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Wanda B. Hedrick

*The University of North Florida*

Janis M. Harmon

*University of Texas at San Antonio*

Philip M. Linerode

*Northside Independent School District*

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## Teachers' Beliefs and Practices of Vocabulary Instruction With Social Studies Textbooks in Grades 4-8

Wanda B. Hedrick  
The University of North  
Florida

Janis M. Harmon  
University of Texas at  
San Antonio

Philip M. Linerode  
Northside Independent  
School District

*This investigation focused on the vocabulary beliefs and instructional practices of social studies teachers in intermediate and middle school grades as well as their use of teachers' manuals. Using a self-reporting survey to measure these beliefs and practices, we found some discrepancy between what teachers believe about vocabulary learning and their actual instructional practices for supporting vocabulary in teaching social studies. While their reported beliefs appear to mirror what is currently accepted as effective vocabulary instruction, their reported practices reflect more traditional notions like those found in many social studies textbook manuals. While all teachers surveyed held many beliefs and practices in common, three beliefs and three practices were differentially affected by grade level, economic status, or number of years of teacher experience.*

OUR KNOWLEDGE OF VOCABULARY development is grounded in an extensive body of research that supports widely accepted practices of teaching new words to students. These efforts are based upon the universal belief that knowing word meanings is fundamental to understanding concepts presented in texts (Baumann & Kameenui, 1991; Nagy, 1988). Empirical studies indicating a positive correlation between students' vocabulary and comprehension support our common sense notion that we must teach words to help students understand what they read (Beck & McKeown, 1991a). As children reach intermediate and middle grades, vocabulary demands in content areas increase at a rapid rate and influence the network of ideas that are important for conceptual learning in all disciplines (Chall, Jacobs, & Baldwin, 1990). Critical factors, such as textbooks used in content area classrooms and the pedagogical knowledge base and belief systems of teachers concerning effective vocabulary instruction, can impact vocabulary teaching and learning in these different subject matter areas. In particular, this study examines how these factors might interact together to influence teacher decision making about vocabulary learning in intermediate and middle school social studies classes.

Textbooks, as major instructional tools, continue to prevail in content area classrooms (Alvermann & Moore, 1991; Moore & Murphy, 1987), and this use increases with successive grade levels (Goodlad, 1976). While teachers across disciplines and grade levels use textbooks in different ways (Irvin, 1998), teachers typically devote class time to textbooks, assign homework that is textbook-oriented (Woodward & Elliot, 1990), and use textbooks to make important instructional decisions (Muth, 1985). Yet, studies also have indicated that textbooks are difficult for students to read (Beck & McKeown, 1991b; Hill & Erwin, 1984; Sellers, 1988; Wade, 1983), offer too much information with little depth (Tyson-Bernstein & Woodward, 1989), and provide little guidance for helping teachers support student reading (Armbruster & Gudbrandsen, 1986; Ciborowski, 1992). Still other studies have answered the call to these shortcomings and have made recommendations to improve textbook programs (Beck & McKeown, 1991b; Stetson & Williams, 1992; Wood & Muth, 1992).

The limitations of textbooks directly impact vocabulary acquisition of content specific terms. For example, to cover extensive topics in social studies, publishers present cursory explanations that disregard rich contexts needed to help students understand the ideas represented by content specific terms. These general passages can be difficult to understand, especially if students have inadequate background knowledge to make needed inferences. In response to the call for more considerate texts (Konopak, 1988), publishers have tried to alleviate vocabulary obstacles by defining new terms in a succeeding sentence right after the word is used. Such practices still do not provide enough context and connections for students to gain a deeper understanding of the concept being presented.

In regard to effective vocabulary instruction, teachers need to focus on the enhancement of comprehension instead of promotion of word knowledge alone. Studies document the important role that direct instruction on constructing word meanings serves in the vocabulary acquisition of school age children (Graves, 1987; Stahl & Fairbanks, 1986). Preferred practices for enhancing comprehension include active, in-depth processing of word meanings where students use the meanings of words instead of regurgitating definitions, multiple exposures to word meanings in different contexts, and the integration of words with other related terms (Stahl & Fairbanks, 1986).

The beliefs and practices of content area teachers for supporting vocabulary learning in such a manner are related to the importance they place in helping students develop necessary strategies for reading informational texts. A logical place to teach reading and thinking strategies is in content area classes, such as social studies, where students can learn how to be strategic learners as they acquire content knowledge (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985). Nonetheless, studies focusing on reading strategy instruction in content area textbooks have yielded disappointing results. When Armbruster and Gudbrandsen (1986) examined reading comprehension instruction in social studies programs for fourth and sixth grade, they found that direct instruction in any reading skill rarely occurred. Menke and Davey (1994) found similar results with secondary teachers. Furthermore, one extensive analysis of science and social studies textbooks published from 1985 through 1987

revealed that these textbooks offered little support for helping learners with reading in either student books or teachers' manuals (Ciborowski, 1992). While the study examined textbooks from primary to secondary levels, the researchers found this paucity was especially common in textbooks in the higher grades. In reference to vocabulary, they found that teachers disagreed with the words publishers chose to "highlight." They also found little emphasis in teaching words in relation to conceptual development.

Almost ten years later, Hedrick, Harmon, & Linerode (2000) found that social studies publishers in grades 4-8 continue to recommend traditional vocabulary instructional procedures that typically focus on a definitional level of word meaning and disregard how learners process new words. While publishers lag behind implementing current, research-based findings about instructional procedures, this should not be the case with the knowledge base of teachers, especially those who have entered the profession in recent years. Additionally, practicing teachers keep abreast of current ideas through staff development, workshops, and university courses. Given the disparity between our understanding about vocabulary development and what is still currently found in social studies textbook manuals, how social studies teachers of intermediate and middle school students grapple with these inconsistencies is not clearly understood.

The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' self-reported beliefs and practices of vocabulary instruction with social studies textbooks in intermediate and middle school grades and to examine how these practices align with textbook publisher recommendations. Because of the lack of research in this area, it was necessary for the study to be exploratory in nature and to do more describing of the data rather than extended statistical analysis. Research questions guiding the study included the following:

- How do social studies teachers in grades 4-8 view vocabulary teaching and learning?
- What do they report as their current instructional practices in teaching vocabulary in social studies classes?

- Do teacher-reported practices reflect use of publishers' teaching manuals for teaching social studies vocabulary?
- Do the reported teacher practices reflect what is currently viewed as effective vocabulary instruction?

### **Methodology**

We conducted a survey to explore and describe the vocabulary beliefs and practices of social studies teachers in grades 4-8 and their use of suggestions from social studies textbook manuals to support vocabulary learning. We followed the guidelines put forth by Fraenkel & Wallen (1993) for designing and conducting surveys. Given the exploratory and descriptive nature of this investigation, we designed the survey to capture a wide variety of demographic information (e.g., ethnicity of school population, economic status of students, etc.) as well as a variety of questions about textbook and vocabulary practices. We mailed our survey instrument to 74 elementary schools with intermediate grades 4 and 5 and to 21 middle schools with grades 6 through 8. We mailed 211 surveys to the lead teacher per grade level at each school and had an overall return rate of 34.6 percent. The returned surveys included 47 teachers in grades 4 and 5 out of 148 that were mailed (31.8 percent). It included 23 teachers from grades 6 through 8 out of 63 that were mailed (36.5 percent). Three teachers did not identify their grade level position. Although survey research is best served when a large return rate is realized, we analyzed the surveys available given the constraints we experienced as outside researchers collecting data from school district personnel. However, we maintain that respondents represent the larger targeted populations for the following reasons:

- we used multiple school districts
- we selected only school districts that had ethnic and socioeconomic compositions representative of the state
- we followed the formal request procedures of the school districts to conduct research
- we confirmed survey results of demographic variables with known district data

- we offered incentives to participants for completing and returning the surveys

We were obligated to accept the initial survey returns because we had no staff-line authority to compel response and we promised teachers anonymity to encourage participation and confidentiality.

As a result, the returned surveys represent teachers across ethnicity of student population, grade level, and size of school. The respondents identified their schools as having student populations of 16 percent African American, 5.6 percent Asian American, 39.2 percent Hispanic American, 0 percent Native American, and 39.2 percent Caucasian. The respondents also represented different grade levels from 4<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade with 64.4 percent teaching in grades 4 or 5 and 31.5 percent teaching in grades 6-8. In regard to school size, 75.4 percent of the respondents identified their school size as one thousand students or less and 24.7 percent as over one thousand students. When asked to identify the type of social studies that they taught, 45.2 percent identified U.S. History (grade 5, 27.4 percent and grade 8, 17.8 percent), 45.2 percent identified the State History (grade 4, 35.6 percent and grade 7, 9.6 percent) and 1.4 percent identified World Geography (grade 6). Several participants (8.2 percent) either did not identify their grade level or subject taught making inclusion of their data unusable. Even though our return rate was relatively low for survey research (34.6 percent), we felt it was widely representative enough of our initial mailing (as explained earlier) that the reporting of this data could be useful in the design of future survey research in vocabulary practices and beliefs. Therefore, we will report data in the returned surveys and analyze that data in order to explore possible directions for future studies.

We asked teachers to approximate the number of children on free or reduced lunch to determine an estimate of socio-economic status of the students. When asked to what was the percentage of children on free or reduced lunch at their schools, 41.1 percent of the respondents identified that 20 percent or less of their children were in that category. We labeled this category as being a "low" amount of children that were economically disadvantaged. In the "moderate" category of 21-50 percent of the children being economically disadvantaged, 26 percent of

the teachers chose this category to represent their school populations. Finally, 31.5 percent of the teachers chose the "high" category of over 50 percent to represent the number of their children on free or reduced lunch. In terms of years of teaching experience, 27.4 percent teachers reported having less than 7 years of teaching experience, while 72.6 percent stated they had 7 years or more of teaching experience. This larger percentage of teachers with more experience may be representative of the national phenomenon of the aging of the teaching profession as evidenced in the forecasted teacher shortage.

One part of the survey contained a segment of an instrument created by Konopak and Williams (1994) to explore teachers' beliefs about vocabulary learning. This segment required participants to select four statements out of twelve that matched their beliefs about vocabulary learning. Konopak and Williams (1994) constructed the statements to reflect three hypotheses that help to explain the relationship between vocabulary and reading comprehension (Anderson & Freebody, 1981; Mezynski, 1983):

- a knowledge hypothesis
- an instrumental hypothesis
- an access hypothesis

Grounded in our understanding of schema theory and the constructive nature of learning, the knowledge hypothesis emphasizes the importance of prior knowledge as well as the interconnectedness between related words and concepts. The instrumental hypothesis suggests that knowing meanings of words is a necessary prerequisite for comprehension and that direct instruction in word meanings should enhance comprehension. In the words of Ruddell (1994), "it appears that when we teach vocabulary, students learn vocabulary" (p. 421). The access hypothesis highlights the importance of automaticity of word knowledge that enables learners to quickly retrieve a word's meaning. This hypothesis views practice as a critical component in vocabulary learning. Konopak and Williams (1994) used a panel of three professors and research team members to establish content validity (see p. 488 in their article for details). For the remainder of our survey, we created questions for capturing information about descriptions of respondents, descriptions of



their vocabulary practices, and the extent of their use of the social studies teacher's manual. We checked for, and confirmed construct validity for this portion of the survey by enlisting the help of several social studies teachers. These teachers took an initial version of the survey and commented whether the questions were appropriate or confusing. From their comments, we adjusted the survey before sending it out to our participants. Because this was a self-report measure of attitudes and behaviors, we did not conduct a traditional measure of reliability such as split half calculations of reliability. Also, because this was an investigational study, based on the work of Konopak and Williams (1994) we did not construct a second form at this juncture. When we collected construct validity information we also asked the expert about the clarity and potential ambiguity in any of the questions. Based on the documentation on the original Konopak and Williams work and our experts' comments were assumed the form had reasonable reliability.

### **Results**

We report our findings based upon three variables:

- the grade level of students
- the campus' economic status
- the teachers' level of teaching experience

Our reason for doing so is based upon the impact that these factors tend to have on teaching and learning (e.g., Chall, Jacobs, & Baldwin, 1990; Klingele, W.E., & Warrick, B.K, 1990; Levin, 1970). We divided the results of the survey data into two broad categories, beliefs about vocabulary learning and vocabulary instructional practices and differences. We present the findings of each category in the following sections.

#### **Beliefs About Vocabulary Learning**

Using Konopak and Williams' (1994) instrument for capturing teachers' beliefs and practices about vocabulary teaching and learning, we investigated twelve belief statements that represented three orientations toward vocabulary learning. We instructed teachers to select

four statements out of twelve that best represented their beliefs about vocabulary learning. After generating frequencies to determine which statements teachers considered as most representative of their beliefs, we then ranked each belief and the proportion of teachers who identified it as being in their "top four." Table 1 presents the twelve belief statements in this rank order.

Table 1

*Teacher Beliefs about Vocabulary Learning*

Rank	Percent	Belief	Hypothesis represented
1	78.1	A new word is acquired through learning about a topic and information about that topic.	Knowledge
2	76.7	Children learn new words through their experiences, such as participating in an activity.	Knowledge
2	76.7	Having knowledge about a subject helps children learn new, related words.	Knowledge
4	72.6	Learning a new word means developing a concept of ideas related to that word.	Knowledge
5	47.9	A new word is acquired through many encounters with its definition.	Access
6	21.9	Learning a new word means acquiring a definition, or facts about the word.	Instrumental
7	5.5	Learning a new word means repeating it so that the meaning becomes automatic.	Access
7	5.5	Being given a list of words and definitions helps children learn new words.	Instrumental
9	4.1	Learning new vocabulary takes place one word at a time.	Instrumental
10	1.4	Children learn new words best through practicing the definition over and over.	Access
10	1.4	Children learn new words best through direct presentation of their definitions, such as telling them the meaning of words.	Instrumental
12	0.0	Being quick and efficient will help children learn new vocabulary	Access

For each belief, we conducted three comparisons to determine:

- the grade level of the students
- a campus' economic status
- the teachers' level of teaching experience was related to any variation in the perceived importance of the belief

We determined that three beliefs were differentially affected by grade level, economic status, or teacher experience. The nine beliefs not impacted by economic status, teacher experience, or grade level were:

- Children learn new words through their experiences, such as participating in an activity.
- Learning a new word means acquiring a definition, or facts about the word.
- Learning new vocabulary takes place one word at a time.
- Children learn new words best through practicing the definition over and over.
- Being quick and efficient will help children learn new vocabulary.
- A new word is acquired through learning about a topic and information about that topic.
- Learning a new word means repeating it so that the meaning becomes automatic.
- Being given a list of words and definitions helps children learn new words.
- Children learn new words best through direct presentation of their definitions, such as telling them the meaning of words.

Using the chi-square test, we noted significant interactions between the three comparisons (grade level, economic status, or teacher experience) and the following reported beliefs:

- Having knowledge about a subject helps children learn new, related words.

- A new word is acquired with many encounters with its definition.
- Learning a new word means developing a concept of ideas related to that word.

There were significant differences across grade levels for two belief statements:

“Having knowledge about a subject helps children learn new and related words” and “Learning a new word means developing a concept of ideas related to that word.” With both beliefs, intermediate teachers had a significantly higher proportion of responses for the beliefs in the ‘Top 4’ than the middle school teachers. There was also a significant difference in socioeconomic status for belief statement, “A new word is acquired through many encounters with its definition,” with teachers in less economically disadvantaged sites selecting it more frequently. Table 2 illustrates this information.

Table 2

*Chi-Square Test of Interactions about Teacher Beliefs*

<b>Differences related to:</b>		
	Economic Disadvantage	Teacher's Experience
Having knowledge about a subject helps children learn new, related words.		Students' Grade Level
A new word is acquired through many encounters with its definition.	Significant $\chi^2=10.10$ ; $df=2$ $p = 0.01$	
Learning a new word means developing a concept of ideas related to that word.		Significant $\chi^2=6.22$ ; $df=1$ $p = 0.01$

### Vocabulary Instructional Practices and Differences

We investigated eighteen practices and conducted three comparisons to determine:

- the grade level of the students
- a campus' economic status
- if the teachers' level of teaching experience was related to any variation in the practice

We selected the eighteen practices described below because they represent typical tasks related to both traditional vocabulary instructional practices and to practices based upon current understanding of vocabulary acquisition (Allen, 1999; Blachowicz & Fisher, 1996). In this section, we present those practices not impacted by these variables and those practices significantly impacted by the variables.

#### *Practices not impacted by grade level of students, economic status, or teachers' experience*

Fifteen practices (the questions to which the teachers responded) were not impacted by grade level, economic status, or teacher experience. They include the following:

- How do you rate the textbook you are using? Across all teachers surveyed, 83.5 percent rated their social studies textbooks overall as being between adequate and very good.
- How well does the textbook you are using clarify new terms? Almost 85 percent thought their textbooks were adequate to very good at clarifying new terms.
- How long does it take to cover one unit in your classes? The majority of teachers (60.3 percent) reported taking 6-9 weeks to cover a unit.
- How long does it take to cover one chapter in your classes? The majority of teachers (75.4 percent) reported taking 2 or more weeks to cover a chapter.
- How often do you give students lists of words and definitions to help them understand the text? Twenty-two

percent gave students lists of words and definitions to help them understand the text with each unit and almost 25 percent gave this assignment at every chapter. Thirty-seven percent of the teachers reported that they seldom gave this assignment.

- How much time do your students spend looking up definitions for new terms before reading the textbook where new words are found? Thirteen percent of the teachers stated that their students spend thirty minutes to an hour looking up definitions for new terms before reading the textbook containing the new words and almost 40 percent reported their students spent less than thirty minutes doing this activity. Barely 30 percent said this activity was not part of their instruction.
- How often do your students use the dictionary or the textbook glossary to look up new social studies terms? Eleven percent of the teachers reported having their students do this for every unit, 28.8 percent reported it for every chapter, 17.8 percent for every lesson, and 34.2 percent stated that they seldom had their students do this activity.
- At the beginning of a new unit in social studies, how much time do your students have in class discussions to talk about what they already know about targeted vocabulary words? At the beginning of a new unit 37 percent of the teachers allow 20-30 minutes of discussion to talk about what the students already know about targeted vocabulary, while 34.2 percent spend 10 minutes in this activity, 15.1 percent spend 5 minutes or less and 11 percent report that it is not part of their instruction.
- How many different opportunities do your students have to practice using a new word introduced in a unit? (i.e., fill in the blank, reading definitions, using new words in answers and essays, tests, etc.) Over 46 percent of the teachers gave their student 3-5 exposures to practice using the new words while almost 40 percent gave the student 6-9 exposures.
- How often do your students write sentences with new vocabulary words? Four percent of the teachers had their students use the words in a sentence for each unit, 13.7

percent did this for each chapter, 11 percent for each lesson, and 68.4 percent reported this was done seldom or was not part of their instruction.

- How often do your students use new vocabulary words in other kinds of writings, such as essays, reports, journal responses, etc.? Eleven percent of the teachers do these kinds of writings on each unit, 35.6 percent on each chapter, 13.7 percent on each lesson, 31.5 percent checked seldom, and 5.5 percent checked other.
- How do you select vocabulary words to teach for each unit, chapter, or lesson? The majority of teachers (57.5 percent) checked that they follow the terms highlighted by the authors of the textbook, 21.9 percent indicated that they create their own list of words, 1.4 percent of the teachers have their students select the words, and 13.7 percent checked “other”.
- How often do you use flash cards (or other ways) to help students review newly acquired word meanings? Concerning using flash cards or other ways to review the newly acquired word meanings, 6.8 percent of the teachers did this at the end of every unit, 26 percent at the end of every chapter, 15.1 percent at the end of every lesson, and 49.3 percent reported that their students reviewed words on their own without it being part of the teachers formal instruction.
- What kinds of vocabulary tests do you give most frequently? The kinds of vocabulary tests teachers gave most frequently involved having students match words with definitions (8.2 percent), write the definitions (8.2 percent), answer multiple-choice questions (5.5 percent), and write explanations (42.5percent).
- What kind of reading format do you use most frequently? For this question, the teachers reported having the students read the textbook independently in class (12.3 percent), read it at home (8.2 percent), listen while the teacher reads (8.2 percent), and other ways (23.3 percent). Under the category of “other ways,” teachers listed examples such as a combination of the ways listed above, students reading to

each other in pairs, and students listening to the text read aloud on audiotape.

*Practices impacted by grade level of students, economic status, or teachers' experience*

In three of the practices, we found that practice was differentially affected by grade level, economic status, or teacher experience. Using the chi-square test, we noted significant interactions between the three variables (grade level economic status, or teacher experience) and ratings of teacher's editions, reliance on teacher's editions, and vocabulary instructional techniques. We included ratings of teacher's editions in this section because use of instructional materials can be viewed as part of instruction.

- How would you rate the teachers' edition? Overall, teachers from schools with populations with low numbers of students that were economically disadvantaged rated their teachers' edition as less helpful than the ratings of teachers from schools with populations of higher incidences of economically disadvantaged students. Teachers with less experience (1-6 years) reported the teachers' edition to be much more 'Somewhat Helpful' and much less 'Helpful' than the teachers with more experience. Furthermore, teachers at different grades had significantly different responses to how they rated their social studies textbook. As a group, intermediate grade teachers rated their teachers' editions as being very helpful 30.4 percent of the time whereas teachers in grades 6, 7, and 8 rated their textbooks as very helpful 4.5 percent of the time.
- How much do you rely on the teachers' edition as an instructional guide? This question produced a significant difference by grade level. In general, intermediate teachers tended to follow the instructional guidelines offered in the teachers' editions much more than the middle school teachers.
- Which instructional strategy do you find most helpful? Responses to this question also produced significant differences between intermediate and middle school teachers' responses. Twenty-two



percent of the intermediate grade teachers reported that providing definitions and sentences for conceptually loaded words was a helpful instructional strategy for teaching vocabulary. On the other hand, proportionally over twice as many, 47.6 percent of the middle school teachers indicated that providing definitions and sentences for conceptually loaded words was a helpful instructional strategy for teaching vocabulary. Fifty-eight and one-half percent of the intermediate grade teachers selected visually representing concepts as a helpful instructional strategy for teaching vocabulary. In contrast, proportionally only half as many, 23.8 percent of the middle grade teachers selected this strategy as being helpful. Finally, only 12.2 percent of intermediate teachers used dictionaries and glossaries while 23.8 percent of middle school teachers selected this strategy as being helpful for teaching vocabulary.

Table 3

*Chi-Square Test of Interactions of Teacher Practices*

	<b>Differences related to:</b>		
	Economic Disadvantage	Teacher's Experience	Students' Grade Level
How much do you rely on the teacher's edition as an instructional guide?			Significant $\chi^2=11.21$ ; $df=4$ $p = 0.01$
How would you rate the teacher's edition?	Significant $\chi^2=16.14$ ; $df=4$ $p = 0.04$	Significant $\chi^2=13.19$ ; $df=4$ $p = 0.01$	Significant $\chi^2=9.28$ ; $df=4$ $p = 0.05$
Which instructional strategy do you find most helpful?			Significant $\chi^2=7.87$ ; $df=4$ $p = 0.05$

## Discussion

This study followed a previous investigation of vocabulary instruction support in the teachers' editions of social studies textbooks (Hedrick, Harmon, Linerode, 2000) in order to understand how social studies teachers (grades 4-8) supported vocabulary learning, especially in conjunction with use of social studies textbooks. Prior to this current study, we wondered if we would find teachers doing more effective vocabulary instruction or doing activities more reflective of the teacher's manuals with their outdated notions of how vocabulary development occurs. We also wondered if social studies teachers' practices, effective or not, would reflect their reported beliefs about how vocabulary is developed. Therefore, we conducted this exploratory, descriptive study to examine teachers' beliefs about vocabulary learning as well as instructional practices and views about their social studies textbooks. As with all survey data, we acknowledge that our findings are based on self-reporting by the participants and that Konopak and Williams' statements (1994) are based on a broad description of the relationship between vocabulary and reading comprehension. Nevertheless, findings revealed both expected and surprising results about social studies teachers' espoused beliefs and vocabulary practices.

Across grade levels (intermediate and middle school teachers), social studies teachers' beliefs about vocabulary learning paralleled the findings of Konopak and Williams (1994) in their investigation of elementary reading teachers. Over 70 percent of the teachers in this survey selected statements that reflected the knowledge hypothesis. Such reported beliefs are encouraging because it suggests that teachers understand the relationship between vocabulary learning and conceptual understanding. However, a less encouraging finding was the number of teachers who felt that new words could be learned by repeated encounters with the definition. Approximately 50 percent of the respondents selected this belief statement that Konopak and Williams classified as indicative of the access hypothesis. Multiple exposures to words are necessary for word learning to occur, but these exposures should include a variety of different contexts that move beyond definitions to actual word use (Stahl & Fairbanks, 1986). Another finding was that over 20 percent of teachers felt that learning a new word meant

acquiring its definition or facts about the word, representative of the instrumental hypothesis. While definitions are effective as an initial step in word learning, they convey only a superficial level of knowledge about a word and do not, by themselves, help students learn how to use a word (Nagy, 1988).

When we examined the data in terms of teacher experience, we found no differences in their rankings of the beliefs. As a contrast, in the Konopak and Williams' study (1994), the participants, who indicated a general tendency toward the knowledge hypothesis, had 10 years or less experience in teaching. The investigators hypothesized that these teachers had recently attended teacher preparation programs and had a principal who advocated staff training in teaching and learning. In our study, however, teaching experience was not related to the rankings of teacher-reported beliefs about vocabulary learning.

Another finding tied to beliefs was that more intermediate grade teachers leaned toward a knowledge hypothesis about vocabulary learning than middle school teachers. Interestingly, Konopak and Williams (1994) found those teachers in grades 3-5 gravitated more toward the instrumental hypothesis or a combination of all three orientations as compared with the primary grade teachers who had a propensity for the knowledge hypothesis. It appears that, as we move up in grade levels, teachers may be inclined to support the instrumental hypothesis because it represents direct instruction of vocabulary that entails a measure of teacher control (Konopak & Williams, 1994). On the other hand, many social studies teachers in middle schools are certified at the secondary level and may not have had the depth and breadth of preparation in reading that many teachers with elementary certification receive in their teacher preparation programs.

An unexpected finding involving beliefs was that more teachers in less economically disadvantaged sites selected the statement, "A new word is acquired through many encounters with its definition," than compared to teachers in economically disadvantaged sites. We surmise that this may be true in many instances because teachers in more affluent school settings may find that more traditional vocabulary practices seem to work for the majority of the students [who may have much stronger

vocabularies and more extensive experiences acquired outside of formal schooling]. In less affluent school settings, teachers are apt to have more students who do not benefit from traditional methodologies and who require stronger support for developing effective vocabularies due to limited support or equipping prior to in-school exposure to the word.

Teachers across all categories rated their social studies textbook overall as adequate or better and specifically thought the textbooks were adequate or better in clarifying new terms. While publishers may supply a sentence using the definition immediately after the sentence containing the target word, definitions tell very little about a word and they do not represent concepts very effectively (Nagy, 1988). It may be that teachers, however, are attributing the supplying of a definition as clarification of the target word. In reference to our question of how teachers viewed the helpfulness of the teachers' editions to their social studies textbooks, however, we found significant differences based on school population, teaching experience, and grade level. We found higher textbook ratings from teachers in lower socioeconomic school settings, teachers with less experience, and teachers in intermediate grades. In particular, we noted a great disparity between teachers at different grade levels. As a group, intermediate grade teachers rated their teachers' editions as being very helpful 30.4 percent of the time, whereas teachers in grades 6-8 rated their textbooks as very helpful 4.5 percent of the time. These results are not surprising, given the dearth of vocabulary teaching suggestions found in middle school teachers' editions of social studies textbooks (Hedrick, Harmon, Linerode, 2000). Along similar lines, middle school teachers also reported less reliance in following instructional guidelines in teachers' editions than that reported by the intermediate teachers.

In terms of vocabulary instructional techniques, teachers as a whole had an especially troubling conflict of practice. We found that approximately 48 percent of the teachers reported seldom having their students write sentences with new vocabulary words and 31.5 percent seldom had their students using the words in any other kinds of writing such as reports and essays, yet 42.5 percent of the teachers reported that their vocabulary tests involved having students write explanations of the words. This represents a large leap from doing few, if any, generative level activities where students create novel responses using the target

words to being required to supply highly generative levels of word processing during testing. On the other hand, we found significant differences between what intermediate and middle school teachers valued as effective teaching practices. The middle school teachers displayed a tendency to rely on more traditional approaches that involved writing definitions and sentences, whereas intermediate teachers regarded other techniques, such as visually representing concepts, as helpful instructional strategies for teaching vocabulary. This information is interesting in that it indicates some inconsistencies in the reported data of intermediate grade teachers. Based on previous research (Hedrick, Harmon, Linerode, 2000), we know that the textbooks infrequently include visual representations of concepts as a vocabulary instructional strategy. If teachers were relying solely on textbook recommendations, then they would not be implementing strategies they consider to be helpful for teaching vocabulary. Yet, this same group of teachers rated their textbooks as very helpful over 30 percent of the time. It may be that they value other features in the textbook, such as designated key terms and review activities at the end of the chapter.

### **Implications**

There still appears to be some discrepancy between what teachers report as their beliefs about vocabulary learning and their espoused instructional practices for supporting vocabulary in the teaching of social studies. Even though their reported beliefs favor current understanding of effective vocabulary instruction, their reported practices appear to value traditional notions of vocabulary instruction found in many social studies textbook manuals. The findings of this study hold several implications. First, as an exploratory study, this investigation calls for more extensive research on teacher beliefs and practices that would include classroom observations to corroborate espoused beliefs and practices. Second, the findings also call for the need of guidelines to help teachers and district personnel select social studies textbooks that include relevant vocabulary instructional suggestions. Third, these reported practices indicate a need for more emphasis on vocabulary instruction in teacher preparation programs at both the elementary and secondary level. There is a critical need to create awareness that the use of effective vocabulary instruction must be incorporated into content area

classrooms, not only to build vocabulary but to also aid in conceptual understanding. Finally, publishers of social studies textbooks need to include effective instructional suggestions to support vocabulary learning.

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**Wanda B. Hedrick is a faculty member at the University of North Florida in Jacksonville, Florida, Janis Harmon is a faculty member at the University of Texas at San Antonio in San Antonio, Texas, and Philip Linerode is with the Northside Independent School District in San Antonio, Texas.**