a traditional approach. The results were significant beyond the .05 level. The experiential group's means were consistently higher than those of the control group.

In an experiment with junior high school students, Grubaugh & Molesworth (1980) designed a health unit in which key vocabulary concepts were emphasized. The major goals of the unit were to have students redefine words which are often taken for granted and to develop concepts concerning value related words such as abuse.

In the beginning, students were asked to attend carefully to the vocabulary words and not to give dictionary definitions but to use their own words and phrases. Every word was explained, demonstrated or defined on a literal level before any health associated meanings were introduced. Students were encouraged
to understand that words were not being taught separately but that a relationship existed between the words. When evaluating this vocabulary approach the students responded that they enjoyed the work, found the change refreshing and gained a clearer understanding of health concepts. After a spaced review strategy allowing brief reviews over a two month period an evaluation revealed that students had understood and retained the words and concepts taught.

Haggard (1980) conducted a study to examine how and why elementary and post elementary children learn new words. The students were asked three questions to determine if they could recall specific instances when new words were learned, and if so, what strategies were used. The major conclusion drawn from the study is that social affect plays an important role in the process of vocabulary acquisition. A second conclusion has implications for classroom use. Although many words were identified as having been learned because they were immediately useful, they were rarely learned as a result of traditional teaching methods. New vocabulary was most potent when words had particular significance for the individual, or could be applied to immediate experience or need.

Wittrock’s (1974) conception of reading with understanding is called the generative model of learning. The basic notion of this model is that learning with understanding is the process
of generating perceptions of meanings that are consistent with
an individual's previous experience, prior learning, beliefs
or knowledge.

This model bases prediction about sentence comprehension
and its long term memory upon the following hypothesis:
Meaning for sentences involves more than the sum of the
semantic, syntactic, phonetic, and episodic character-
istics of words. We hypothesize that these character-
istics and the sentence context serve to reduce un-
certainty in the identification of distinctive previous
experiences stored in long-term memory. After uncer-
tainty is reduced, one generates from memory one or
more distinctive representations of an event or rela-
tion consistent with the words of the sentence. The
actively constructed representation induced from
memory of prior events is the psychological meaning
of the sentence. (p. 88)

According to this model, reading with comprehension involves
more than just saying the words aloud. Meaning is gained by
relating one's memory or events and relations to the text.

From this model, a prediction was developed about the
effects of generative processes upon reading and listening with
comprehension and upon the learning of vocabulary. If reading
and listening are generative processes, then children should be
able to generate the meanings of undefined low-frequency words
from a familiar, meaningful story context.

Marks, Doctorow and Wittrock tested several predictions of
the generative model. In one study (1974) it was found that
familiar words facilitate comprehension of unfamiliar stories.
In a second study (Wittrock, Marks & Doctorow, 1975) it was
found that a familiar story enhanced the comprehension and
and retention of new propositions or new words, at least by 25%.

From the data of these studies, it appears that children quickly learn and retain many new undefined vocabulary words when the words are introduced in the contexts of experientially induced, meaningful, familiar sentences and stories. Based upon these data and upon the related studies on learning as a generative process, Wittrock (1974) maintains that reading comprehension is a generative process which involves both semantic memory and distinctive memories of events or experiences.

**Summary**

In terms of vocabulary teaching it is critical to draw upon a student's background of experiences. Concept formation and ability to associate concept and word symbol in a variety of contexts are also critical elements of vocabulary growth. A review of the literature supports the teaching of vocabulary using context as an important strategy. In addition, drawing upon the student's prior knowledge and background experiences will assist the learner in relating new concepts to similar ones already known to them. Words should be introduced in an appropriate contextual setting. The familiar context will guide each learner to the "old information" available in his conceptual base. Thus, the new words will be learned on the basis of individual background experiences.
Chapter III

The Research Design

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of a context method on the overall development of vocabulary comprehension versus the traditional dictionary approach.

Hypotheses

The null hypotheses investigated in this study were as follows:

1. There is no significant difference between the two methods of vocabulary instruction (context versus dictionary) with respect to mean gain posttest scores on the vocabulary checklist test.

2. There is no significant gain from pretest to posttest scores of the context group with respect to the vocabulary checklist test.

3. There is no significant gain from pretest to posttest scores of the dictionary group with respect to the vocabulary checklist test.

Methodology

Subjects

The subjects involved in this study were high school
students (grades 9-11) attending an inner city high school in a predominantly low socioeconomic area. A total of thirty students participated in the study; ten were eliminated due to excessive absences. All thirty students were pretested orally using a vocabulary checklist test.

Instruments and Procedures

Fifty words from Levine's Vocabulary for the High School Student were selected. These words were incorporated into a vocabulary checklist test (see Appendix A for complete test). This test, designed by the experimenter, was readministered at the end of the study as a posttest. The test consisted of two sentences using the chosen target word. One sentence used the word correctly in context; the other did not. The student checked the sentence in which he determined the word was used correctly. A third option was the word NEITHER. This option allowed the student to express the fact that he had no knowledge concerning the choices and eliminated guessing. The test was presented orally to eliminate any difficulty a student might have had in silent reading tasks. Those words which 90 percent of the students had correct were eliminated. Thirty-two target words were chosen.

The 30 students were previously divided into two groups of low reading ability as determined by their scores on the Spring 1981 Metropolitan Achievement Test. The range of reading scores
was 7.0 to 7.9. The traditional dictionary method and the
context method were randomly assigned to these groups.

This experimenter instructed both groups for a period of
one month. Two words were presented daily for four days. Eight
words were presented each week; a total of thirty-two words
were taught. The target words were introduced in the first
10 minutes of a daily reading class of each reading class
period.

The dictionary group used a traditional approach in which
the vocabulary was taught through the use of a dictionary.
Using the dictionary, the students:

1. looked up the definition listed as number one.
2. listed a synonym or antonym.
3. wrote a sentence using the word.

An example of these worksheets may be found in Appendix B.

The context group were required to read a three sentence
passage in which each sentence used a target word in a defining
context. These passages were designed by the experimenter and
may be found in Appendix B. The context was of a simple
sentence structure and contained only common words in order to
make the context familiar. Each student was then asked to
respond in writing to a question at the end of the passage with
a word or phrase from his personal background experience that
further exemplified the target word.
In both groups, worksheets were distributed and collected by the teacher. Instructions and passages were read to the students if necessary.

At the end of the four week treatment period, both groups were given the vocabulary checklist test orally and comparisons were made to measure and compare the mean gains for the two treatment groups.

**Analysis of Data**

Test scores of those who learned vocabulary by the context method were compared with the test scores of students who learned their words by the traditional dictionary method. A correlated t test was used to compare students' individual gains from the pretest to the posttest on the vocabulary checklist test.

**Summary**

This study was designed to examine the effect of a context approach to vocabulary instruction versus a more traditional dictionary method of vocabulary instruction. The study involved thirty high school students for a period of four weeks. The evaluation device was a vocabulary checklist test designed by the experimenter which was used as a pretest and posttest. Mean gain scores were examined for both groups. A correlated t test was used to compare individual pretest and posttest scores.
Chapter IV

Analysis of Data

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of a context method versus a more traditional dictionary method on two groups of high school students’ vocabulary development. Comparisons were made on mean gain scores from pretest to posttest on a vocabulary checklist test.

Findings and Interpretations

The null hypotheses in this study were as follows:

1. There is no significant difference between the two methods of vocabulary instruction (context versus dictionary) with respect to mean gain posttest scores on the vocabulary checklist test.

2. There is no significant gain from pretest to posttest scores of the context group with respect to the vocabulary checklist test.

3. There is no significant gain from pretest to posttest scores of the dictionary group with respect to the vocabulary checklist test.

The first null hypothesis states that there is no significant difference between the two methods of vocabulary instruction (context versus dictionary) with respect to mean posttest
scores. The first set of results is summarized in Table 1.

### Table 1

Mean and Standard Deviation of Gain Scores for the Vocabulary Checklist Tests of the Context and Dictionary Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Context Group</td>
<td>11.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>11.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>2.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dictionary Group</td>
<td>7.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>7.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>4.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Difference</td>
<td>3.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t value</td>
<td>2.91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ t \text{ crit (28)} = 2.76, \ p < .01 \]

The data in Table 1 indicate that there was a statistically significant difference (3.93) in the mean gain scores for the two groups with respect to the posttest scores on the vocabulary checklist test. With 28 degrees of freedom, the calculated t value (2.91) was greater than the critical t value (2.76) required for significance at the .01 level. Therefore, the first null hypothesis was rejected, \( t \ (28) = 2.9, \ p < .01 \).

The second hypothesis states that there is no significant gain from pretest to posttest scores of the context group with respect to the vocabulary checklist test. For the context group
the mean gain score of 11.13 with respect to the vocabulary checklist test was highly significant (see Table 2).

Table 2

T test of Differences of Pretest and Posttest Scores for the Vocabulary Checklist Tests of the Context and Dictionary Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Context Group</th>
<th>Dictionary Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pretest Mean</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>13.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest Mean</td>
<td>25.13</td>
<td>20.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Gain</td>
<td>11.13</td>
<td>7.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t value</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>3.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ t_{crit} (14) = 2.98, \ p < .01. \]

With 14 degrees of freedom, the calculated \( t \) value (3.54) was greater than the critical \( t \) value (2.98) required for significance at the .01 level. Therefore, the second null hypothesis was rejected, \( t (14) = 3.54, \ p < .01. \)

The third hypothesis states that there is no significant gain from pretest to posttest scores of the dictionary group with respect to the vocabulary checklist test. For this group, the mean gain score of 7.20 was statistically significant (see Table 2). With 14 degrees of freedom, the calculated \( t \) value (3.18) was greater than the critical \( t \) value (2.98) required for significance at the .01 level. Therefore, the third null
The hypothesis was rejected, \( t (14) = 3.18, p<.01 \).

The findings of this study demonstrate that vocabulary development utilizing the context approach is significantly more effective than an approach which uses the dictionary. The context group evidenced significantly more growth than the dictionary group. However, within each group there were also significant gains from pretest to posttest scores.

**Summary**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of a context approach to vocabulary instruction versus a more traditional dictionary method of instruction. Analysis of the data demonstrated that the use of context for vocabulary instruction is a significantly more effective method than the use of the dictionary. The context group evidenced significantly more growth than the dictionary group.
Chapter V

Conclusions and Implications

The intent of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of a context approach to vocabulary instruction versus a more traditional dictionary approach.

**Conclusions**

The data indicate that there was a significant difference between the gains made by the groups using the two methods of vocabulary instruction. The use of context and drawing upon the students' prior experience was significantly more effective than the dictionary approach in the teaching of vocabulary.

The significant differences in the posttest scores of the treatment group support the assumption that the context method would produce the greatest increase in vocabulary since this method incorporated suggestions for concept development.

**Implications for Research**

A larger population could be utilized that includes a variety of reading levels to determine the effectiveness of these two methods of vocabulary instruction on subjects of different ages and abilities.

Although the context group performed significantly better on the posttest, both groups appeared frustrated by the absence
of discussion and sharing of answers. Teaching would be even more effective if discussion of the words were a part of the treatment.

**Classroom Implications**

Students would benefit from a practical application of this study. Instruction should make use of that which the student already knows to teach new meanings of words. If the student is introduced to a new word without being given any indication as to how and when this new word should be used, there is nothing available to him that will 'trigger' his prior knowledge and allow him to assimilate this new information. Use of the dictionary is not always helpful for the initial learning of word meaning because the definitions and example sentences are usually such that unless the user has prior knowledge as to the word's meaning, there is nothing available in the definition to trigger an interactive process. Methods of introducing new vocabulary such as using the new word in a sentence designed to explain its meaning or the use of a familiar synonym are supported by the results of this study. The teacher employing these kinds of methods should also try to assure that the words used in explaining the new word are familiar and that any synonyms used in explaining the new word are familiar and that any synonyms used are also understood.

In addition, the learner should be required to respond
in a written manner to demonstrate understanding of the new word. This could be done by using the word in an original sentence or by answering a question concerning the word. It is probably not sufficient for the teacher to assume that because the new word has been introduced in a familiar context that the child now understands the word. This study would suggest that the word be introduced not only in a sentence, but in several sentences, one of which provides a definition. Once these sentences have been studied, the learner could be asked to apply the new word's meaning to his own experiences, as the tasks used in this study demonstrated. Written exercises could be provided which demand that the learner think about and use the word's meaning. Further practice with the new words can occur in many ways: 1) filling in the blanks in sentences, 2) matching words with synonyms, 3) using the dictionary to find synonyms or antonyms, and 4) grouping words of similar meaning to name a few.

The preparation of the student for reading or vocabulary instruction should include stimulating pre-existing schemata. Worksheets with nothing more than directions will not accomplish this. Instruction could be conducted with full length passages containing worthwhile content and include much more oral discussion of ideas and new words both before and after reading. This discussion of the overall topic would have special emphasis
on integrating previously learned information. This would encourage the learner to make connections between concepts (and new vocabulary) in the text and background of knowledge.

This type of approach also might be a significant factor in improving vocabulary by generating excitement about language acquisition. The teacher's enthusiasm also plays an important part in making student's more aware of words. Memorizing word lists will make very little permanent change in a student's vocabulary. Actively involving the student's in discussion and drawing upon their personal experiences will make the learning of new vocabulary meaningful to them.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of a context method versus a traditional dictionary method as vocabulary development. This study sought alternative methods to the more traditional method of vocabulary enrichment. The analysis of the data revealed that there was a significant difference between the two methods of instruction. The group using the context method exhibited significant gains with respect to the vocabulary checklist posttest.

Research indicates a need for quality vocabulary instruction. A context approach which also draws upon a student's personal background experience can offer teachers an alternative method of instruction. This method also generates enthusiasm among
students and aids retention of new vocabulary.
References
References


Burroughs, R. S. Vocabulary study and context, or how I learned to stop worrying about word lists. English Journal, 1982, 71, 53-55.


Appendix A

Vocabulary Checklist Test
Read the pairs of sentences below. Decide which sentence uses the underlined word correctly. Put a check mark in front of that sentence. If you do not know the meaning choose letter C.

1. a. I had an altercation with my brother.
   b. The altercation on the license plate caused people to stare.
   c. Neither

2. a. The baker was told to demolish the cake with 16 candles and roses.
   b. The wreckers will demolish the empty warehouse tomorrow.
   c. Neither

3. a. My new watch keeps precise time.
   b. The precise animal would not obey its master.
   c. Neither

4. a. The dubious cat tipped over all the garbage cans.
   b. I was dubious about my ability to pass the test.
   c. Neither

5. a. A cast on your arm will hinder your daily activities.
   b. "Be careful not to hinder your new shoes," warned mother.
   c. Neither

6. a. The general showed valor when he led his small band of men into battle.
   b. The valor in the middle of the road stopped traffic.
   c. Neither

7. a. Her parents remained obstinate about the rules.
   b. The obstinate vase fell to the floor with a loud crash.
   c. Neither

8. a. The class laughed when John made a blunder.
   b. During the springtime, blunder grows very quickly.
   c. Neither

9. a. The prisoner felt animosity toward the guard.
   b. The animosity on the car soon lost its shine.
   c. Neither

10. a. My new isolation is blue with white stripes.
    b. The patient with the high fever was placed in isolation.
    c. Neither
11. a. The townspeople were frightened by the calamity.
    b. The calamity stood very still and listened.
    c. Neither.

12. a. Susan is a very punctual person.
    b. Brett's new shoelaces are very punctual.
    c. Neither.

13. a. Veracity is an excellent quality.
    b. The hunter always carried his veracity for good luck.
    c. Neither.

14. a. An unleashed dog can be a menace.
    b. The doctor ordered a menace for his patient.
    c. Neither.

15. a. The losing team felt dejected.
    b. The plant was dejected on the windowsill.
    c. Neither.

16. a. Laurie and Ron recognized that they were compatible.
    b. The glass of coke became compatible after sitting on the counter for several hours.
    c. Neither.

17. a. The obstruction in the road caused a traffic jam.
    b. The obstruction was stored in the freezer and didn't spoil.
    c. Neither.

18. a. A thrifty person always looks for bargains.
    b. The thrifty puppy was adorable.
    c. Neither.

19. a. We had to alter our route because of the detour in the road.
    b. The young child agreed to alter the spinach.
    c. Neither.

20. a. Linda inadvertently swallowed the large pit.
    b. The pen wrote inadvertently and had a fine point.
    c. Neither.

21. a. Tony was perplexed by the math problem.
    b. This year the farmer's cotton crop is perplexed.
    c. Neither.
22. a. Louise is indispensable to her boss.
   b. The winds were indispensable during the storm.
   c. Neither.

23. a. The speaker needed a microphone to be audible.
   b. With a new coat of paint, the canoe would be audible.
   c. Neither.

24. a. It is difficult to intimidate a champion boxer.
   b. Eating the proper foods every day will intimidate you.
   c. Neither.

25. a. A rose is a very rational flower.
   b. "Only after we have all the facts can we reach a rational decision," said the judge.
   c. Neither.

26. a. An illiterate person cannot sign his name.
   b. Marie's face became illiterate from the heavy makeup.
   c. Neither.

27. a. Graffiti covered the walls of the phone booth.
   b. The doctor rubbed graffiti into the wound.
   c. Neither.

28. a. It is compulsory to wear shoes in school.
   b. The buzzing in my radio is compulsory.
   c. Neither.

29. a. The shortage of water caused widespread famine.
   b. The famine on the dog's paw caused great pain.
   c. Neither.

30. a. The blind man was exempt from military duty.
   b. The fruit became exempt and had to be thrown out.
   c. Neither.

31. a. Mother emptied the scrupulous ashtray.
   b. The bank president hires only scrupulous people.
   c. Neither.

32. a. Ted's endurance allowed him to run in the marathon.
   b. Mary's endurance was dangerous so she gave it away.
   c. Neither.
33. a. Mark has the potential to be a student leader.
   b. Sally hid the potential and wouldn't give it back.
   c. Neither.

34. a. The data about the bank robbery was given to the FBI.
   b. The data on my nose made it itch.
   c. Neither.

35. a. Scott became belligerent when the teacher asked him to leave the classroom.
   b. The map I drew of the neighborhood was very belligerent.
   c. Neither.

36. a. Carla faced a difficult dilemma.
   b. A turtle is a very common dilemma.
   c. Neither.

37. a. The hunters searched for the options in the forest.
   b. The counselor offered the student several options.
   c. Neither.

38. a. The odor lingered on for several weeks.
   b. The velvet couch lingered on the brown carpeting.
   c. Neither.

39. a. Mrs. Evans thought that my composition was mediocre.
   b. The mediocre week of school is almost here.
   c. Neither.

40. a. The class felt the wrath of the teacher.
   b. A wrath of insects disturbed the picnic.
   c. Neither.

41. a. Please penetrate your applause until the ceremony is over.
   b. The enemy could not penetrate the fort.
   c. Neither.

42. a. A cat will devour a canary.
   b. The prize money will devour the entire family.
   c. Neither.

43. a. The cunning animal was able to outwit its enemy.
   b. The cunning automobile needed a new engine.
   c. Neither.
44. __a. The birthday boy caught a **glimpse** of the gifts his mother had hidden.  
   __b. The glimpse on the piano sounded flat.  
   __c. Neither.

45. __a. Charles wanted to **accumulate** a large sum of money.  
   __b. The rocking horse will **accumulate** from so much use.  
   __c. Neither.

46. __a. The sluggish chain sparkled in the sunlight.  
   __b. Cathy felt **sluggish** after taking the medicine.  
   __c. Neither.

47. __a. Just before his operation Doug felt **apprehension**.  
   __b. At holiday time, Mrs. Kane put an **apprehension** in the window.  
   __c. Neither.

48. __a. The teacher told the students to pick up all the **debris**.  
   __b. I don't like **debris** on my ice cream or my pudding.  
   __c. Neither.

49. __a. To continue the search after dark would be **futile**.  
   __b. The chocolate frosting on the birthday cake was **futile**.  
   __c. Neither.

50. __a. The scientist declared that his invention was **infallible**.  
   __b. The **infallible** mule refused to take another step.  
   __c. Neither.
Appendix B

Activity Sheets
Read the paragraphs below and answer the question that follows.

Tina's grandfather often tells the story of the calamity that drove his family from their home. The calamity was a flood that washed away the roads, sent entire homes floating down the river and killed 700 people. A calamity is a disaster. Can you name another kind of calamity that is caused by nature?

Graffiti now covers almost every inch of the walls in the girls' bathroom. Sayings such as "Sally loves Sam" and "Lisa was here" as well as many drawings are a few examples of the graffiti that cover the once bare tiles. Graffiti are writings or drawings scratched on a surface. In what other places have you seen graffiti?

Sandy is perplexed about what she wants to do after she graduates from high school. She is perplexed about what kind of job she might want—or should she go on to college? Perplexed means to be confused or puzzled about something. Are you perplexed about what you want to do after you graduate from high school?

Ron could not penetrate the wall with the nail. The nail would not penetrate the wall because it was made of cement. Penetrate means to enter or go through. What could be used to penetrate cement?
Read the paragraphs below and answer the question that follows.

Joe Baxter, a captain on the police force, seems to intimidate everyone in the neighborhood. He is able to intimidate them because he is six feet four inches tall, has a deep harsh voice and carries his gun at all times. Intimidate means to make fearful. Name someone who has made you feel intimidated?

On hot and humid days, when the temperature is 90 and no air seems to be moving, many people feel sluggish. They feel so sluggish that most activities such as cooking, baseball, jogging or even playing a quiet game of cards with friends do not interest them at all. Sluggish means without energy. What time of year do you feel the most sluggish?

Parents and teachers try to tell young people about the importance of veracity. If you are known throughout your life for your veracity, and you should get in trouble, your family, friends, teachers and perhaps even a judge, will believe your side of the story. Veracity means truthfulness. Has anyone ever doubted your veracity? When?

John's report cards always show just mediocre grades. His parents think that his report card is mediocre because he usually gets 4 C's and a B which they feel could be improved if John would spend more time on his homework. Mediocre means average. Are your grades mediocre, below average or above average?
Mr. King needs to hire someone who is totally scrupulous. It is necessary that the person be scrupulous because they will be in charge of large sums of the company's money every day. Scrupulous means very honest or moral. Can you name a person whom you know is totally scrupulous?

Willie Norris is exempt from gym. He is exempt because his doctor has discovered that Willie has a weak heart and should not do exercise like running, swimming, or jumping. Exempt means excused. Have you ever been exempt from gym? Why?

Mr. Conti, the principal of Johnson High feels the wrath of the students by their angry looks and insulting words. Their wrath is caused by his new policy which makes it illegal for any student to leave the school during lunch. Wrath means great anger. Would you feel wrath toward the principal of Franklin if he made this same rule? Why?

No matter what she said, Nancy's parents remained obstinate about the subject of her allowance. They are obstinate because they are afraid if Nancy is given more money she will spend it foolishly or get into trouble. Obstinate means stubborn. Are your parent(s) obstinate about some issue? What?
Read the paragraphs below and answer the question that follows.

During the assembly last week, someone on the last row of the audience yelled to the speaker, "You're not audible!" The speaker was not audible because the microphone had not been turned on.

Audible means capable of being heard. Does music have to be played loudly in order to be audible?

The horrible smell lingered in our country cottage for weeks. It lingered because it had been caused by a skunk and nothing we tried would make it disappear.

Linger means to remain or stay. What food has an odor that lingers in your house long after the meal is finished?

Being absent from school a great deal of the time can really hinder your progress. It can hinder it because when you return you must make up the work you missed as well as learn all the new material.

Hinder means to block or get in the way. What else can hinder a pupil's progress?

Mrs. Gray made a blunder the other day that almost cost her her job. The blunder was forgetting to place a zero at the end of a number so that it read two hundred dollars (200) instead of two thousand dollars (2000).

Blunder means mistake or error. Do you ever make a blunder when you add or subtract?
Read the paragraphs below and answer the question that follows.

Linda felt bad because she inadvertently spilled red paint on her teacher's white blouse. It happened inadvertently when she was holding the jar of paint and turned around suddenly, not realizing that Miss Ames was standing just a few inches behind her.

Inadvertently means not on purpose or accidentally. Have you ever inadvertently ruined a piece of clothing?

Maria grew up with a feeling of animosity toward her parents. The reason for her animosity was that her folks beat her up and took any money that she earned.

Animosity means hatred. Do you believe that Maria will feel animosity toward her parents for the rest of her life?

In New York State it is compulsory for every high school student to pass certain tests before he earns a high school diploma. It is compulsory to pass a test in reading, writing and math.

Compulsory means required. Do you believe that this compulsory testing is a wise idea? Why or why not?

Mrs. Casey refuses to alter her opinion about the use of alcohol by teenagers. She refuses to alter her thoughts because a sixteen year old drunken driver struck and killed her only child.

Alter means to change. Can you blame Mrs. Casey for not altering her opinion?
My boss demands that I be punctual and not be late for work. He wants me to be punctual so that I put in a full day's work and if I'm even one minute late, he subtracts money from my paycheck.

Punctual means to be on time. Do you think it's important to be punctual for school? Why?

The newspapers are filled with stories about people who have displayed valor. Some of them have performed daring rescues, have helped to capture crooks, while others have given their own lives trying to save some one else's life. Valor means bravery or courage. Have you ever shown valor in any situation? What?

John and Mary Jones had a major altercation last Friday over whose turn it was to stay home and babysit for the younger children. The altercation was settled only after their father grounded both teenagers for arguing. An altercation is an argument or disagreement. Are there ever any altercations in your family? For what reasons?

Sara was dubious as to whether she would be able to lose any weight. It was dubious whether she could stay away from sweets such as ice cream and candy. Dubious is to be doubtful. Are you dubious about whether or not you'll pass this year?
Read the paragraphs below and answer the question that follows.

Randy is faced with a difficult dilemma. His dilemma is whether or not to report his best friend's role in a robbery or just allow his favorite teacher to suffer the loss of her money. A dilemma is a problem that can be solved in two or more ways. What would you do if you were faced with Randy's dilemma?

Lola was sure that her plan to steal a copy of the final exam was infallible. It was infallible because she had a copy of the key to the cabinet where the tests were stored and everyday she was left alone in the room to wash the boards. Infallible means foolproof or perfect. Do you think that Lola's plan is foolproof? Why?

Mrs. Brown accumulates old magazines and papers in her attic. She has accumulated so many of them that there isn't room for anything else in her attic. Accumulate means to collect or gather up. Is there something you've accumulated in the past year? What?

Sandy felt dejected when he wasn't chosen to be on the track team. Sandy was dejected because he had trained for a long time and felt he was better than some of the boys who had been selected. Dejected means depressed or downhearted. When was the last time you felt dejected?
Read the paragraphs below and answer the question that follows.

The obstruction in the road caused the car to come to a sudden stop. The obstruction was caused by boxes that had fallen off a large truck. An obstruction means something that gets in the way. Have you ever had an obstruction in your throat? What?

Electricity has become indispensable to modern man. It is indispensable to the running of almost all machinery; the lighting of homes, factories and stores and to the refrigeration of food. Indispensable means absolutely necessary. Can you think of something else that is indispensable to all mankind?

Louis Martino felt belligerent toward Rico. He felt belligerent because Rico had insulted Mrs. Martino in front of many people. Belligerent means angry. Would you feel belligerent toward someone who offended a member of your family?

It is futile for my parents to cling to the hope that my brother Ray is still alive. It is futile because the War Department reported him missing over 10 years ago and we haven't heard a word in all that time. Futile means useless. Is it futile to believe that someday all the countries of the world will be at peace?