THE USES OF POSTERS AND PERCEIVED VALUES IN SCHOOLS: A CASE STUDY

A Dissertation in
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by
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ABSTRACT

Many types of posters are displayed in schools, such as motivational posters, instructional posters, and informational posters. The purpose of this study was to examine the uses and perceived values of posters in schools. In chapter 1, background on the topic and the justification for examining this problem are presented, followed by a description of the problem and the purpose statement. A definition of posters also is presented. The second chapter contains a review of the literature on the uses of posters in schools and public libraries, and during wartime. A case study approach was used to examine the perceived uses and values of posters in a middle school in a rural area of Pennsylvania. Thirteen women and two men at the Sabah Area Middle School (SAMS)—administrators, teachers, and staff—were interviewed in this study. The results showed that posters existed in the school and that administrators, teachers, and staff used these posters in different ways. These include decorative, informational, educational, motivational, and public relations items. This study concludes that paying attention to the uses of posters in middle school based on the five functions of posters might help school administrators, teachers, and staff to maximize posters’ benefits.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Problem Statement

Today, despite the huge evolution of mass communications in terms of capabilities such as Internet services, television cable, radio, cell phones, and digital tools, posters remain a useful and effective low-tech and low-cost vehicle for communication. According to Weil (1985), the term poster was initially used about 1838 in England to refer to a printed sheet of paper that combined text and illustration.

Nowadays, information conveyance occurs in several different ways, such as brochures, fliers, posters, websites, articles, email, text messages via cell phones, television (TV), electronic screens, and books. The impact of these media is different depending on the context. For example, in Kuwait (my native country), during the latest parliamentary election some candidates used text messages to reach people in their areas; this communication vehicle was very effective in that context because most Kuwaiti people have cell phones. Another example of an effective communication medium is the poster, which is still “a powerful cornerstone of many advertising campaigns” (Haverkamp & Schamel, 1994, p. 1).

The art of poster design was developed by artists, painters, illustrators, and designers. Posters are a powerful record of ideas, products, concerns, and events (Allen, 1994). They are designed to communicate a specific message—it is an intentional art, imparting a thought, an idea, or a concept clearly. Posters are developed to attract public
attention (by catching the public’s eye). They are designed to be understood at a glance, communicating an announcement or commercial to passers-by (Allen, 1994).

Throughout time and all over the world, people have used graphic images for many reasons. Some have used them to present their culture visually on a surface, such as a wall, stone or canvas to illustrate and inform. Currently, people use graphics to communicate and present information on computer screens, paper, TV or cell phones. In schools, graphics are heavily used in text books, especially those concerning subjects such as geography, science, and mathematics, to illustrate theories and concepts, such as the human anatomy. Examples of graphics include photographs, drawings, line art, graphs, diagrams, typography, numbers, symbols, geometric designs, maps, and engineering drawings. Graphics often combine text, illustration, and color.

The uses of posters vary based on their purposes. In its definition of the poster, YourDictionary.com (http://www.yourdictionary.com/poster) provides several examples of uses, such as: distributing posters directly to students, displaying posters for events, promotions, eye-catching presentations, campaigns, and propaganda.

In school settings (the focus of this study), many posters are often displayed on the walls in different places around the schools. These posters are very different and they are used according to their purposes. For example, the library is a different place than the cafeteria and classrooms are different than the gym. The nurse’s office is very different from a teacher’s classroom, where a poster may be used, for example, for learning multiplication or teaching history. Some posters are used in schools to: advertise, warn, engage, motivate, decorate, announce, inspire and more.
In short, some schools exhibit posters and images on their walls as well as in classrooms and offices. Usually, the display of these posters and images is not well organized because there is no policy or well-constructed plan for doing so. As a result, there is a wide variety of types of content and presentation as well as places for posters in schools today. In addition, some school administrations use appropriate posters to deliver specific messages about behaviors such as smoking or about values such as success. Although these posters carry messages and instructions, very few schools design their own posters because producing custom posters is costly. However, if they believe that the posters and images will have a positive impact, they sometimes will pay a lot of money for them from vendors.

There are many reasons for deciding to purchase and display posters. Posters can be a powerful tool in different fields, including education and business. Many concepts, rules, and procedures cannot be explained without graphical information (Lockee, Moore, & Moore, 1999). It is well known and popularly said that a picture is worth a thousand words. A little picture can sometimes save hundreds of words, and takes less time and effort to communicate a message (Harry, 2001).

Furthermore, pictures can effectively draw attention to a message—they can draw the eye to an area of the page much faster than text alone (Crosby, 2007). Appropriate visual images engage readers and make the message memorable. According to Harry, (2001), over many years of research, researchers have found that pictures play a big part in memory. For instance, most people can remember peoples’ faces better than their names (Harry, 2001). Therefore, some corporations use posters to remind employees about corporate values with which employees should be familiar and should follow.
Posters can be used for many purposes in schools. Some nonprofit organizations distribute their posters in schools directly to students or through campaigns within the school. For example, a ‘Get Caught Reading’ poster campaign may go up around a school to coincide with World Book Day. Sometimes companies display their posters on the walls of school hallways. Some schools display some posters in waiting rooms. Some websites offer customized posters and also help customers to design their own posters. Further, school buses sometimes exhibit posters. Some schools have a theme every month and use posters to support these themes. Schools use posters to support soldiers during wartime. For example, Britain used propaganda posters in World War I. Some schools use posters to assess the learning framework. Some teachers use posters as an intervention to solve problems, such as lack of motivation, attendance, low performance, and negative behaviors. The poster is a method used to increase the learning experiences of students in schools, and to increase students’ awareness and knowledge of a specific issue. Thus, in order for a poster to function effectively as an educational aid, the learner must be able to interpret it successfully. Seidman (2007) indicated that well-designed posters have been an efficient and effective means to influence attitudes and behavior.

There is little research in this area, either in school settings as a whole or in classrooms. In addition, the uses and perceived values of posters in schools have not been examined. While a large number of possible uses or examples of uses have been provided here, there are very few articles on the uses and values of posters in school. This gap in the literature needs to be addressed. This study sought to reduce that gap by taking place in a school setting and by utilizing a case study approach to gain a rich understanding of this topic.
**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to examine the uses and perceived values of exhibited posters in a middle school. The importance of this study comes from its focus on the school environment. The school environment has a potential influence on teachers, staff members, and students. Further, it was anticipated that the findings would lead to useful recommendations for school administrations and staff members as well as teachers. Some of the recommendations might involve the best locations and uses of posters, and which posters are most suitable for specific places. In addition, findings might influence the practices and policies of schools. They may help to illuminate the intentionality or non-intentionality of poster usage in the school. They also might be useful for poster designers by providing information that will enable them to be more receptive and responsive to clients’ needs. Schools’ development practitioners might use the findings to develop interventions that embrace the challenge of creating a “place” to work rather than simply a “space” to work, or to create situations that involve poster use and creation by innovative and talented teachers and school administrators as well as students (Vickie & Gary, 2006).

**Research Question**

What are the perceived uses and values of posters in schools according to middle school teachers, staff, and administrators?
Significance of the Study

This study sought to add to the research on posters in schools and its values by providing thick description of poster use and values from inside the school. In addition, researchers and practitioners may use the findings to further explore the area of posters and their impact. For example, school administrators, designers, and photographers may use the findings in terms of school environment design or apply certain aspects of the results in the design of posters. Also, the findings may provide guidance on the types of posters to be used in the school environment and where and how these posters should be displayed.

The literature review includes an examination of previous research on the uses and perceived values of posters in schools. This review reveals a limited number of studies that focus on this issue—most of the articles focused on posters in the classroom as reflective of teachers’ experiences. This study was an opportunity to reduce a gap in our knowledge about the uses and perceived values of posters in schools.
Summary

Most schools display some posters on their walls around the school. The uses of these posters differ from place to place and from school to school. While many studies have focused on the uses of posters, the literature only includes examinations of teachers’ uses of posters in the classroom. The purpose of this study was to describe the perceived uses and values of posters in middle schools. Its importance comes from its focus on the school environment, since the school environment may influence teachers, staff members, and students. Further, it is anticipated that the findings will help school administrators, teachers, and staff members to understand what roles posters can play in school and how they can affect the school environment.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

Overview

This study focused on the uses and perceived values of posters in schools. The literature review shows that poster use in schools relies on teachers’ experiences in classrooms and is somewhat haphazard at this point. Little research has been conducted that focuses on the use of posters in schools as a whole environment or location; rather, the preponderance of research to this point has reported individual applications of posters in particular content areas or particular contexts such as the library. This chapter contains a justification for the research question posed in this study by reviewing the literature on posters in schools.

Posters are designed to be both eye-catching and convey information. Posters may be used for many purposes, and they are a frequent tool of advertisers, propagandists, protestors and other groups trying to convey a message. Posters are also used for reproductions of artwork, particularly famous works, and are generally low-cost compared to original artwork.

All posters are used as a vehicle for communication. Some posters may be used for many purposes. For example, a history teacher may use war posters to teach history, in the analysis of events, and in discussion. Other teachers and librarians may use posters to teach concepts or skills—for example, a math teacher may use a poster to teach students about multiplication while a science teacher may use a poster to teach about the life cycle of a butterfly. However, the librarian may use posters to emphasize the
importance of reading. Some teachers may use posters to change unwanted behaviors or to motivate students to do particular tasks. Some school administrators may use posters to emphasize attitudes and values to students.

Posters are used in various settings—education, sports, business, health, etc.—to help people understand their employer’s missions, goals, instructions, etc., or to motivate them to engage in or avoid some behaviors. Some posters contain visuals that have often been used to offer and/or communicate unseen or inaccessible materials, locations, events, and processes across time and space; reinforce text and oral presentations; and provide concreteness and realism to instructional events (Dwyer, 1972). According to Allen (1994), some of the benefits of posters are that they: “(a) hold a viewer’s attention for a moment or two, (b) use that moment to drive home a message to a targeted audience, and (c) leave the audience in a frame of mind favorable to acting on the message” (Allen, 1994, p. 52).

This review of the literature contains information about the uses of posters in general and how these posters are used in schools. It is divided into the following subsections: information on what constitutes the physical work environment; reasons for designing posters; the school as a workplace; and several uses of posters according to thematic usage: wartime, classroom, library, and general awareness and knowledge.

Physical Work Environment

Everyday, we experience several types of physical environments in some fashion because “people are psychologically attached to their physical environment as well as to their social environment. Discussing the meanings, emotions and memories associated to
significant items from their physical environment reveals significant experiences and conflicts” (Dwairy, 2003, p. 2). Since most of the population is employed in some sort of workplace activity the physical work environment has been one of the locations examined in environmental studies. Research has shown that employees feel that their workplace should be comfortable and designed to maximize their productivity. For example, according to Maggie (2007), the “efficient environment is to not have anything in it that we don’t believe to be beautiful, functional, or meaningful” (p. 1). However, since we spend so many hours in the workplace every day, we often bring into our offices objects and artifacts that provide visual cues to use and history, and also contribute to (and reinforce) group identity and purpose. Employers, too, will use pictures, awards, and furniture in offices or hallway to indicate qualities or objectives they regard as important to the workplace culture (Dwairy, 2003). After all, research has shown that employees desire a workplace that is positive and supportive. A supportive employer will recognize this dual need of employees to blend into their work environment via personal artifacts in their offices, and to identify with the workplace community by offering and observing others’ “personal information” as revealed in their own artifacts. Kweon, Ulrich, Walker, and Tassinary (2008) supported that claim, finding in their experimental study that males who worked in office environments decorated with abstract and nature posters experienced less anger and stress than males who worked in offices without any posters. However, females did not experience a significant difference in feelings in any of the types of environments. Two hundred and ten college students participated in this study, which involved the creation by researchers of four office conditions: an office with
abstract posters on the wall, an office with nature posters on the wall, an office with both nature and abstract posters, and finally an office with no posters on the wall.

According to Vickie and Gary (2006), “Artifacts symbolize and convey pleasant or unpleasant emotions, creating either positive or negative affect in organizational members. Displays of employee awards for team activities can instill positive affect. Pictures of a past tyrannical leader could create or sustain negative emotions. Artifacts, like symbols, warrant the time to notice and manage in order to create a positive impact on internal and external constituents” (Vickie & Gary, 2006, p. 7). According to Rowland (2006), motivational posters can make people stop and think about the message conveyed by the poster. However, they may also be regarded as a piece of furniture and hence lose their power, like anything else, when left up too long (Rowland, 2006).

School administrators, like corporate employers, seek to improve the school environment by putting up meaningful pictures, artwork, employee pictures, student pictures, vision and mission statements, and so on, in order to inspire the school community—teachers, students, and administrators.

**Reasons for Designing Posters**

Poster designs have several bases, including the designers’ motivations or inspirations. Another is the importance of the image to the design and message. According to Lockee, Moore, and Moore (1999), images come in all varieties, complexities, colors and levels of movement to support instruction. Images, for example, can be simple, as cartoons or line drawings. They can be complex, as in blueprints and detailed photographs. Images can show the unseen, as in x-rays or as animation that illustrates processes and internal workings. Levin, Anglin, and Carney supported the view
that “pictures in text consistently produce prose-learning benefits” (Levin, Anglin, & Carney, 1987, p. 53). Pictures may help people to feel an emotion. In research, Gombrich’s (1982) arguments support the conclusion that pictures are supreme in their capacity to produce emotions.

Another reason might be message delivery. According to Vickie and Gary (2006), “information—which comes from the physical environment via the senses of sight, sound, smell, and touch—is filtered cognitively and non-cognitively based on the culture, experience, and knowledge of an individual. These sensations prompt affective responses, behaviors, and actions. There is interplay between environment and individuals in that people control the environment; the environment then influences the affective and behavioral responses of both groups and individuals” (Vickie & Gary, 2006, p. 8). Baldoni (2005) suggested that translating an organization’s vision into images and posting them on the walls will stimulate employees’ thoughts, as one example of the impact of visual aids.

Part of the creative process for designers is examination and linkage of former, successful message products and research on the target audience when creating a new product. For example, in a school setting, ‘exercise your heart’ may not be effective because young people are less concerned about heart health, whereas the same message may resonate strongly with people at a senior citizens center. Furthermore, Thompson (1994) believed that taking the time during design to ensure the audience’s careful understanding is important—the image creator must know what the viewer would do as a result of being exposed to the image. According to Thompson, the more cues images provide, the greater the opportunity for learning to take place (Thompson, 1994). These
image cues include ones that direct attention, highlight content and organization, elaborate upon issues and salient information, relate what is said or written, and provoke and/or motivate the viewer (Thompson, 1994). On the other hand, sometimes a picture is not worth a thousand words. When the text and illustrations do not match, the illustrations can actually interfere with comprehension and reduce learning (Willows, 1978).

In health and sport settings, several studies have shown that visual prompts can increase stair usage. In a British town square, Oliver and Frank (2007) conducted 1,200 structured interviews with two goals: (1) to establish which of two types of messages was more persuasive; and (2) to examine whether validating messages by telling participants that they were true, increased their motivational potential. Two types of messages were used in this study: general descriptions of stair climbing (e.g., ‘provide daily exercise’ and ‘helps to keep you active’) and specific consequences of stair use (e.g., ‘keeps you fit’ and ‘helps to keep you healthy’). These messages were scheduled for group A. Group B had four messages: ‘is free exercise’ and ‘is the easy way to exercise’, and the consequences, ‘works your legs’ and ‘exercises your heart’. A total of 300 people participated in the study over three weeks. The study was replicated in the same location with a further 600 interviewees over three weeks, following the same protocol. Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with each message. Ratings were made on a 5-point scale (1= not at all – 5= very much). Using this scale, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which each message would encourage them to use the stairs (motivation rating). Findings showed that messages with specific consequences motivated participants to use stairs more than did a general description. However, no
difference was found between the two types of messages in terms of agreement ratings. Furthermore, groups who were told that the statements were true were more motivated to use the stairs (Oliver & Frank, 2007).

According to their results, Bergen and Yeh (2006) suggested in their pilot study that energy-content labels and motivational posters on beverage vending machines may be an effective way to influence beverage sales. This pilot study was conducted at a university. The targeted participants were students, professors, and staff members. The study involved eight beverage vending machines that were of equal size and contained 12 similar beverage choices, including water, diet beverages, and sugar-sweetened soft drinks. The purpose of the study was to examine the effectiveness of an environmental intervention promoting more water and non-energy-containing soft drink consumption compared to sugar-sweetened soft drink consumption. Results showed that using motivational posters and energy content labels significantly lowered the growth rate of sugar-sweetened soft drink sales. (Bergen & Yeh, 2006).

The studies to this point in the review have focused on non-school settings, such as workplace, vending, and health centers. However, the interest in this study was in the uses and values in school. Teachers often enliven their classrooms by adding images that may help to inspire and engage students. For example, www.earthscape.com.sg has educational posters such as Study Hard So That Your Exam Will Be EASY or Doing your homework consistently is better than complaining about poor results later. Such posters may help to keep the children enthusiastic about learning and motivate to continue learning.
Finally, focusing on a single element to be seen at a glance and remembered is one technique that poster designers use to attract students’ attention (Allen, 1994).

Knowing the audience helps poster designers to communicate effectively with their audience. Since certain symbols and idioms are readily recognized and embody ideas or attitudes readily recognized during certain periods of time in someone’s life, some poster designers use popular images or idioms to make their point (Langer, 1953). Since symbols carry meaning and feelings, poster designers often employ those symbols that will link their audience to their past experiences. For example, most children are familiar with Sesame Street characters and that symbol could readily be used in a classroom poster.

*The School as a Workplace*

As noted throughout this chapter, posters may be found in various settings, including health, sports, corporate, and school settings. Johnson (1990) defined a workplace as “more than a physical setting: it is also the context that defines how work is divided and done, how it is scheduled, supervised, compensated, and regarded by others” (p. 1). In schools, the workplace role of teachers or any staff member differs from that in other occupations such as dentistry or law. The workplace environment in schools is complex because teachers and staff members work with students as well as with parents of different ethnicities, cultures, religions, attitudes and levels of knowledge. The extent of the responsibilities held by schools can make that workplace very and differently stressful for staff members and teachers.

In reality, due to the complexity of the school environment and the everyday realities of dealing with students and parents, teachers and staff members desire a positive
and healthy workplace that supports them in overcoming the different problems that arise daily and in working effectively. School administrators usually recognize that staff members and teachers spend an enormous portion of their time at school and sometimes at home in fulfilling their duties. Finding ways to help alleviate pressure and stress in the school workplace is important.

*The Uses of Posters in the Literature*

According to the research literature base, the uses of posters vary from place to place based on the goal of the poster and the message to be delivered, the audience, and the context. “Through the poster’s evolution, it has been designed for many tasks: filling theaters, selling products, lauding merchandise, praising candidates for public office, extolling holiday resorts, selling ship and rail tickets, attracting recruits and volunteers, selling national unity during wartime, and urging environmental conservation” (Allen, 1994, p. 52). In addition, posters have been used to promote books, concerts, plays, and other cultural events. In this review, the uses of posters are divided into four categories: wartime, classroom, public library, and general awareness and knowledge.

*Wartime*

During wartime, governments usually use posters in propaganda or campaigns to galvanize public support (National Archives and Records Administration, 2003). Propaganda is a tool used to shape opinion and influence behavior in pursuit of governmental goals. “Propaganda became a major industry, using famous actors,
directors, artists, and writers to get points across to the people quickly and effectively...
The medium that most clearly and vividly illustrates this massive effort to educate and convince the public is the propaganda poster” (Mahaney, 2002, p.41).

During propaganda wars, millions of posters are produced to achieve a variety of goals. According to Allen (1994), these goals include the following: “to foster unity and prepare people for sacrifice; to call people to come to arms through such messages as, ‘Join the Army, Navy, Marines, Coast Guard’; to encourage acceptance of national policies; to sell bonds to finance the war effort; to spur war industry productivity; to promote the conservation of materials; to inform the public of expected behavior and ways to act; and to channel emotions—hate, courage, fear, and fraternity—in ways conducive to success” (Allen, 1994, p. 53).

Furthermore, posters are also used to recruit men and women into the armed services, to encourage factory workers to work harder for a war effort, and to provide messages that warn people not to give away war information (Mahaney, 2002).

According to Allen (1994), the poster reached its zenith in mass communication during the First World War, when governments needed a means to communicate effectively and efficiently with citizens or subjects (Allen, 1994). One example of these propaganda posters is the U.S. government’s propaganda poster for World War II. These posters are located at the National Archives website (www.archives.gov/education/lessons).

Posters can be designed with symbols and messages that spark an emotional response instantly. The response can be positive or negative, with recognizable symbols being the quickest way to spark a feeling.
Classroom

Some schools use posters to help students present their skills and what they have learned in school. For example, the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools, which are considered one of the best academic school systems in North Carolina, encourage students to participate in a Career and Technical Education (CTE) poster contest themed, “I’ve Got Skills, Yes I Do.” In this contest, students are required to create a poster using their own creativity and skills. This poster emphasizes skills they acquired in high school that would benefit them in a competitive workforce environment (Winslow & Fletcher, 2008). Examples of individual poster contests in schools are common, but larger examinations of uses and values of posters in schools are not.

Posters can be a powerful teaching tool. Teaching with primary documents such as propaganda posters encourages a different learning environment for teachers and students alike. Analysis of primary documents can be used to sharpen skills as well as create enthusiasm for any of the school subjects, such as history or social studies (National Archives and Records Administration, 2003). For example, Allen (1994) explained that one example of poster analysis is that “students should notice that the target audience must be white or even Anglo-Saxon males in the United States. No African Americans are pictured in any WWI recruiting posters, and the images used in these posters do not reflect the ethnic diversity in the United States by 1914” (p. 57).

The National Archives and Records Administration (2003) developed a lesson plan using World War II propaganda posters. This lesson plan takes one to two class periods for completion. The main activity is poster analysis; the goals are to: demonstrate understanding of the effects of World War II at home; understand the goals, political
decisions, and explain the relationship between politics and individual/public goals (National Archives and Records Administration, 2003).

A review of the literature shows that many teachers in different grades have used posters in their teaching. For example, teachers of history and the social studies are always searching for motivational materials for use with students (Allen, 1994). Mahaney (2002) used World War II propaganda posters with her 12th-grade students to give them a better understanding of the American homefront and war effort. Allen (1994) concluded that these posters are worthy of use in the history classroom, because through viewing them students may develop appropriate history and civic skills (Allen, 1994, p. 53). The teacher of history can use a systematic examination of posters from the past to teach history and skills relating to historical inquiry, and to link the past with the students’ present. Some teachers believe that educational posters are a very important tool that the teacher can use in the classroom. These posters can motivate students to learn and get a better understanding of a subject.

In addition, in a study conducted in 2004, Ramsey and Fowler found that poster use increased preschoolers’ science and mathematics learning experiences both within and outside of the classroom, and benefit children, teachers, and parents when used during interactions and discussions. Observations were conducted in three different preschool classrooms; Ramsey and Fowler also conducted interviews with the classroom teachers and aides, and the parents of the children in the classrooms. Classrooms A and B were located at a private, religiously affiliated school. The 17 children in Classroom A were 3–4 years of age; the 17 children in Classroom B were 4—5 years of age.
Classroom C was part of the local Head Start program. Classroom C had 20 children aged 3—5 years old.

Prior to distributing posters to the classroom teachers, the researchers observed each classroom for one hour and interviewed the teachers and aides to ascertain the types of science and mathematics activities followed in their classroom, their interest in science and mathematics, and their theories about preschool science and mathematics learning. There was discussion about ways in which instructions and questions contained on the posters could be applied to classroom activities. In addition to the posters, the researchers provided small index card-sized versions of the posters for use external to the classroom use at home.

Over a 10-week period, the researchers observed each of the classrooms for one hour a week at the same time and noted any science and mathematics skills or concepts and vocabulary words or phrases used by the children or teachers. The researchers were also interested in identifying the words or phrases that the teachers were encouraging the children to use specifically related to the poster. A new poster was introduced every two weeks—by the end of the study each classroom had five posters. After a poster had been in a classroom for two weeks, the researchers interviewed teachers and aides to get specific feedback on it. After five weeks, the researchers observed the same classrooms for the same amount of time to determine whether the posters were still present if the teachers used the posters, and/or if the children engaged in activities or used vocabulary related to the concepts and skills on the posters.

Following the observation, teachers and aides were interviewed to evaluate the posters’ effectiveness and feedback was obtained on poster implementation and specific
content. Parents were interviewed to assess their use of smaller versions of the posters with their children at home. These interviews occurred in the middle of the study; the second interviews were conducted at the end of the study. Findings revealed that teachers were able to use the posters effectively to encourage their students to think scientifically and mathematically during even the most routine activities, such as getting in line (“Who is biggest?”), playing outside (“Tell me what you see.”), or serving a snack (“Is there enough for everyone?”) (Ramsey & Fowler, 2004, p. 34).

Another teacher emphasized the effective use of posters in classrooms. Granlund (2004), an applied technology instructor working with 9th-grade students, used a “Wanted Poster” activity in the classroom to give students an opportunity to practice some of the research and computer skills that they’d learned in middle school, as well as to bridge the curricular areas of applied technology, history, and language arts. This activity also gave students an opportunity to learn techniques for gleaning information from the World Wide Web. This activity produced completed posters that made great decorations for their classroom and lab walls (Granlund, 2004).

Some teachers require students to construct a poster and then to assess other students’ posters. For example, Zevenbergen (2001) used posters in peer assessment. Students were required to construct a stand-alone resource containing a maximum of 25 words (excluding heading) that could be used in the classroom. His findings showed that the posters had two main purposes. First, the poster had to document student learning. The student was required to display the selected concept in a concise, innovative, and user-friendly manner that showed an appropriate understanding of a selected concept, thereby addressing the concern about pre-service teachers’ poor understanding of many
mathematical concepts. Second, poster construction would enable students to develop skills, techniques, and knowledge relating to effective materials construction and communication. Results showed that poster construction and assessment were novel experiences enjoyed by the students (Zevenbergen, 2001).

Furthermore, Tibbs and Jordan (1994) used posters in teaching high school mathematics. They asked students to make a career poster. The students were asked to interview someone who uses mathematics in his or her job and write down an actual problem that the person would have to solve as well as a paragraph-length explanation of the problem. Posters were tacked up around the room to show students evidence that people use mathematics. Then they took them down and sorted, indexed, and noted where each would fit in future lesson plans. Each week they pulled out the posters that related to that week’s topic. They concluded that many unexpected benefits accrued from using the career posters as teaching aids—all students could participate in this activity regardless of their levels; parents were very positive about this activity; students gained further experience in writing; and the time spent producing the career poster was negligible compared to the benefits derived (Tibbs & Jordan, 1994).

Ashby (2002) was a middle school teacher who used free NASA education posters known as wall charts in her communications and language arts classes. There were several benefits in using these posters: they were useful in teaching U.S. history and encouraging discussions about the usefulness of research to the nation; and they were instrumental in sparking connections between events in history and the technology that either gave impetus to the event or arose from the needs made evident through the event. Ashby felt that the most important thing about these posters was their communication of
a wealth of scientific information derived from current NASA projects and research missions.

According to Ashby, in addition to the posters’ decorative appeal, they could be used as instructional tools because the reverse side provided teachers and students with an in-depth explanation of the image(s) presented on the front, notes to the educator on how to best incorporate the poster into the curriculum, additional on-line resources, and some instructional activities. This helped students to update their science information and learn about real-world science in action (Ashby, 2002).

Bayley’s (2004) observations of many classrooms led him to determine that the most common mathematical poster seen there was the faithful multiplication times-tables. Earlier, Kahn (2001) had said that these posters have the potential to provide an overview of a mathematical idea or concept and link them to the real world (Kahn, 2001).

Riejos, Mansilla, and Castillejos (2001) suggested that using a poster with attractive images to explain a linguistic concept is a very useful pedagogical tool when used in the classroom. After conducting a survey, the researchers discovered that the students not only grasped the concept but also understood the message easily (p. 301). They also said that presenting selected images in the form of a cartoon in the classroom is a motivating tool that students do seem to appreciate (Riejos, Mansilla, & Castillejos, 2001, p. 307).

Clearly, then, the meaningful poster can be used to increase learning opportunities. Learning opportunities can be described as moments in which students are observing, discriminating, classifying, interpreting, recalling, organizing, problem-solving, imagining, evaluating, questioning, estimating, comparing and hypothesizing (Education
Department of South Australia, 1977, p. 21). Effective posters are those that scaffold the students’ learning. This means integrating what the students know and challenging them further. Posters can be used to confirm prior learning and to remind students of past work and concepts. This may include using posters to display definitions or formulae. Posters also can show how this learning connects to another area of mathematics. Bayley (2004) suggested that most posters can encourage students to recall information and discuss with teachers and other students what they see and understand.

Public Library

Posters are often used at the public library to motivate people to read or to emphasize the importance of reading and increasing awareness and knowledge. Another purpose is to increase borrowing and introduce newer editions of publications. However, Linda, K. (2000) conducted a study to determine whether the librarian’s promotion of audiobooks, by the use of a poster, display, and recommended listening list, increased audiobook circulation. The second purpose was to determine which promotional treatments by the librarian—poster, display, or recommended list—produced the preferred results, meaning the greatest increase in audiobook circulation. Her findings showed that using a poster did not significantly increase the circulation of adult audiobooks in the public library compared to displaying a recommended list of audiobooks. This is good evidence to argue that posters should be evaluated to ascertain their effectiveness in the venue in which they are placed—whether libraries, schools, or workplaces—and to determine whether their effects are negative or positive. This evidence can be compared with teachers’ experiences in schools.
On the other hand, the American Library Association (2000) conducted America Reads Challenge: Read* Write*Now! Arthur the Aardvark activity using a poster. This poster presented on one side a colorful image of Arthur the Aardvark encouraging adults and children to share the fun of reading and writing; on the other side, there were five fun and challenging activities for reading time. The activities were designed to expand a child’s interest in and enthusiasm for reading and writing while also helping to improve these skills. This activity was conducted to help all children learn to read well and to inspire their love of reading.

**General Awareness and Knowledge**

Despite the tremendous evolution in mass communications in terms of radio, television, cell phones, and online services, posters remain a powerful cornerstone of many advertising campaigns. Through word and image, posters convey vital information or persuade people to follow a particular course of action. The poster must arouse curiosity or stimulate interest so that the viewer walks away with the thought intended, leading to taking the desired action (Allen, 1994). Many government programs use posters effectively in various thematic campaigns. For example, the Forest Fire Prevention program used posters to increase fire prevention awareness and provided information to interested teachers about teaching activities such as poster analysis (asking students questions using the poster) and research (having students research an issue of concern related to the poster’s topic) (Haverkamp & Schamel, 1994).

During World War I, the U.S. Food Administration produced posters for both indoor and outdoor display. These posters were designed and produced to illustrate the
importance of food in winning the war. These posters were used with some teaching activities for classroom implementation such as document analysis, database research, poster design, student research, and essay writing to teach students about constitutional issues (Linda, S., 2000). The Constitution Community is a partnership between classroom teachers and education specialists from the U.S. Archives and Records Administration. They are developing lessons and activities that address constitutional issues.

LaBrie, Pederson, Eric, Huchting, Thompson, and Hummer, (2007) distributed a 20-item survey on college drinking to 212 undergraduate students at all grade levels. Based on the survey’s results, they recommended that student-designed poster campaigns be encouraged on campuses because they are inexpensive, accurate, and consistent efforts to reduce drinking levels among students.

Functional Framework

The main functional framework for this study involved Levin’s five functions (Levin, 1981) of pictures in text processing—four conventional functions (decorative, representational, organizational, interpretational) and an unconventional one (transformational)—to facilitate learning. Levin’s five functions idea was adopted because it is very close to the researcher’s area of interest; further, according to Anglin, Towers, and Levie (1996), this functional framework has “proved to be useful in explaining differences in research studies concerning pictures and prose” (Anglin, Towers, & Levie, 1996, p. 765). To understand this adaptation, all five definitions of Levin’s five functions were presented. The decorative pictures simply decorate the page whether related or not related to the text content. For example, “a generic drawing of a
pine tree adjacent to a description of a hiking trail would be decorative in nature. In contrast, representational pictures mirror part or all of the text content and are by far the most commonly used type of illustration. For example, a picture that accurately portrays a scene described in a Harry Potter book would be deemed representational. Organizational pictures provide a useful framework for the text content (e.g., an illustrated map of a hiking trail, or an illustration showing the series of steps involved in performing cardiopulmonary resuscitation). Interpretational pictures serve to clarify difficult passages and abstract concepts (e.g., representing blood pressure in terms of a pump system)” (Carney & Levin, 2002, p. 7). Finally, “transformational pictures are designed to have a direct impact on a learner’s memory (e.g., pictures used as a mnemonical aid serve a transformation function)” (Anglin, Towers, & Levie, 1996, p. 765)
Summary

This study involved an examination of the perceived uses and values of posters in schools according to middle school teachers, staff, and administrators. This chapter develops a justification for the research question posed in this study by reviewing the literature on using poster/s in schools and other contexts, highlighting the lack of empirical evidence on the perceived uses and values of posters in schools. This study sought in a relatively exploratory fashion to understand more deeply these perceived uses and values.
Chapter Three

Methodology

Overview

This study involved an examination of the perceived uses and values of posters in schools. The qualitative approach was chosen to empower teachers and staff members to share their stories about the perceived uses and values of posters in their school. In this inquiry, the case study approach was employed as “a vehicle for in-depth description and analysis” (Merriam, 2002, p.8). In this chapter I first explicate the question guiding and approach for the study, and then provide details on the participants, sampling, data collection, and analysis. Finally, a brief discussion of the quality and significance of the study, researcher identity, and limitations close the chapter.

Research Question

What are the perceived uses and values of posters in schools according to middle school teachers, staff, and administrators?

Study Approach

According to Creswell (2007), a case study is a form of methodology. It is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a “bounded system” (Merriam, 2002)—“(a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information”. “The case study is an intensive description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit such as individual,
group, institution, or community” (Merriam, 2002, p. 8); the case study approach is viewed as the most appropriate method for exploring the perceived uses and values of posters in schools. I chose one school rather than multiple schools because studying “more than one case dilutes the overall analysis; the more cases an individual studies, the less the depth in any single case” (Creswell, 2007, p. 76). The Sabah Area Middle School (SAMS 1) was the site of the case study (see chapter 4, section on SAMS background). The issue is described in rich detail. This rich description will help us to understand the uses of posters in the SAMS. Although all schools have posters in their environment, every school has its own philosophy about using posters in the school—the SAMS was a unique case because the descriptions and perceptions of participants focused on the SAMS environment.

Furthermore, the case study approach provides a richer understanding of certain organizational phenomena that had previously not been documented fully enough (Van Manen, 1997). To achieve this level of understanding certain phenomenological tools were used, such as the interview, “to get to the roots, the essence of consciousness … to attain understanding of understanding” (Barritt et al., 1985, p. 20)—the meanings of employees’ experiences with poster use. Open-ended interviews enabled an understanding of how teachers and staff members perceive the use and value of posters.

To ensure that the methodology created for this research was viable, in spring 2008 a pilot phenomenological study (not published) was conducted in a charter school for a graduate level qualitative methods course at Pennsylvania State University. There were three participants in the pilot study. After placing more than 15 motivational posters on the school’s walls, after two weeks the three participants were interviewed.

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1 SAMS—is not a real name of school
individually. After three weeks, they were interviewed again. This pilot study provided valuable information about what should be observed and whom to interview, and which documents to review.

Research Site and Participants

Entering the Field

The first school asked to be the research site refused the request. I then sent an email to many superintendents in different local school districts. After obtaining permission from each school’s superintendent to contact schools, I sent an email to all principals requesting permission to conduct my study. The first principal who responded to my email—was the SAMS’ principal. She sent an email to all teachers and staff members to see who was willing to participate. I received four emails from teachers and staff members who were willing to participate in my study but later three of these teachers did not respond to my emails. The one remaining willing participant from initial group was the school librarian. After receiving her email, the SAMS principal gave the go-ahead to conduct this research. The school librarian was assigned as the key person for all contact. A good relationship was established with the key person by visiting her in the school and describing the study. This occurred in mid-October 2008. Furthermore, after receiving IRB approval, I sent an email to the librarian to schedule a meeting before data collection began. I then went to school for our appointment but the librarian was not there due to illness so the principal welcomed me at her office. At that time I requested permission to take pictures around the school. After granting that permission, the principal walked with me throughout the school. After our meeting, the principal told me
that the librarian would help me to identify participants and would provide other assistance—in other words, she became the key person in my relationship with SAMS. The role of the key person was very important because she arranged all schedules and places for interviews, although participants were very busy. I sent her and the principal many emails requesting information. After reviewing all pictures, data collection began in March 2009 and continued until May 2009.

The unit of analysis in this study was the posters displayed in the SAMS. The sample of the unit of analysis was six posters. I took more than one hundred and fifty pictures of posters as they appeared in different places in SAMS and then selected six posters based on seven criteria: size, location, source, message, framed, laminated, and cost. The posters’ sizes ranges from A4 (21.0 x 29.7 cm) to A0 (84.1 x 118.9 cm); these were located in different places such as the cafeteria, hallways, classrooms, and gymnasium, and inside or outside the school. Their messages could be short, medium or long or without message; the posters could be framed or not, and laminated or not; their cost could be low or high cost. The first picture (see Appendix F) was selected because of its size—A0-, the source was the nutrition department at the school district; its message was a medium message; and its location was the cafeteria. The second picture (see Appendix G) was selected because of its size—A2, location in the school district, too many messages, free cost, and location in a busy area in the classroom. The third picture (see Appendix H) was selected because of its size—between A3 and A2; its source—was inside and outside of school; its location—close to the ceiling of the gymnasium; presence of too many messages, and low cost. The fourth picture (see Appendix I) was selected because of its medium size—A1, outside source; location in the hallway; free
cost, and short message with too many images. The fifth picture (see Appendix J) was selected because of its size—A3; framed; location at the main entrance; high cost; and short message. The sixth and last picture (see Appendix K) was selected because of its size—A2; teacher-made; short message; lamination; location in the library—up at the high level; and low cost. I chose these posters because I believe that they represent most of the posters displayed in SAMS. I did not choose student-made posters because students were not participants in this study. Participants were selected from among the SAMS teachers and staff. Based on visits to several schools, the SAMS was selected for two reasons. First, based on my visits to my children’s schools, I saw that middle and elementary schools display posters more often than do the high schools. Second, students in middle school can understand the images and messages on the poster better than those in elementary schools and each subject in middle school has its own classroom while in elementary school one classroom has many subjects. For example, the 7th-grade social studies teacher at SAMS said about his wife’s classroom in the elementary school:

... my wife, who’s an elementary teacher, when I visit her classroom, there’s just so much more going on. I call it a busy room because she’s full of posters. You know she’s got posters for math, and science and language art and social studies. So it’s just stuff everywhere and so I think they’re trying to recreate those types of classrooms where in one classroom you’re gonna have five or six different subjects so you need five or six different sets of posters plus your character poster (Social studies teacher interview, April 29, 2009).

Middle school students might discuss these posters with teachers or other staff members and these reflections and perceptions may filter into the interviews with teachers and staff. The researcher’s intention was to gain a fuller understanding of the perceived uses and values of posters in the school context and setting because it may not
be possible to separate what teachers and staff members say from the context in which they say it.

**Sampling Research Participants**

A purposeful sampling strategy was used. Patton (1990) argued that it is important to select information-rich cases for in-depth study: “Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposeful sampling” (p. 169; emphasis in original). Merriam (1998) claimed that the researcher must select a sample from which the most can be learned.

The sample size for this study was not a fixed number. Merriam (1998) recommended sampling until a point of “saturation” (p. 64) or “redundancy” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 202) is reached. Qualitative researchers know that there are no rules about sample size in a qualitative study. At the end of this study, there were 15 participants; at the beginning of the data collection process, there were 13 participants and all of them were women: library clerk, guidance counselor, classroom assistant in the learning support room/7th-grade, librarian, paraprofessional/teacher’s assistant, principal, remedial math teacher, school counselor, business teacher/technology coordinator, school secretary, classroom assistant, guidance counselor secretary, school psychologist. Although the point of saturation was attained with these participants, two male teachers were interviewed: emotional support /8th-grade math teacher and 7th-grade social studies teacher. These two additional employees were chosen to ensure the collection of varying viewpoints; these two curricular areas were selected because the literature shows that
most of the relevant experiences among teachers occur in these subjects (see Allen, 1994). These two teachers provided us new and more examples about their using posters due to their jobs. Some of these examples are presented at chapter four and five. In general, all participants emphasized that posters existed at school and they used for different purposes.

**Data Collection**

Four data collection methods were used to obtain exhaustive, detailed data and to attain ‘thick description’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the uses and perceived values of posters in schools: documents, interviews, observation, and field notes. The data collection process had two phases. During the first phase I took more than one hundred fifty pictures of posters as they appeared in different places in SAMS because photos taken by researchers or chosen by researchers and shown to subjects can be used as a stimulant for producing data (Schwartz, 1989). After taking pictures, I reviewed the school’s archival documents, such as school vision and mission statements, goals and objectives documents, brochures, and magazines, and electronic artifacts, such as web documents, in addition, of course, to the posters on display. This step was very helpful in enriching the description of the perceived uses and values of posters in SAMS. Photographs provide strikingly descriptive data, are often used to understand the subjective, and are frequently analyzed inductively.

The second phase involved conducting the interviews. Interviews provide information on other people’s experiences—conducting interviews thus allows us to become more experienced ourselves (Van Manen, 1997, p. 62). Through the interviews conducted for this study, the perceived values of posters in schools and interpretations
were deeply explored. Many issues were addressed through the interviews, such as the display locations of posters, content, sizes, who bought them, from whom they were purchased, decisions made relating to the posters, and poster activities. A single interview was conducted with each participant, with the possibility of a follow-up interview if needed. No follow ups were necessary since I was able to gather the needed information in a single interview and did not find it necessary to extend the conversation into follow-up interviews. During the interviews I began with general questions [see the interview protocol in Appendix D] and then moved to more specific questions. During the interview, I showed the participants six photos of posters that I had taken in their school to help them enrich their answers.

**Analysis Process**

The purpose of the analysis process was to make sense of the data. In other words, analysis is a process that involves breaking down data to then synthesize it for the purpose of describing, explaining, and predicting phenomena (Yin, 2008). In this study I described rather than explained or predicted. Qualitative analysis, then, is a creative process that produces something new beyond a shorthand version of extant data. Analysis occurs in a “simultaneous” (Merriam, 1998) fashion with data collection—in other words, we engaged in constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The following paragraphs contain a description and justification of the proposed data analysis process. Understanding “the big picture” of the phenomenon and the holistic perspective requires good data analysis strategies. Thematic analysis was used with visual because these analytic strategies provide a thick description and different interpretations of the perceived uses and values of posters in schools. The six phases of
thematic analysis are informed by Braun and Clarke (2006), Aronson (1994), Moustakas (1994), and Van Manen (1997). The phases are: 1) familiarize with the transcript and field notes; 2) horizontalize the data listing all the textural elements that are relevant and meaningful to the phenomenon; 3) determine invariant constituents or horizons; 4) define, name and refine themes; 5) create a textural description; and 6) create textural-structural synthesis. Combining different data analysis strategies based on epistemic interest in the study increases the richness and thickness of the description of the phenomenon. For example, because this research focused on posters that include images and messages, visual analysis was used to describe the phenomenon more vividly to readers.

The following paragraphs provide detailed information on the phases of analysis.

**Phase 1: Become familiar with the data**

During this phase, I “immersed” myself in the interview transcripts, photos, and other sources such as documents until I was deeply involved in the words, impressions, and flow of events. During the transcription process I became familiar with the data because transcription was consuming time. During this process I noted some sentences, stories, and names from old interviews, allowing me to extract the inherent meanings and “horizontalizing” the data (Moustakas, 1994), the next phase of the analysis.

**Phase 2: Horizontalize the data**

Gadamer (2004) defined horizon from its use in philosophy by Nietzsche and Husserl as “to characterize the way in which thought is tied to its finite determinacy and the way one’s range of vision is gradually expanded” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 301). Moustakas suggested “horizontalization” as a process of listing every expression relevant to the phenomenon, deleting repetitive or overlapping statements, and leaving the textural
meanings and invariant constituents of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Based on this strategy, all textural elements (horizons) from the interview transcripts, photos, and documents that are significantly related to the research question were highlighted. Then all meaning units (ideas) with “equal worth” were listed (Creswell, 2007) without any prejudgments.

*Visual Analysis*

Visual analysis is an important type of analysis when the data include photos. In this study, some of the data included images such as the posters themselves, location of the posters and general context of the posters in the school. These images may be significant to the phenomenon (Hancock, 1998). Riessman (2008) adapted three sites for visual analysis provided by Gillian Rose. These were: “the story of the production of an image, the image itself, and how it is read by different audiences” (p. 144). The first interrogates how and when the poster was made, the social identities of poster-designer and recipient, and the poster-selecting process. The second focus is the posters, asking about the stories they may suggest, what it includes, and how its quote or inspirational message related to the other components. The third is the audience’s views of the poster. By considering these three sites in the analysis process for this study, I can gain a greater understanding of what the phenomenon means to the participants, leading to a more complete interpretation.

*Phase 3: Determine invariant constitutes or horizons*

In this phase I looked for common ideas from the meaning units that were significant and related to the research question and deleted ideas in order to identify invariant constituents or horizons. “The clustered and labeled constituents are the core
themes of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). Moustakas went on to say that, “to determine the invariant constituents, one must test each expression for two requirements: (a) Does it contain a moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it? (b) Is it possible to abstract and label it?” (p. 121). If so, it is an invariant horizon of the experience. In this study, all expressions not meeting the above requirements were eliminated, as were overlapping, repetitive, and vague expressions. These were presented in more exact descriptive terms. The horizons that remained were the Invariant Constituents of the experience (p. 121).

Braun and Clarke’s (2006) suggestion were followed, with work occurring systematically through the horizontalized statements and interesting aspects identified that form repeated patterns across the data (p. 89).

**Phase 4: Define, name and refine themes**

In this phase I used Levin’s five functions (Levin, 1981) of pictures in text processing—four conventional functions (decorative, representational, organizational, interpretational) and an unconventional one (transformational)—to gain better themes for this study. Levin’s five functions (Levin, 1981) include four conventional functions (decorative, representational, organizational, interpretational) and an unconventional function (transformational)—to facilitate learning. This “functional framework has proved to be useful in explaining differences in research studies concerning pictures and prose” (Anglin, Towers, & Levie, 1996, p. 765). In this study, Levin’s functions were adapted into a framework used in this study but because four out of five functions were not applicable to my study, I developed four new functions to use in examining posters in SAMS. These five functions were: decorative (same as Levin’s function), educational,
motivational, informational, and public relations. As will be seen in chapters 4 and 5, these five functions were useful in describing the uses and value of posters in SAMS, according to study participants.

*Phase 5: Create textural descriptions*

Themes and categories were used to develop the textural descriptions of the social structures of the phenomenon. Creswell (2007) calls the textural description “what happened” which means what the participants in the study experienced with the phenomenon (p.159). A rich textural description provides information on the perspectives of participants. In addition, to make the description more vivid, verbatim examples were selected from the transcribed interview that demonstrated the reliability and validity of the data analysis.

*Phase 6: Create a textural-structural synthesis*

From textural descriptions, structural descriptions and integration of textures and structures, a holistic description of the phenomenon was constructed. I looked at themes and categories that emerged and then integrated the textural description and these themes to synthesize and construct the findings. Direct quotations from transcription were used to support the findings (Moustakas, 1994). In this phase some quantitative techniques such as tables and figures were utilized to support the results and strengthen the analysis. Baptiste (2001) said: “in the final analysis, it seems to me that it is that richness, that depth of understanding that is the genius of qualitative research” (p. 14). I have tried to reach that level of richness in the analysis and subsequent writing of the results.
The Quality of the Study

I am responsible for providing the readers or reviewers with evidence for findings and results. The analysis and interpretation process should be described very well and in rich detail to ensure that the study has been conducted with a concern for quality. The indicators of quality in qualitative research methodology from the naturalistic and constructivist paradigms are: meaningfulness, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

To produce meaningful findings, observation and multiple perspectives triangulation were used (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Stake (2005), “Triangulation has been generally considered a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation” (p. 454). Further, “triangulation aids in identifying different realities” (Stake, 2005, p. 454). However, in terms of transferability, Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasized that the description should be thick, clear, and very detailed, and provide adequate information about the inquiry so that anyone else interested may follow the process and judge the results. Further, according to Lincoln and Guba, the process also should occur in a manner that ensures the data’s dependability and confirmability. During my note-taking process in the school, I endeavored to ensure that information from the interviews and follow-up emails, and from the observations of posters in their contexts, followed the features of “thick description” and could be followed by other researchers, in order to ensure that the data were dependable and confirmable (by school sources).
Researcher Identity

As noted by Merriam (1998), the qualitative researcher is “the primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (p. 7). Therefore, it is important to understand my identity, interests, perspectives and biases with regard to the topic to be studied. I am from Kuwait, and my native language is Arabic. I have been interested in instructional and motivational posters since completing my master’s degree at Penn State in 1998. As a teacher in the instructional technology department at the College of Basic Education in Kuwait, I encouraged students to design images that colleges and schools could use both in teaching and promoting positive attitudes in the workplace environment. For instance, I worked as a teaching assistant in the College of Basic Education, Educational Technology Department in Kuwait. This department has a photography lab that is used by students to produce high-quality photographs that unfortunately too often go to waste. In some cases, these photographs are sent on to schools because teachers can use them in classroom for decoration and few for demonstration purposes. I encouraged my students to produce photographs that related to something in the school’s curriculum so that they might be useful later. I believe that students in art and photography, for example, can produce purposeful posters and images to be used in schools and organizations. Furthermore, in 2004, I was a parent volunteer at kindergarten and I tried to design a poster that teachers could use in the classroom. The idea of the poster was that every unit of experience can be demonstrated by poster such as one poster for sea experience and another for desert experience and so forth. Thus, ultimately I believe in the power of posters as an excellent mix of high-quality photographs or other illustrations and text to
bring home an important point. I believe they can be inspirational as well as educational and can serve many other functions.

In 2006, as a consultant at a training center at the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) I conducted a small project that related to that organization’s values. The goal of the project was to develop and design posters around the organization’s identified eight values and display them graphically in employees’ offices and the cafeteria, at the front desk, and on the corridor walls over a period of eight months. This was to help the employees to memorize these values and apply them in the workplace. At the beginning of each month one value was displayed for the entire month. These posters were displayed in different sizes (ranging from 24 x 33 inches to 118 x 158 inches). From this experience, I anecdotally learned that employees were discussing their values with one another and with visitors. Ultimately, then, I found posters to be powerful instruments for discussion and discourse. As the primary instrument in this qualitative work, I am sure that I brought these biases and beliefs to bear on the questions being asked, the data collected and so forth.

**Limitations**

The type and quantity of posters may be one limitation of this study. Further limitations include a limited time period in the study context, which was necessary due to constraints on time and resources. Besides these limitations, some challenges arose in recruiting a school and participants from a local school district in close proximity to a research university. The limited research setting may limit the ability to attain saturation in the study. The participants’ schedule was another limitation. For example, the school counselor’s schedule changed many times because she was very busy. Another teacher
stopped the interview because he had a class: he returned after the class was finished. The principal allowed just twenty minutes for the interview because her time was very tight. Therefore, time was a significant limitation on several levels, but was unavoidable due to the necessity of conducting this study in a school setting.
Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to illustrate the approach that was used to conduct this research. The case study approach was employed in this study. This study sought to describe the uses and perceived values in the Sabah Area Middle School (SAMS) in depth. There were 15 participants: 13 women and 2 men. The women were employed as: library clerk, guidance counselor, classroom assistant in the learning support room/7th-grade, librarian, paraprofessional/teacher’s assistant, principal, remedial math teacher, school counselor, business teacher/technology coordinator, school secretary, classroom assistant, guidance counselor secretary, and school psychologist. The men were employed as: emotional support/8th-grade math teacher and 7th-grade social studies teacher. The participants were asked to talk about their perceptions of the uses and values of posters in their school. Furthermore, this chapter provides details on the sampling, data collection, and analysis. Finally, a brief discussion of the quality and research identity, limitations, and conclusion close the chapter.
Chapter Four

Results

The purpose of this chapter is to present and illustrate the findings. The findings related to the five functions of posters in SAMS: decorative, informational, educational, motivational, and public relation. At the end of every function there is a summary that describes the function that participants hope to see.

SAMS Background

SAMS is a middle school located in a rural area of Pennsylvania. It is one of six schools in the area school district. SAMS divides its academic teams into white and red. In the 6th grade, special classes, and learning support, there is no division into colors—the division begins in the 7th and 8th grades. They are: 7th grade red, 8th grade red, 7th grade white, and 8th grade white. These teams can be led by one teacher or more. For example, there are six 6th grade teams and each team has one or two teachers. There are nine Learning support teams (e.g., emotional support). In addition, SAMS has more than 20 clubs, focusing on the newspaper, yearbooks, drama, ski, self-defense, sign language, golf, and poetry, for example. The total enrollment is around 710 students in grades 6, 7, and 8. The total number of staff is 86. Further, the middle school building goals are: respect for oneself, respect for others, and respect for property. SAMS also has a parent group—P.I.N. (Parent Information Network)—to support the students, teachers, and administrators throughout the school year (SAMS website, 2009).

In SAMS, many programs and teams have been formed for specific tasks and goals. These include: the Star Cluster Program, which involves “Building a Community of Excellence”
and an anti-bullying program, and is part of Olweus’ Core Programs Against Bullying and Antisocial Behavior. The Star Cluster program raises some topics in individual months. These topics are: Building Empathy, Building Responsibility, Building Respect, Building Generosity, Setting Goals, Understanding Diversity, Building Perseverance, Experiencing Rejuvenation, and Experiencing Relaxation. Both programs—the Star Cluster and the anti-bullying programs—use posters during the school year as one of the vehicles for conveying messages about these topics and rules of behavior.

Certain classrooms contain more items than others. Throughout the SAMS, there are larger banners for special occasions and occasional signs or posters for different events. I took more than 150 pictures of posters around SAMS (see Appendices F-L); most of the scenes include 3-4 posters. These pictures reflect different places in the school, such as the gymnasium, cafeteria, classrooms, nurse’s room, counselor’s room, hallways, main entrance, and library. From these pictures I chose only six that included different kinds of posters at this school. As mentioned earlier, the criteria for choosing these posters were: size, location, source, message, framed, laminated and cost (see chapter 3 for additional detail). When I chose these posters, I looked for those that exemplified all these criteria to help us understand how these posters had been used in the school.

Before describing the findings I summarized all information about these six posters in one table (Table 4.1) to provide background about my interpretations of these posters’ uses in the school. I also created a school map (Figure 4.2) to support my illustrations. The first picture was ‘got milk’ [see Appendix F] and measured 48”x72”. It included the band The All-American Rejects, the motto, “got milk”, and this information: “Dairy Little Secret. Want a body that rocks? Listen up. Some studies suggest that teens who choose milk instead of sugary drinks tend
to be leaner, and the protein helps build muscle. It’s one drink we won’t reject.” This poster was released by the Milk Processor Education Program and produced by a dairy company for the “got milk” campaign. The health department in the school district received these posters for free and then they sent them to the schools. The school administrators posted it on the walls of the cafeteria with other posters related to nutrition. They were displayed for three to four months, and then the school administrator gave it to students as a gift. When the participants asked which poster had an impact on students, 11 chose this poster. In addition, when they asked which was the best, 6 chose this one.

The second was a poster on the school district’s mission, vision, beliefs, and goals [see Appendix G]. This poster came from the school district and was supposed to be posted in every classroom, office, and library. It was not framed or laminated. Its size was 17”x11” and from the picture [see Appendix G] it is obvious that it is very difficult to read from a distance and includes too much text and no images. In addition, it is posted with other posters that have pictures and large fonts. When the participants asked about its impact on students, no one chose it. Although the poster was posted in every classroom, offices, and hallways, only three participants noticed the poster and three believed that the poster had an impact on them. Based on the photograph, I see that this poster is largely “invisible” in that it is posted among many other posters that have colors and large fonts.

The third image [see Appendix H] I collected actually included two posters: the title of one was academic “standards” and the second one included an explanation of the core concepts in Pennsylvania relating to state requirements for health/physical education classes. All teachers have standards assigned to their subject. The poster size is 24”x36”. These posters were laminated and one of them was teacher-made while the other was purchased. Furthermore, they
were posted in the gym high on the wall. When the participants were asked which one had an impact on students or themselves, no one chose it.

The fourth picture [see Appendix I] was of a homeland security poster. Its size was 50”x 31.25”; it included several photos of Pennsylvania, Terrorism Tip line information, and the slogan, “Homeland Security is Everyone’s Responsibility. Get Involved!” Although it was posted in the hallway near the mail room, no participant gave it a greater presence than other posters. The school administrators posted the poster for a while.

The fifth picture [see Appendix J] includes three posters: one is labeled “Character”, one is labeled “Freedom” and one is labeled “Commitment.” Each of the posters contains an inspirational or motivational quote from a famous person. The first poster, “Character”, has a picture of two hands of military people and the first hand is passing the U.S. flag to the other hand. The second poster, “Commitment”, has a massage related to the importance of commitment to a goal or dream. There are two pictures on it: an American eagle and a flag. The third poster, “Freedom”, contains a picture of the Statue of Liberty. These posters are framed and their size is 25”x19.5”. They are located in front of the entrance of the building. They look very professional. When participants were asked which poster was noticed more, 7 participants chose these posters. These posters were on display for more than three years. When the participants asked which one was the best, 6 participants chose these posters. The cost of these posters was high. In addition, when participants were asked which one was having an impact on students, only one participant chose them. However, when they asked which one had an impact on them, three participants chose them.

The last picture includes [see Appendix K] four posters that display some of the Pennsylvania State standards. The first poster is yellow and entitled READ (capitalized and bold)
and understand essential content of informational texts. The second poster is orange and entitled UNDERSTAND and USE media for learning purposes. The third poster is light red and entitled ORGANIZE and PRESENT the main ideas from research. The fourth poster is light blue and entitled SPEAK and LISTEN to others, using appropriate skills. These posters are located in the library high on the wall above the white board. Their size is 24”x18”. The librarian made these posters to cover the four Pennsylvania standards through nine weeks teaching. The principal required the teachers to post these academic standards in their rooms. In addition, when the participants were asked which picture was noticed more, 4 participants chose it. When the participants were asked which picture was having an impact on students, 3 participants chose these while 4 participants believed that these were having an impact on them.

The following table (Table 4.1) has more details about each picture. A school map (Figure 4.1) shows where these posters are located.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poster number</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>Nutrition</td>
<td>School mission</td>
<td>Standards</td>
<td>Homeland security</td>
<td>Motivational</td>
<td>Academic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Cafeteria</td>
<td>most classroom and some hallway</td>
<td>gymnasium</td>
<td>Hallway main area</td>
<td>Main entrance</td>
<td>Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laminated</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size</td>
<td>48”x72”</td>
<td>17”x11”</td>
<td>24”x36”</td>
<td>50”x31.25”</td>
<td>19.5”x25”</td>
<td>24”x18”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Framed</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message:</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Long</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Long</td>
<td>Short</td>
<td>Short</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Short=(word-sentence)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Medium=(two sentence-paragraph)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Long=(paragraphs)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>Low cost</td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>High cost</td>
<td>Low cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource</td>
<td>Company</td>
<td>School district</td>
<td>Company</td>
<td>Police</td>
<td>Company</td>
<td>Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Displaying period</td>
<td>3-4 months</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>PA Office of Homeland Security and PA State Police</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More noticed (N=15)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The best (N=15)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on student (N=15)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on participant</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible for hanging or changing</td>
<td>School district</td>
<td>Every teacher in classroom</td>
<td>Health and Physical education teacher</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Student counsel</td>
<td>Librarian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The findings are presented as five themes. These themes are based on the five functions of posters in school, derived from Levin (1981): decorative, educational, informational, motivational, and public relations. Briefly, decorative posters simply decorate the environment, such as the classroom, offices, library, gymnasium, cafeteria, and hallway. Some of these posters
are related to the context and some are just decoration. For example, in the French language classroom there was a poster of the Eiffel Tower that was useful in discussions of French culture and history; if the social studies teacher was to use it, it would also offer geographic and historical contexts.

Educational posters educate students and teachers, as well as classroom visitors. For example, a U.S. Presidents poster in the social studies classroom provides people with knowledge about their country. In the math classroom, a multiplication table provides students with information about the multiplication process. Educational posters can be divided into three types of posters: attitude, knowledge, and skills. Attitude posters deal with students’ actions; viewers are expected to apply the posters’ messages to their life. For example, some posters educate students who engage in bad behaviors such as smoking and bullying. This sort of behavioral change poster is really aimed at attitudinal learning. Knowledge posters provide students, teachers, staff, and visitors with facts, concepts, procedures, and principles about behaviors and subjects. For example, SAMS has a poster about five themes in geography—location, place, human-environment interaction, movement, and region—in the social studies classroom. Another example is the diseases that result from smoking. Skills posters teach students skills, such as how to solve problems, how to write an essay, and how to search for a book in the library.

The third type of poster is informational posters, which provide students and teachers with information about school rules. These rules may include no bullying, or no chewing gum. The fourth type of posters is motivational posters, which are used to motivate, inspire and reinforce students, teachers, and colleagues to act positively. These posters usually include a picture, a concept, and a message. For example, at SAMS there was a poster about drinking milk
[see image in Appendix F]. The fifth and final type is public relation posters that reflect all activities and campaigns in school, such as a no smoking campaign or a book fair.

Posters in school have four factors that make them different. These are: context, timing, source, and function. Context means that some posters are posted in a specific place. For example, some nutrition posters are posted in the cafeteria because they convey a message or information about nutrition. Timing means that some posters are posted in a specific location and for a limited time based on the activity, holiday, or campaign. Source means that some posters come from vendors, students, administrators, and teachers. The last factor is the uses of posters.

One important finding was that in SAMS, there were literally thousands of posters around the school, with most of them being located in the classrooms. Some participants described classrooms as very busy environments with no space to place a new poster, even a small one. For example, the business teacher/technology coordinator said, “there are some classrooms I see where there’s no wall space at all”, while her classroom had very few because she is a new teacher at SAMS “being a first year teacher here, I don’t have a lot in my classroom this year…!”

All posters can be teacher- or student-made, or purchased. The following paragraphs provide more details about each one of these options as they were found at SAMS.

Teacher-made

Some teachers liked to customize their own posters based on their needs. The principal emphasized that “…and a good mix of teachers creating their own posters that have more specific details that they need for their classes.” In addition, the remedial math teacher stated that “all the teachers have a budget and they can purchase if they desire. A lot of teachers make them because they’re cheaper than purchasing that you have to laminate.”
Student-made

Most students made posters for assignments in classrooms. The 7th-grade social studies teacher explained that: “I do have students create posters at the end of the unit.” And he “likes the idea of having the students create the posters.” In addition, the paraprofessional/teacher’s assistant describes how much students like to design posters “hands on! A lot of hands on. Kids love hands on. I think some of them learn better from that and take them outside. Take these posters…let them do posters…let ‘em do more hands on.”

Moreover, the school counselor indicated that: “we have kid-created posters, that kids are making about bullying in particular. That kids are creating posters out of their own ideas, to reinforce things that they’ve learned” The school psychologist emphasizes that “the students like to do that too … If you walk around the school you’ll see posters the students have made.”

Purchased Posters

The 7th-grade social studies teacher stated that “some that are… you buy ‘em through a company…” The principal also emphasized that “… teachers buy posters that are already made that fit into what they have…” In addition, the remedial math teacher indicated that, in reference to the posters in her classroom, “probably about 95% of my posters I have bought.” Furthermore, the business/technology coordinator teacher said that: “I know for my classroom for next year I have purchased ones to reinforce those things that I teach in the classroom”

In the rest of this chapter, the five functions of posters—decorative, educational, informational, motivational, and public relations—are discussed in more detail, allied with relevant findings from the data analysis.
Decorative Function

Decorative posters are divided into two categories as mentioned before: related and not related. Related means that the content of the poster relates to the context or subject while not related means that the content is not related to it. The data show that, of the 150 examples located at SAMS, two were found not to be related decorative posters—that is, posters that had a purely decorative function only. All participants stated that posters decorate the school environment but at the same time have another function, such as teaching, educating, and announcing. Here are some quotes from the interviews.

The emotional support/8th-grade math teacher explained his view:

. . . I think they’re used to decorate. Like, I keep going back to those first three in the hall [see image in Appendix J] The reasons I think I….they’re framed…Or if there’s something funny, like the duck [see image in Appendix L], I enjoy that. The Paris one, very nice, like I said, very nice looking. And that is a decoration, there is no information on that, it is something…it’s a decoration for the French class, it’s great. So I think some of them are decoration (The 8th-grade math teacher interview, April 29, 2009).

He went on to describe how these posters serve as a decoration, and the value of that function:

. . . I guess the aesthetic value, the visual of the Paris one and things like that. Make it more of a comfortable environment, enriching I guess you could say, colorful, enrichment to the environment at the school, I guess if I had to say…I think posters in the hallway are needed. There white bleak walls, you know, add a little color to it is great…a better environment when they’re things like that up. The French one makes me want to go to France, it does…I think it’s beneficial, in that it makes the environment a little more fun…it’s nice to look at, as opposed to a whole thing of print, not very fun to look at (8th-grade math teacher interview, April 29, 2009).

The 7th-grade social studies teacher said posters in classrooms, “are there just to be there almost…for simply decoration to create a climate”. In addition, “some might just use them as
background, wall coverings. During her interview, the library clerk said that posters in SAMS are “more for decoration”. In addition, the guidance counselor explained how posters serve as decoration “I like to be able to kind of see things on the walls, when you’re going by you might be thinking of something else, like the one of the duckling on my wall, I love that one!” She added, “I like to see them around, rather than plain dirty walls at school…Honestly for aesthetic purposes it’s nicer, like I said I don’t want to look at bare walls. Some of them are for decoration” This point was echoed by the classroom assistant in the learning support room/7th-grade: “I like posters … instead of a blank wall. So I like seeing posters hanging around. I like seeing posters hanging in the classroom.”

The librarian agreed with many of these comments, stating:

. . . “because I’m a visual person, and I love brightness, and I love color and I learn by seeing. I would love to see an entire wall painted in a poster format, like in a mural, in several places in the building or posters that are large and bright and colorful and encompass a large area of space…I don’t like to see empty, blank walls. It’s pretty obvious when you walk in this library; it’s pretty full of stuff, because I like to have things for people to look at. I even have posters on my ceiling in the classroom … I was at my dentist last year, getting my teeth cleaned, and he had posters on the ceiling about how to take care of your teeth, and I thought, oh, good idea. Cause there are kids that will look up at the ceiling and so rather than stare at a blank ceiling I give them something to read (The librarian interview, March 26, 2009).

Moreover, the principal described some posters that are:

“decorative, you know, that make our school look nicer”. She also noted areas in the building that could use more decoration: “that are more decorative or less? Probably my 6th-grade teachers are, because teachers who are trained elementary tend to be more decorative than teachers who are trained secondary. Some of my 7th-grade teachers are trained elementary and some are trained secondary. Math teachers tend to have less which I think is a little weird. They have the same budget but they might use it different ways. Sometimes females more than males, but I’ve never really looked in the males and females room to see…I think it’s a positive thing. I’d rather see things in my building…I think it warms up the building, instead of being cold … I like the warm busy feeling rather than a cold empty feeling (Principal interview, March 26, 2009).
For more explanations of decoration, the focus turns now to more detailed examples of the ways in which decoration is viewed and defined. Some quotes from the interviews will accompany this discussion.

*Decoration-related*

According to the data, most of the participants emphasized and preferred posters to be beautiful and useful. For example, the 7th-grade social studies teacher said: “don’t just make them a decoration. Incorporate them into your curriculum somehow. Make them a part of your curriculum or what’s the sense of buying them,” The guidance counselor said when asked whether one poster in her office was decorative or not: “no, it’s probably to help people think. But it’s also decoration. Because I guess the other choice would be to put a picture on the wall. But it’s nice when we can have some kind of positive comment or you know a different way of looking at something or thinking about something.”

In addition, the principal said that:

those posters [all six posters] are useful and not something that just takes up wall space. Because if we’re requiring it, I don’t it to just take up wall space, I want it to be meaningful in their classroom… And it might be that it’s strictly decorative … So even though it’s about decoration it’s also about rapport building… they’re [see images in Appendix J] aesthetically pleasing as well as they have a message and they’re welcoming to our school as well (Principal interview, March 26, 2009).

Furthermore, the remedial math/7th-grade math teacher described the role of posters in her room: “I have a very small room with no windows. So I have four walls. I have a lot of posters, they are very colorful. Otherwise it would not be pretty! It’s kind of my means for survival, to have all the different colors in my room… I like the entry way. I just think that’s a nice statement when you walk in the building. It’s a nice presentation. They’re framed, colorful.
I think they look really nice.” She tried: “to put things up there that are not screaming at them, but they identify with them.” Most of them were math-related.

In addition, the school counselor explained how these posters are related to her work even though they decorated her office:

. . . it brightens up my office and it makes it a more cheery setting. As the school counselor, when the kids come into my office I want them to feel comfortable, I want them to feel good and I think that helps the environment in my office, to see all kind of cheery and comfortable… So I think posters are a good way of decorative purposes but to make it more inviting and comfortable with their surrounding. So if they see things that make them feel better about being in school, that might help. Not only for decorative purposes…there’s lots of wall space. You’ve got to cover the walls with something so it may as well be something that’s going to help and teach and reinforce ideas and at the same time again look nice, and to make your school look more inviting (The school counselor interview, March 27, 2009).

Most of the participants emphasized that decorating the school with posters improves the school environment. For example, the business/technology coordinator teacher suggested that “do some of that in a more colorful bright way, for a more cheerful, colorful environment.”

Decoration-not related

A review of 150 photos taken at SAMS did reveal two posters that were entirely unrelated to a subject taught or a campaign embraced at the school. One poster focused on arts and crafts/folk art and the second poster had a picture of three tigers—neither of them contained a title or message. Since the artwork on the poster was quite lovely, they were visually appealing but were not subject- or campaign-related. In addition, the participants also did not mention any examples of posters that had been hung just for decoration and were not related to school matters. So clearly they had either gotten used to the presence of these particularly decorative posters or
were not aware of them, or perhaps did not even view them as posters for the purposes of this study.

With regard to the decorative function, then, creating a good climate in school is an important issue. Toward this end, teachers and administrators are trying to cover blank walls in classrooms and hallways to make the school environment more encouraging and to reinforce learning. Some are related to a context or subject, and others are not related. The majority of these posters are related. These posters make the school environment more comfortable, cheerful, funny, and warm.

*Educational Function*

The educational posters have different sub-functions based on the message and content of the poster. Therefore, these posters were classified into three categories: attitude, knowledge, and skills posters. If the poster conveyed a behavior message, then it was an attitude poster; if they offered/stimulated knowledge, then they were a knowledge poster. If they provided or illustrated a skill, then it was a skill poster. These posters benefit students, faculties, and visitors. Findings about these kinds of posters are supported by findings in Dwyer (1972), where it was reported that posters “reinforce text and oral presentation and can be used to bring unseen or inaccessible materials, locations, events, and processes across time and space because posters include visual elements” (Dwyer, 1972). When asked to identify types of posters he would use if he were the school administrator, the emotional support/8th grade math teacher suggested poster on the actual effects of smoking such as “…showing black lungs and diseased lungs…showing the kids the actual effects. So like the harsh reality”. Such posters serve to bolster his position— for example, if he is talking to students about smoking, he can be more effective if he also has visual
aids that bolster his arguments, such as picture of unseen phenomena such as the “black lungs” found in smokers.

**Attitude Poster**

Although these posters have a positive side, some have a negative side. The following paragraphs describe both the positive and negative sides as participants saw them.

*Positive side.* This type of poster focuses on the behaviors of students and staff. With regard to the students, a lot of posters are aimed at their behaviors, such as bullying, and chewing gum. According to the data, all participants were focusing on bullying because it is currently a significant issue in school. Several of the participants were also concerned about the gum chewing issue. The emotional support/8th-grade math teacher described some students’ behaviors in school: “I know a lot of kids smoke. I’ve talked to kids about smoking because with emotional support we talk about a lot of that stuff. That would definitely be a big one – no smoking, tobacco and its effects.” He also mentioned one example of behavior: “when we did the Special Olympics, our life skills class walked out the front of the school, and everybody hung up a bunch of posters saying “good luck,” “use teamwork,” and stuff like that.” “Life skills? Special Olympics? All the kids the um…mentally disabled will go to the Centre County Life or um….Special Olympics, where they’re playing games and everything and they leave at 8:15 and all the home rooms from all the grades will line the front hallway and they’ll be holding posters, and they’ll hang ‘em up, and you know good luck, cheering for ‘em and everything, it’s kind of a nice thing they do and the kids spend a period the day before making the posters.” In addition, since his job also included emotional support, he explained his reasons for purchasing certain posters: “I’ve bought posters that deliver a message that hopefully keep them on target, not just
in the curriculum, but as a person.” Furthermore, “If there are other things outside of curriculum, that deal with respect and how to treat others, that’s more of our anti-bullying program in the last few years and we go through the committee to get those things.” “The functions of, the message posters, you know, the ones that are trying to teach kids a lesson or a way to behave … to teach them how to be productive citizens in this community here and in the community at large.”

The school secretary addressed another point when she described how the school used posters on some occasions. For example, “… at Christmas time our star clusters groups that we have here did community service and there was a lot of posters about that, about giving to pet shelters and giving to food banks and things like that.” The library clerk talked about how she used posters in her classroom at the library: “I kind of like to put up more posters, just warning them, you know, about being safe when you’re on a computer, and who’s on the other end, and the cameras they put on them and all that kind of stuff… the nurse’s office has some health-related posters, I think about coughing, covering your mouth, washing your hands…” All these comments emphasized the importance of healthy behaviors among students, especially at school and how posters can contribute in this regard. All of these findings confirm Allen (1994), who theorized that posters can be used to hold students’ and teachers’ attention for a moment and use that moment to drive home a message to a targeted audience. Afterwards, the audience may be left in a frame of mind favorable to acting on the message. Data show that school administration, teachers, and staffs were using posters to convey a message that they wished the audience/observers to focus on.

The librarian described other behavioral management goals related to the posters:

May we’re going to talk about appropriate ways for the student to de-stress and relax for the summer. And we’re going to be suggesting ways for students to be with families, do family activities, camping, do recreational activities like swimming, baseball and not always mentioning things like sit inside and play video games. We want to mention
things to get them out, to get them active. So those are some of the things we’ll be talking about in May (The librarian interview, March 26, 2009).

In addition, the principal explained how these posters help students and teachers to behave positively: “we have something called slant, which is how kids pay attention, sit up look at the teacher, body posture, and those posters are in the classroom. So if a teacher says slant, a kid can look at the poster and say I’m supposed to sit up and look at the teacher.” For example, “I’ve seen some teachers, remember, if someone’s talking out of turn, remember our classroom rules that we raise our hand or we wait until someone else is finished talking before we talk, and they refer to the poster to remind the student” She also stated that teachers should be “explicit to kids on why we’re here, why we’re teaching this and what it’s useful for, so there’s a purpose and not just because my teacher said I had to learn this. Trying to make that connection. And that’s a teacher. That’s her academic standard.”

The school counselor explained how these posters help her to do her job “so that poster has been particularly helpful in my office, not only because kids can get out what they’re feeling, but identify how they’re feeling. So I use it not only as an instructional tool for them but also so they can talk about what’s going on with them.” The 7th-grade social studies teacher described the posters outside the classroom: “when you get out into the school you deal more with posters that deal with bullying, making good choices, uplifting, kind of posters to teach kids more about morals, maybe or how to act in society, more behavior based posters.”

Negative side. The emotional support/8th-grade math teacher explained the negative side of using some posters:

. . . now the unfortunate side of that. If I see a got milk ad, and Tom Brady’s on it, the quarterback for the New England Patriots. I don’t like him, because I like the Steelers, you know, so, that’s almost counter productive because I’m like, Tom Brady, forget it, you know what I mean. So when you’re doing the athlete thing, if you’re using one that’s a rival of the people around here, it could be a problem. I don’t think that’s a problem
with musicians necessarily but with athletes, um, I’m very competitive so if you’re gonna put a poster up of milk, and I don’t like milk, and if it’s of somebody I don’t like, I really don’t like milk now, you know what I mean. They definitely have their advertisement and their persuasion (The 8th-grade math teacher interview, April 29, 2009).

Based on this quote, we can see that some posters use pictures of well-known musicians or athletes because they are very popular with students. The question here is, do we have real data which show that using musicians or athletes can convey a message, although millions of dollars have been spent on such posters? Additionally, most of the participants in this study mentioned that the posters for ‘got milk’ and which included celebrities typically involved musicians and athletes while other celebrities, especially scholars who have influenced the world and science, are not mentioned on posters. There was one poster in a classroom that had Einstein’s picture and the sentence “even Einstein asked questions”. In this instance, we can see that the milk posters are designed to attract attention through the presence of musicians and athletes, while poster designers include Einstein in more academic messages. When we go back to the pictures of ‘got milk’ and ‘Einstein’, we can see clearly other differences between them. One is the size. The milk poster was more of a banner (48”x72”) while the Einstein poster was a regular poster (17”x11”). The difference in sizes may show us the importance attached to each message. The second difference is display. The got milk was displayed in the cafeteria while the Einstein was displayed on the right side of a cabinet, where it was not easily viewed. This indicates that the locations of these posters in the classroom may or may not always reflect the importance of the message. Rather, the teacher has to really think about placement; this may not always be at the forefront of their thoughts as they hang posters. They also may in fact be looking to fill empty space or find a place to hang an older poster.

Knowledge Poster
The knowledge poster provides students, staff, and visitors with facts, concepts, procedures, and principles about different aspects of life. According to some participants, this kind of poster is found a lot in classrooms. For example, the emotional support/8th-grade math teacher stated that:

. . . with the tobacco things, one that was always impressionable on me was the lungs – showing black lungs and diseased lungs, that would be another one I would have up, showing the kids the actual effects. So like the harsh reality…in the classroom I would have a lot of math stuff, because I’m a math teacher… As far as instruction goes, I don’t want too much detail. I don’t want a whole bunch of fine print they’re gonna have to read. I want it to be basic and then get the idea by just looking at it, understanding (The 8th-grade math teacher interview, April 29, 2009).

The 7th-grade social studies teacher also described the knowledge posters in his classroom: “in my classroom, they’re curriculum based. I have posters on the different ancient civilizations that we cover. They go into detail such as contributions, what they’re known for, the style of dress that they had, the ins and outs of the different civilizations that we’ll cover, like government, their economic, their economies and what they were known for”. He mentioned one example of a knowledge poster: “I’ve bought different posters that deal with different areas, five themes of geography is something important in social studies… these themes are: location, place, human-environment interaction, movement, and region.” These comments support Allen’s (1994) finding that some teachers use thematic posters to teach subjects.

The school secretary talked about the benefits of using knowledge posters: “they made people aware of smoking and the hazards that it causes.” Another benefit is “to remind kids, the students, or make them aware of different things… I think having a visual, having something that the kids can look at, ‘cause sometimes I think the students, they hear, and it goes in one ear and out the other, at least if they see it maybe it sticks with them more and they can remember it better.”
In addition, the library clerk mentioned one example of these posters: “a lot of the homemade posters are hung in the hallway, when the students do certain assignments. I can only think of the social studies one right now where they’re doing the different Amendments of the Constitution. And then they each did an informative poster of the different amendments and then they’d be hanging in the hallway for students to read or any visitor could see also.” Some of the posters in the nurse room are posted there “to educate the students on not spreading germs because they’re so many of us together in this school.”

Furthermore, the classroom assistant described the teacher’s use of posters. For example, “math, for instance. She’ll use you know different posters for different formulas, and they’re posted for as long as they’re on that part of the math, and the kids can use it.” On the other hand, the librarian talked about how she uses some posters in the library “in four little posters [see images in Appendix K] covers what I teach the kids in a marking period, in teaching my kids to read, understand and use, organize and present. And those are the four Pennsylvania standards that I cover in my 9-week class. Having students pick a topic, reading their information, organizing their notes, and so on.”

The paraprofessional/teacher’s assistant described how the posters benefit students and teachers, particularly with regard to some behaviors. For example:

. . . tobacco…you have to talk to kids about that…first of all they’re expensive! And the lung cancer, what it can look like inside your lungs you must put that out there. Your activities, what it can do that. You’re not gonna breathe if you’re wrestling. Just break it down like that… I think posters…the kids will get all the facts about it and then they’ll talk about it to you, and then they’ll want to know more. Just like say tobacco and stuff they’ll want to know the damage it does to your body… and alcohol the same, and they’ll want to know more about it, like driving under the influence. They’ll question it more. You put it out there in a poster (The paraprofessional/teacher’s assistant interview, March 27, 2009).
The principal also explained how some teachers use knowledge posters. For example, “a lot of teachers will have word walls which are kind of like vocabulary type posters and so when you talk about the vocabulary you can refer to the poster…” Furthermore, the remedial math teacher described her use of posters in her classroom:

in my classroom I have a ton of math posters. I try to put a lot of things in there that will help students who struggle with math …I have vocabulary terms. And especially with math if you don’t understand the terminology, you’re not going to be able to do the problems. And so, the time they forget how to do something, we refer to the poster. So we’re constantly referring to the math posters – a lot!... if they can’t remember how to do something. Like a geometry term. A lot of students need that visual representations so we’ll point things out (The remedial math teacher interview, March 27, 2009).

Another example is the social studies classroom: “if I taught social studies I would want to put pictures up of different locations I taught just to get the kids interested, an appeal. Especially if you’re doing things about a foreign country that the kids don’t have knowledge of.” She also uses posters to help students remember some vocabularies: “if they have a problem. Just a refresher if they’re forgetting something. Geometry term – if they forget what something looks like they can see what it looks like right on the poster. Those we do use a lot.” In addition, she states that she uses the posters based on its purposes “the math ones – they serve a purpose. They do what I want them to do. I like to have things around that help the students. That’s the bottom line. I want things there that will aid them, not me. If it’s gonna help them and we use it, then fine, otherwise I would get something else.”

Furthermore, she described how she selects posters for her classroom and how she uses them:

I try to find posters where the students are struggling…And then I address them with the poster. For instance they may have trouble with square root, problems with exponent. I try to find some visual aid that’s part of my room now, so that if they get stuck and forgot how to do something, I say look up there. Let’s go through it again. I don’t have to go through a binder, it’s there on my wall, I know where it is, it’s right there at my fingertips. Geometry is an area where a lot of students need that refresher. Most of the posters I have
are very visual. They don’t just mention the type of triangle, they actually show the different types of triangle. So it’s a lot more user friendly for the students – especially if they’re a visual learner…It helps me to have them at my fingertips for them to refer to (The remedial math teacher interview, March 27, 2009).

The business teacher/technology coordinator described how she uses posters in her classroom: “I’m going to work on a word wall to teach them vocabulary that we use on the computer that’s not everyday language have that posted for them.” In addition, the guidance counselor’s secretary offered two examples of knowledge posters:

. . . well, the example of the black history month or the Latin American famous people. They would have facts about that person and maybe you didn’t know they were of Latin American descent and you didn’t know what they were famous for. The nutrition posters might teach you different facts about healthy eating that you might not have known. Sometimes a class will do a project about different parts of the country and they’ll have facts listed on that poster that teach you things that maybe you didn’t know before (the guidance counselor’s secretary, March 25, 2009).

Another example involved the use of posters in a campaign. She said that:

. . . they want kids to think, like kick butts yesterday was an anti-smoking campaign and it made kids like a lot…55 was the big number, it even made the adults question it, it was just the number 55 and that’s all it was. On posters and t-shirts as well. And everyone was saying what was the 55 for? Well 55 people a day in Pennsylvania die from smoking related deaths. It made you curious, it made you question, it made you think. So it caught your attention (the guidance counselor’s secretary, March 25, 2009).

This quote and others are supported by Roland (2006), who theorized that posters can make people stop and think about the message conveyed by the poster. Most participants focused on this point that at least the posters make students think about the poster’s message. One example was a poster on which was the number 55, which made all students, staff, and visitors ask about that number. In addition, the guidance counselor mentioned that her son, who is student at SAMS, discussed the smoking issue:

I have a son in 8th grade and he came home and did talk about the tables and the displays they had set up. They had a large sheet like poster, huge poster size and all the kids signed it, it was a pledge not to smoke. You know that made them think about it and give
a commitment. I don’t think everyone will follow it once they get older, but at least for a little bit you thought about what your actions were so you know my son did talk about it when he came home, so it must have made impacted him somewhat (the guidance counselor’s secretary, March 25, 2009).

**Skills Poster**

The skills poster teaches students, teachers, and staff skills that help them to improve their learning and teaching. For students, there were many posters on certain skills, such as solving problems, writing an essay, and searching for a book in the library or using the Internet. The 7th-grade social studies teacher provided an example of a skills poster: “how to create an essay, posters that show the steps in creating an essay or writing an essay response.” In addition, the principal described some posters that are “procedural type posters, like for instance we have ones on different reading strategies that kids can…when teachers say we’re gonna read this chapter in the book, here are some reading strategies, and the kids can refer to posters on the wall to help them with the process of that reading strategy.”

The school counselor talked about some posters that also focus on certain skills: “one is a more instructional purpose and to give kids strategies with whatever they’re studying. We have a lot of reading and writing strategy posters in the school to remind kids to use those skills that they’ve learned. So as a reminder I guess? And visual so that they’re seen, so they’re remembering what they’ve learned.” She also states that “there’s a couple in there about study skills, study habits.”

The business/technology coordinator teacher described some skills that students learn through the posters: “some of them are about correct keyboarding techniques when you’re at the computer. I think there’s one about internet safety.”

In summary, the educational posters were divided into three types: attitudes, knowledge, and skills. Attitude posters aim mostly at students’ behaviors while knowledge posters target
students, staff, and visitors. The skills posters also target students first and then staff as well as visitors.

*Informational Function*

The third function of the poster is informational. This type is designed to provide students and teachers with information about the school’s rules and policies, such as no chewing gum. The guidance counselor stated that “a lot of them [the posters] have to do with rules.” Many programs in school serve the school community, such as the anti-bullying program. These programs let students design posters that focus on the program’s goals. For example, the anti-bullying program encourages students to produce anti-bullying posters that help students to apply these rules.

The emotional support/8th-grade math teacher said that “anti-bullying is a big one, um, no smoking, the health classes did a lot of no smoking stuff...anti-bullying is probably the biggest thing in school rules. Wherever you go it says don’t bully, or bullying is a crime”. He indicated that anti-bullying is very important so “that is our strategic plan and we went over a lot of that before the students were here, so I really. I notice that in every classroom.”

On the other hand, the 7th-grade social studies teacher described these kinds of posters and how they benefit him:

...the one that benefits me...I’m gonna have to say the school district one [see image in Appendix G], ‘cause it kinda gives a vision, what’s my purpose here, obviously it’s to teach social studies, obviously it’s to teach the kids, but you know specifically here in the district, what are we trying to accomplish. And this poster kinda goes along those means, what are we trying to accomplish, what’s our vision, how are we gonna achieve that and you know it kinda helps you see...that kinda gives me a vision of the whole district and where I fit into it (The social studies teacher interview, April 29, 2009).

The library clerk noted that some posters deal with the school rules, “like school rules against bullying” as well as state standards. She “would consider gym a class that would have to
have standards, and that’s why they must have them in the gym” The librarian made her own posters to present state standards for her class “and those [see images in Appendix K] are the four Pennsylvania standards that I cover in my 9-week class.”

The guidance counselor explained that the how and who of producing these posters:

they make them in their star cluster groups, which is part of our anti-bullying promotional activities. So they might make them either about a school rule…[these posters] sometimes it reminds them of what they should be doing – if it’s the school rules that are up. Sometimes I’ll be going down the hall, and a group of kids will be walking down the hall, and it will be one of the posters, and I’ll say, what does that say? And they’ll say oh we’re supposed to be on the right. And it’s supposed to help with traffic patterns so kids get where they’re going faster. So I’ve done that before (The guidance counselor interview, March 25, 2009).

The classroom assistant in the learning support room/7th-grade described some of the posters in her classroom: “we have posters to tell you rules…And I don’t necessarily know that they pay attention to the ones that tell them about the rules…like gum chewing isn’t allowed but they still chew gum. But I think they’re helpful…they remind you of the rules that the school has… they are just a reminder or a positive reinforcement of something that the school wants the kids to know.” Also, “they remember seeing the sign saying ‘no gum zone.’ I think they’re used in that way. To remind kids of rules.” Here, we see a situation that shows us how these posters are used:

well we hoped yesterday that a student would change their behavior. They were caught chewing gum and we pointed out the no gum policy in our school. So now we’re hoping he changes his behavior and doesn’t chew gum. But we did actually point out the poster to him and ask him to read what was at the bottom. They would get a detention if they were caught chewing gum… But yesterday in particular there were two students that were caught chewing gum, and we pointed out the poster and had them read the bottom line of the poster that says your consequence for chewing gum is that you get a detention (The classroom assistant in the learning support room interview, March 26, 2009).

The paraprofessional/teacher’s assistant noted that the school needs to present the “school’s policy, you have to jilt into these kids about bullying, tobacco, drugs. You have to have
them out there so the kids know what’s going on.” In addition, the principal stated that “we also have … posters that have to do with the rules…we have some anti-bullying programs in our school and sometimes teachers will have kids create posters on bullying… there was a poster there that said I should wash my hands after going to the bathroom, so maybe I should!”

In addition, the principal described how these posters impact students in terms of teaching rules: “I think they probably have in some ways especially when sometimes when kids are producing a poster, especially when it’s anti-bullying; it’s hard to make a poster about not being a bully and then go be a bully. The same thing if you go sign a pledge to not smoke and then you go light up a cigarette.” Furthermore,

. . . we have posters on the academic standards that we’re requiring teachers to post in their rooms. That I wanted the posters to be meaningful to teachers, to students, not just because I told you to hang them up. Because it’s very easy to just buy a poster of all the Pennsylvania academic standards and just slap it up on the wall. I wanted something that would be in kid friendly language because they can’t always understand that department of education lingo or babble I guess. Kids need to understand them and teachers might use those. Why are we learning this today? Well, one of the things the department of education expects us to learn is this standard, which is multiplying, so our lesson relates back to this standard (The principal interview, March 26, 2009).

The school counselor reported that: “we also have a lot of posters about bullying and bullying prevention and the school rules and those kinds of things… We are trying to get that message out to kids, in different way, no only in the meetings we have every week, but emphasizing what they’ve learned in those meetings by displaying the rules” The school psychologist preferred the school mission poster: “‘Cause that have to do with my job, and what I’m supposed to do with the students.”

In summary, the informational posters display school rules, vision, mission, beliefs, and goals. These posters remind students and staff about the school’s policies and how they should act and treat others. In addition, they display the consequences of breaking school rules.
Furthermore, these posters remind administrators, teachers, and staff about the vision, mission, beliefs, and goals that help them to do their best.

**Motivational Function**

The fourth function of posters is to motivate. This type of poster usually has one word or one sentence and a picture to motivate administrators, teachers, staff, and students as well as visitors to think about positive morals such as respect, responsibility, and fairness. At SAMS, there were many such posters targeting students and seeking to convey a message intended to have a positive effect on them and their thinking about these morals.

The emotional support/8th-grade math teacher described how a poster’s content motivates the students when he talked about the “got milk poster” [see image in Appendix F], “but I would also have the other stuff too, the LeBron James and stuff like that to kind of motivate the kids I guess.” He also said “like the first three when you come in [see images in Appendix J], I think that’s a motivation thing…I don’t really match up the pictures all the time, I don’t really understand what they’re going for, but its motivation supposed to be enhancing the atmosphere…I think that motivates you for, like …the attitude is everything” In addition, the 7th-grade social studies teacher described how these posters are used:

. . . yes, there are definitely benefits from them, even the ones that have the message, maybe not curriculum based, but having respect. You know having the kids look at is as part of our bullying program. You know what’s this…what message is this poster trying to convey to us and how can we as an individual implement these in our lives. Even doing something like that, you know in those cases kids will actually look at it. But it takes a little prompting and pushing on our part, to get them (The social studies teacher interview, April 29, 2009).

The school secretary described her feelings towards some of the posters: “um, I think the one that’s in the front of the school [see images in Appendix J], with the commitment…there’s
three...now I can’t remember (laughing). I think those are good. I think they remind you every
day what we should be doing and how we should act so I think those are good and probably have
an effect on me.”

The library clerk had these thoughts about these posters:

... an inspirational poster, or a motivational poster, where you see them, I can think of
those got milk posters where they have like milk mustaches and they’re all celebrities,
you know so everyone wants like celebrities, or a big sports personality, so you think if
they drink milk, I should drink milk. And there’s also different posters where they show
celebrities reading books. All different Presidents, celebrities, reading books, so you
think if these great celebrities read books, maybe I should read books more often too. So
they kind of inspire you to read, drink milk, or do something healthy for yourself (The
library clerk interview, March 26, 2009).

She also described the messages that posters seek to deliver: “my favorite posters are the
inspirational ones, you know, not to bully, to share, to include people,

The guidance counselor uses motivational posters that fit with the mission of her
position: “in my office there are all different kinds. Sometimes they are pictures with quotes, the
kids like those a lot. There’s one in my office about stress, I think it’s ten different ways to deal
with stress. I think in general that’s pretty much it. And posters that kids make sometimes so that
can be a little different.” In addition, “in the sixth grade hallway, they say things like our class is
great, those kind of things.” Furthermore, when asked about stories relating to her posters, she
said:

... between the students, I only heard part of it. I just heard one of them say, see attitude
is everything and the other one said, yeah, and mine is bad. And the other one said, is that
why you’re here? And the other one said, I don’t know, the teacher is always telling me
my attitude is bad! So they just had this little conversation about attitude, and what they
were doing and what people say about them. And I’ve heard stories, because our
secretary sits right there so she can hear a lot and I came out of my office once and she
said, oh, this one doesn’t like your duckling. So I could kind of tease him and say, what
do you mean you don’t like the duckling? What’s the matter with the duckling? And it
just kind of gets them talking and they feel comfortable (The guidance counselor
interview, March 27, 2009).
In addition, she explained how she uses the posters in her office: “the stress posters helps with kids. When I’ll say to them, just calm down, breathe slowly and count. Look at this, do any of those…what do you when you feel this upset? And have you tried any of the other ones? Look at the guy is funny because his belly’s all big and he’s blowing out?” She also talked about how the motivational posters help her in her job: “um, that benefits me the most? I think the ones by the front door [see images in Appendix J] because I can see them and sometimes it helps with my attitude too, my commitment, and that’s why I’m still here. Especially at the end of March when they’re difficult.” The classroom assistant in the learning support room/7th-grade described the use of these posters: “To give kids a little push as far as that they should be learning.”

The librarian defined the motivational posters and their use as follows:

... the average motivational poster that we hang up are often 12 X 24 inches and they’re laminated and they say cute little sayings on them, and they have little graphics on them – Snoopy, Garfield, little motivational things...they have beautiful posters that features celebrities that love to read and they’ll have a picture of themselves reading their favorite book. And often times the kids will enjoy those because I buy celebrities the kids will know, from their culture, young celebrities, not old celebrities...we have a variety of ways it’s presented to kids. Sometimes it’s game playing, sitting and talking about a certain topic, having a speaker come in. And then we do have posters, which we put up from time to time, not often enough, which relate to those monthly themes (The librarian interview, March 26, 2009).

The principal had another view of using motivational posters: “we’re a middle school, too—we sometimes have posters that might have to do with the motivational, or self-esteem posters that are in our school.” In addition, “a lot of them are motivational at the middle school level- try your best, where they’re encouraging kids to try their best and things like that.” Moreover, the remedial math/7th-grade math teacher emphasized the principal’s statement: I also have …some posters that have positive phrases. Because a lot of the kids I work with don’t have high self-esteem and self-confidence in themselves…I would like to see some with respect. I don’t think students respect each other as much as they should. Student to student and student
to staff. You’ve got two different things going on there (The remedial math teacher interview, March 27, 2009).

Furthermore, she explained why the school needs certain kinds of posters: because

I don’t think that’s being taught at home. So I think we need to pick up that slack and address that here. Pick up those things that are getting lost in the shuffle. So I think that respect would be a really good thing. That is something we do hammer over and over again to the students. We do have some homemade ones and some are nice. But I think some professional ones that are uniform across the entire building. Kind of get that same message out.” She also describes where she put her motivational posters “some more of the motivational ones, where they go in and out, so it’s the first and last thing they see when they enter my room (The remedial math teacher interview, March 27, 2009).

The school counselor described the use of motivational posters in her office area:

. . . in my area I have lots of just motivational posters with sayings, about goal setting, thinking positively and stress strategies and those kinds of things” (The school counselor interview, March 27, 2009).

She also described one of them:

. . . actually, I had one particular poster in my office that kids look at a lot and it’s a poster about feelings and how you feel today. It shows faces and emotions connected with those faces. So it’s like happy, sad, excited, and angry. And often times as a school counselor, kids will come into my office because they’re having an issue, they’re having a problem. And they’ll often look at that poster without prompting and say, Oh, I feel like this, and I feel like this and I want to feel like this and this and this” (The school counselor interview, March 27, 2009).

Furthermore, “we talk about the one poster in particular with the feelings. And sometimes I will point out some of the things if the child is having a bad day. I have a lot of posters in my office that are just positive and uplifting sayings. And I will point them out and say, ok, tomorrow is another day. I don’t remember exactly what the sayings are. It will make them feel better. But sometimes they’ll look at them, it will make them laugh for a second, it may make them think about, things are not so bad, kind of thing. With students I guess I use them in that way (The school counselor interview, March 27, 2009).

The school psychologist had the same idea as the school counselor about the same poster:

. . . for example, we have one that says, attitude is everything, and like I said we have one that tries to get them to be more motivated and to do things and to not do things…because I think that’s what we’re really focusing on as a school community. And we want the students to have that message, and we want the students to internalize it. And
the more they see it, the more they internalize it (The school psychologist interview, March 27, 2009).

In addition, she explains how these posters impact students:

I think it might get them thinking. I don’t know if it’s going to change their behavior. If they have a soda or milk in front of them. I don’t know if it’s gonna change their behavior, but it might get them thinking more” (The school psychologist interview, March 27, 2009).

The guidance counselor’s secretary talked about the posters in the guidance office:

...we have posters that are aimed more towards student self-esteem, their attitude, things that help them be better students, better people, and generally getting over the difficulties of being an adolescent in a school…it’s a very effective way to get your message across. You can talk all you want about not smoking, but one simple little poster with a number on it, will make a child think more than a half an hour lecture will (The guidance counselor’s secretary interview, March 26, 2009).

In summary, motivational posters remind students and staff of the importance of the concepts found on these posters, such as freedom, commitment, and character. Most of these posters bought from vendors or free. These posters sometimes are framed or just laminated.

*Public Relations Function*

The fifth and last function of posters is as a public relations tool. This type of poster serves as a method of advertising events at school. For example, some students display their posters on the hallways to show students, staff, and visitors what they have learned in the classroom. The school administration displays posters about activities that have happened or will happen at school. The following paragraphs present information on both students’ posters and school administration’s posters.

*Students’ Posters*

These posters usually reflect what students have learned in classrooms on different subjects. The classroom assistant in the learning support room/7th-grade said that “it helps
showcase what the kids are doing in classes.” The guidance counselor emphasized that “sometimes to show what they did” Therefore, visitors, such as parents, will learn via these posters what their children are being taught in school and in which areas. In addition, the library clerk stated that, “a lot of the things you will see in the hallways are things the students have done. So it’s there posters of their work.”

Furthermore, the librarian explained how these posters serve all people in school:
“... if it’s the students posters made from their class assignment is to show other people walking by the accomplishment of the student and the information.” They were used “to inform the rest of the building about what is going on in that individual classroom. So it’s sort of an outward sign of what the teacher is covering in the classroom that people can see. Oh, they’re studying about landforms in 6th grade science, oh, that’s interesting. They made a Venn diagram about the similarities of mountains and coastal plains. So I was just looking at them when I went by them in the hallway (The librarian interview, March 27, 2009).

School administration posters

These posters reflect all of the school’s activities, such as campaigns, parents’ meetings, and conferences. These posters present the areas on which the school administrator is focusing. For example, the emotional support/8th-grade math teacher said that, “they put posters up for dances or charity things. Swim team has a couple up by room that I’ve noticed. … Sporting events are a big thing, sometimes everyone will wear a t-shirt, like a pink one for breast cancer. There will be posters up about that, so charity event and awareness events are also something…the actual school schedule is posted everywhere.”
The 7th-grade social studies teacher also talked about the school’s programmatic emphases as reflected in current posters: “the bullying within the school, kids are more, they recognize it more, whether they do something more with it, again I don’t know if that because of a particular poster or if it’s in the program as a whole and the posters that go along with it are a small piece of it. So I guess you could say it’s a piece of the puzzle.” The school secretary explained where the posters come from for after-school activities: “in my job a lot of people ask me to post things. We get things for, um, intramural sports, like after school activities for kids. We post those. Um, they’re posters about activities coming up, like cheerleader tryouts or things like that also. Um, there are posters that students do in classrooms that are posted throughout the school and things like that.” These posters often serve as a “reminder for students or faculty about things that are going on, things in the school, or things in the community, um, awareness about reading or drinking milk or things like that too, so you know, information about things going on.” For example, “I know they had a big poster as you walked in the door announcing that it was kick butts day.” And “they do help the students know things and keep them more aware of what’s going on.”

The library clerk also offered insights into how these posters serve the school: “when people walk down the hallways they want to see what the children are learning in school and what you’re trying to get across to the children in school, so parents walking in the school know that we’re teaching them certain lessons, it kinda helps them know what’s going on inside our school.” In addition, they are important “telling you about something’s that coming up, a parent meeting, a sporting event, a charity,” In the hallways, “you’ll see a few different things. Like if you have book fairs you’ll see posters letting kids know what’s going on and things like that.”

The guidance counselor described these types of posters:
the ones that are designed to say there’s a parent group running, parents are more likely to look at them when they’re waiting for us at meetings. So we have a divider and we can pin things on it. So the duck poster is there and some of our other informational things and parents will read those. We have posters on the front doors when you come into school, some about what you need to do if you’re a visitor, and others about the parent group that the county runs. Different activities, like tonight there’s going to be a science night so I know there’s a poster advertising what we’re doing (The guidance counselor interview, March 27, 2009).

The librarian explained that, “the posters in the school area often put out by teachers after students have accomplished a certain assignment and they have created posters that related to their subject matter and they will hang them outside of their classroom area.” These posters “show student work, student accomplishment, they announce things that are coming up in the school like a special program; a book fair” For example:

... today is national kick butt day, to have students not start to smoke, and there are signs all over our building that students made that announce that today’s the day, come down to our activity… I’m sure that it reflects some of the attitudes in our building about certain things. Hopefully it reflects things in a good way, that we want students to behave appropriately, that we are proud of student work, so we put that out on display, so we have a lot of things going on for student events, and that’s why there’s a lot of posters that announce special events and activities. Hopefully that translates to the public that we are an active school. We accentuate the positive, and don’t accentuate the negative perhaps. I think we could do a better job, to better express our culture (The librarian interview, March 26, 2009).

The remedial math/7th-grade math teacher described these posters as follows:

... most of the posters are mostly dates – this is upcoming. If we have a ski club trip. You know different clubs in the building...usually the posters we hang up are for informational purposes...date, time, what it happens to be, maybe some directions, where to meet...You mentioned the chemistry show last night. That was a means of informing people when it was taking place. I was there last night with a nice turnout. So they did their job. I always put posters in the hallway when we’re doing year book sale so the kids know when we’re starting our sale, when we’re ending our sale. But those are the typical purpose of the posters in the hallway, are more for information purposes, so the kids know when the drama meeting, the ski club meeting is….You get a quick sense – they have a drama club, they have this. It kind of gives you like a little nutshell view of some of the things that are available” (The remedial math teacher interview, March 27, 2009).
The school counselor stated that, “the content of the posters that you see in the hallway, reflect the kinds of things that we’re trying to teach that we want our school to be bully free, we want everyone to respect each other, we want to teach kids how to live appropriately in this world” Furthermore, the guidance counselor’s secretary noted that these posters reflect how their school cares for students and the school environment: “the posters from different projects from either the social studies or the science, shows the content that we’re giving the students. And a lot of time the posters say that we care about them. I put a poster in my office about self-esteem or loving themselves or it’s ok to be different. I think that says a lot about how we care about students.”

In summary, the public relations posters reflect the extent to which the school cares for its students and staff, and shows the extent of that caring to students, staff, and visitors. The posters serve to keep all people in touch with all activities in the school. They also add a value by showing that the school community takes care of each other, whether student, staff, or visitor.

Perceived Values of Posters

Personal

According to the data, many values are self-defined and influenced. These include “warming up” the building and reflecting the school’s concern for the students, according to participants. For example, the principal thought that posters “warm up the building”. School administrators, teachers, and staff seek to create an environment that enables them to develop their and their students’ personalities and reflects their caring for the students. One example is the topic of citizenship—some participants emphasized that schools help students to be good citizens in school as well as in the community and then for the nation and the world. Participants
who care about their students try to help them to gain an education as well as attitudes that help them to be good citizens. On the other hand, the data showed that some teachers do not believe in posters because buying and selecting posters take time and enable students to learn more. The principal believed that teachers care enough to put posters up: “it’s not really part of their work day. And they’re thinking about their students”. Other participants emphasized that they would discuss poster purchases with each other at the beginning of the school year. These included, for instance, the librarian and the library clerk, the guidance counselor and the guidance secretary.

Some posters have positive impacts on teachers, staff, and administrators, helping them to be positive with students too. For example, the psychologist selected district poster (see Appendix G) “because that have to do with my job, and what I’m supposed to do with the students. The business teacher also said “a bright colorful sign or picture is going to encourage you, lighten up your mood”

*Instruction*

The principal believed that “teachers are thinking about posters’ content and how they might enhance their teaching by using posters”. Some participants emphasized that they used posters as a tool to convey a message to the students. Most participants said that they referred students to the posters wherever they were located. The principal stated that: “we have something called slant, which is how kids pay attention, sit up look at the teacher, body posture, and those posters are in the classroom. So if a teacher says slant, a kid can look at the poster and say I’m supposed to sit up and look at the teacher.”
Chapter Five

Discussion and Implications

Introduction

This chapter provides an analysis and discussion of findings. After each main part of the findings, there is an implications section. The findings for this study are divided into the five functions of posters in middle school: decorative, informational, educational, motivational, and public relation. The chapter also provides some guidance from the participants’ point-of-view about using posters in middle schools. The chapter begins with a general discussion and then a further discussion of each of the five functions. The second part presents the agreements and disagreements among participants about using posters in their school.
When I visited SAMS to establish connections for this study, I expected the school to have a clear strategy and policy for poster use in school because I saw posters everywhere. According to the data subsequently collected at SAMS, I found that the school does not have a written policy or strategy for using posters in the building. For example, some participants said that they buy posters with their own money while others said that they have budget from the school that they use to purchase posters for classroom subjects only. The principal emphasized that “they get a certain amount each year that they can use for their personal classroom and they can choose to spend that money however they want, whether it’s supplies for their classroom or posters or curriculum materials. The teachers have freedom to use that however they want.” Clearly, the principal has some thoughts about how the staff should use their budgets, but some of the staff do not know how to use these funds or elect not to use them for items such as posters. Furthermore, with regard to poster use in the school, a written strategy and policy will improve the benefits of posters and give this issue more importance. Most of the participants cared to some extent about posters; very few did not care and did not spend a lot of time on them. The following paragraphs discussed these issues in detail.

In addition, after the first meeting with the key access person, I felt that SAMS cared about posters use. The data showed this, and that the school and its staff were using posters for different purposes. The data analysis and functional framework revealed five functions of posters. All participants in this study used different terms for poster use but most used terms such as informational and motivational. Therefore, classifying posters based on their functions will help all administrators, teachers, staff, and students use them
effectively and efficiently. Effective use is defined here as achieving the goals for which they were planned, while efficient means doing so at less cost and using less time to achieve the same goals. The findings from this study show that poster use in schools requires systematic efforts to help administrators, teachers, staff, and students achieve specific purposes. In addition, most of the posters need to be changed periodically to remain effective. For example, the librarian said that posters should be changed when their goals are achieved.

Some of the SAMS participants feel that they see more poster use today compared to 15 years ago. The teacher assistant stated that, “I’ve been in this building 15 years or so and we’ve always had posters. I think there may be a few more now, because they’re more accessible to the teachers now. They relate the posters to what the students are doing. So there might be a few more than there were years ago.” The data showed that 10 out of the 15 participants were interested in the presence of school posters (at least, well-designed or well-selected posters) and their influence on the school environment, whether in the hallways or the classrooms, based on their comments during interviews.

The issue of number of posters and distraction questions arose during the interviews and data analysis. The interviews showed that some of the teachers felt that while the use of posters in school adds to the school environment and offers information relevant to certain contexts and subjects, sometimes these posters can distract students if there are too many or they are posted in a random way. For example, the school psychologist emphasized that “they might not be effective if there are too many all over the place because they would just start to ignore it if they saw things? On every door and the same thing in every hallway.” Thus, schools should consider the strategic hanging of
posters in order to avoid them becoming a distraction and thereby affecting their educational qualities and limiting the success of their goals in using them. Behnke et al. (1981) found that classroom-distraction can be reduced by reminding students of rules. This finding was confirmed by many participants in this study. For example, the principal said that, “we have something called slant, which is how kids pay attention, sit up look at the teacher, body posture, and those posters are in the classroom. So if a teacher says slant, a kid can look at the poster and say I’m supposed to sit up and look at the teacher.”

The data offered an important finding that may help us to understand how faculties perceive poster use. This finding has to do with participants’ agreements and disagreements. The areas of agreement/disagreement were: having posters in school, policies, priority, school and vendor made posters, and budget (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agreement</th>
<th>Disagreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Having posters</td>
<td>Policy for posting posters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priority</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School and vendor made posters</td>
<td>Budget</td>
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</tbody>
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This table shows us that there were more areas of disagreement than agreement. The data indicate a need to address these issues in school because having a discussion about these issues may improve the perceived uses and values of posters in school. The data indicated that all participants addressed one or more of these issues.
Agreement

Before discussing the areas of disagreement we emphasize that all participants in this study acknowledged that there were many posters in the school and that they were being used for different purposes. Some participants focused on the instruction while others focused on the behaviors. For example, the principal described the posters in her school as a positive thing. The remedial math teacher, when she was asked whether these posters were practical, affordable, and effective, said “definitely. We use them all the time. The students know where the posters are.”

Disagreement

Policy. The first area of disagreement had to do with policy—the librarian stated that they don’t have a written policy for hanging posters but they have a general idea. She feels that the school should have a written policy because they “can’t just freely put posters up all over the building because everyone needs equal space”. However, the emotional support/8th-grade math teacher disagreed with having a policy—he likes what they have now.

Priority. The second issue was the priority assigned to poster/poster placement. Some see posters in school as a waste of time and space while others view posters as very effective if used properly. Most of the participants said that they did not mind spending time thinking about poster purchases, including type, purpose, and message to convey in their classrooms and offices. For example, the guidance counselor said: “when we were looking for posters to buy we worked together and then we had to divide them up between us, and then we switched them around”. The library clerk also said: “we discuss what kind of posters we want to buy for the library, to help get across what we want them
to learn during the summer reading program”. They did so because they believed that posters have potential value and uses among students, teachers, and staff. On the other hand, the school psychologist said: “if we were constantly every month taking everything down and putting everything up, every week or something like that. The sheer time factor. If they were making posters instead of sitting down and doing their math problems or reading the books they were supposed to read or something of that nature” the posters become impractical use.

Participants suggested that giving students a formula to solve was more useful to them in the long run than having posting or designing posters.

*School and vendor-made poster.* The third issue was the posters made in school. Most participants liked student posters while others preferred professional posters. The principal said that teachers buy posters that are already made that fit into what they have and a good mix of teachers create their own posters in order to ensure that they have the specific details that they need for their classes. Most of the participants supported student-made posters. For example, the guidance counselor’s secretary thought that “some of them are very eye catching and interesting, especially if it’s a poster that a student has made and it’s hanging in the hallway”.

*Budget.* The last issue involved the budget. Although the principal stated that every teacher has a budget that can be used to buy posters, among other classroom supplies, posters, only some of the teachers buy posters from their budget. Some teachers stated that it was their belief that their budgets could be used to purchase posters: others felt that they could not use their funds for this purpose. The reason for this disconnected
interpretation of school policy on this issue is unclear. For example, the librarian said that they have a budget to use to buy posters: “I have a budget called library supplies...and every year I spend several hundred dollars on posters.” The business teacher said that she bought her posters from her budget.

**Functions Discussion**

Below, each function is described in detail. It should be noted that each function has a specific role but there are interrelations among these functions (see Figure 5.1). For example, educational posters can be used for decoration and still be related to a context or subject. They can be used for motivation but not for information or public relations purposes. On the other hand, the informational posters can be used for decoration related to context, motivation, and education. Let’s take poster number six (see Appendix G), for example, which is based on the district’s mission, beliefs, and goals. In this study, this poster would be recognized as an informational poster. If it were used to educate people in school about how to achieve their goals, this could be educational. When used as a tool to motivate people to achieve their vision and mission this could be motivational.
Study findings revealed that participants were trying to send a message that although most posters are for decoration, they are related somehow to the context and subject. In returning to the functional framework for this study,--Levin’s five functions (Levin, 1981), if we apply his idea to our setting, we see that this study’s findings support his idea in terms of decorative function, whether related or not related. At SAMS, most of decorative posters were related to the context or subject. Although none of the participants mentioned having posters for decoration only, I found that two posters of the
150 were not related. One was three tigers set together while the second poster was a picture of handiwork/arts and crafts. Both of them did not have text.

For example, in the nurse’s office, I saw posters related to health issues, such as covering your mouth when you cough, while if we go to the cafeteria we see posters related to nutrition. The data show that all participants confirmed that their school posters are both decorative and related to a specific context. For example, a picture of the Eiffel Tower was posted in the French classroom which was decorative and reflected the fact that the classroom was a French language instruction classroom. This is contextual. However, if the teacher used the Eiffel Tower poster in his/her teaching, it would be present because it related to the subject matter. Reflecting findings offered in the literature review in chapter 2, I found that some of the teachers’ experiences with posters were supported by this study’s data. For example, Granlund (2004) used “wanted poster” activity products to decorate the classroom and lab walls.

It should be noted that most of the decorative posters in the school were free, such as “got milk” or sports posters. Still, the data show us that school administrators, teachers, and staff believe that each poster should be reviewed to be sure its message is useful in its context because sometimes free posters can play a negative role. For example, the emotional support/8th-grade math teacher explained a negative effect of free posters in school:

. . . everywhere you go there’s gonna be people who don’t like somebody. But here in particular, don’t put up a poster that is from a direct rival of Steelers and Eagles, because that’s Pittsburgh and Philadelphia. Predominately that’s what we like. Everybody likes Penn State here. I do not but everybody likes Penn State. So don’t put up an Ohio State got milk thing, you know what I mean? . . . And just like for kids in Ohio, you’re not going to put up a Steelers thing. So careful planning and you can’t please everybody. Because there are kids who are Ohio State fans. I’m a Notre Dame fan, but I’m not going to be persuaded by Penn
State football players necessarily. But you gotta take that. . . you go for the majority (The emotional support teacher interview, April 29, 2009).

This point is very important for the school to consider when deciding *which* posters to hang.

These findings appear to coincide with the findings from studies on physical environment. According to Maggie (2007), the “efficient environment is to not have anything in it that we don’t believe to be beautiful, functional, or meaningful” (p. 1). Thus all participants in SAMS want their school to be a comfortable place that helps them to maximize productivity. They want to see pictures around them that make them happy and cheerful. Finally, the participants in this study all expressed the desire to use posters that offered meaningful messages or served meaningful purposes in the school.

On the other hand, comparing our findings with Kweon et al. (2008) we see that our findings support one aspect of their findings—their experimental study concluded that males who worked in office environments that had been decorated with abstract and nature posters experienced less anger and stress than males who worked in offices without any posters. However, the same experimental study concluded that there was no significance for females. The qualitative data indicated that 13 of the female participants did not like blank walls which may actually confound the earlier findings. For example, the librarian stated that “I don’t like to see empty, blank walls”. Of course a complete and proper replication of the Kweon study would be needed to ensure that females do have a preference.
As mentioned in chapter 4, educational posters are divided into three types: attitude, knowledge, and skills.

*Attitude*

With regard to attitude, many if not all participants mentioned that these types of posters are very important in school because the middle school is a kind of transition point from elementary school, where students spend their day with one teacher who instructs all students on all main subjects, to the high school where the focus is an individual teacher teaching an individual subject to students. In high school, students travel to different subjects and have different classmates in different classes. The 7th-grade social studies teacher described how students in middle school travel from one classroom to the next: “You’re not traveling as a group from math to science to social studies. Ya know you’re gonna have a whole different group for each one of these subjects so I think in sixth grade they’re trying to recreate that environment for them.”

The library clerk explained that “from 6th grade to 8th grade there’s a lot of maturing, a lot of growing up. We try to make them good people and good students and so when we’re putting things in the hallway, we keep that in mind. We want to educate them, but we also want to put in their mind about being a good person and having a healthy lifestyle.” Further, the guidance counselor secretary indicated that posters about self-esteem are the most important ones: “Because middle school students go through a lot of changes, they’re under a lot of peer pressure and they’re trying to find themselves. And a lot of them suffer from lower self-esteem, maybe especially the girls and anything that makes them think that they’re ok just as they are is an important message.”
These findings appear to coincide with those of Vickie and Gary (2006), which indicate that:

... information—which comes from the physical environment via the senses of sight, sound, smell, and touch—is filtered cognitively and non-cognitively based on the culture, experience, and knowledge of an individual. These sensations prompt affective responses, behaviors, and actions. There is interplay between environment and individuals in that people control the environment; the environment then influences the affective and behavioral responses of both groups and individuals (Vickie & Gary, 2006, p. 8).

Therefore, the school environment plays a very important role. For school administrators to have a clear vision for how posters can be used in school definitely makes a difference.

Although some participants believe that having posters in school will affect students’ behavior by making them think about the posters’ messages, others do not share this belief. Those who believe that posters affect students’ behaviors have stories that support their claims. For example, the school counselor explained how these posters “serve as a nice reminder to kids, so maybe someone who’s thinking about doing something, if they see that they’ll think about it before they do it. Or maybe someone who may be a victim, with the bullying ones in general, maybe they say I need to talk to somebody about it, or I should do something about it. So again they serve as a reminder and that reinforcement may be helping to change behaviors or to help kids who are in need”. On the other hand, participants who did not believe in the usefulness of posters did not have any examples to support this belief. It seems likely that posters at least make students think about a message and may improve their perspectives. Findings in the literature reviewed for this study seem to indicate this as well (Ramsey & Fowler, 2004; Rowland, 2006).
Moreover, the literature showed that governments have used posters widely in times of war to shape public opinion and influence behavior in pursuit of governmental goals. Some of these behaviors included conservation of gasoline, meat, rubber, canned goods or shared unity and preparation for sacrifice. If we extend this idea to the findings in this study, which were not undertaken during a war period, most participants did not believe that posters would change behaviors while others believed that posters would inform students of expected behaviors.

In sum, the data suggested that posters in schools, particularly in classrooms, may aid both teachers and students when used in the curriculum. Further, counselors, guidance counselors, and psychologists use posters in their efforts.

As some participants mentioned, students in this age experience many changes, so that an understanding of these developments and changes will help faculties, students, and parents to work as a team to achieve identified goals. These changes can occur within five areas: intellectual, moral and ethical, physical, psychological, and social development (T.R. Smedberg Middle School). The guidance counselor, guidance counselor’s secretary, emotional support teacher, and school psychologist talked about students’ changes at this age. For example, the school psychologist said that:

Especially at this age, middle school age, the students are really struggling with who they are. And they’re trying to fit in with maybe who their friends are or who they would like to be friends with instead of thinking, I am comfortable with myself. My first answer that comes to mind (The school psychologist interview, March 27, 2009).

Knowledge

The knowledge posters are the most prevalent form of posters in schools and they were in SAMS. Regardless of any poster’s function, most have a knowledge component.
For example, when attitude posters focus on behaviors such as smoking, at the same time the poster has a knowledge aspect, such as that smoking can cause lung cancer. Furthermore, the findings strongly support Allen’s (1994) idea that these posters are worthy of use in the social studies classroom, particularly history, and may help students to understand and develop their views of history (Allen, 1994). The 7th-grade social studies teacher who taught Ancient History also emphasized that poster use in the classroom is absolutely worthwhile during discussions of certain periods of history.

I have posters on the different ancient civilizations that we cover. They go into detail such as contributions, what they’re known for, the style of dress that they had, the ins and outs of the different civilizations that we’ll cover, like government, their economic, their economies and what they were known for (The 7th-grade social studies teacher interview, April 29, 2009).

Bayley’s (2004) observations of many classrooms led him to conclude that the most common mathematical poster was the multiplication times-tables. The multiplication times-table is very important to students so that students notice it more than other posters. This finding supports the finding that students recognize the posters, whether in classroom or the hallway, when it is important and meaningful to them.

In the classroom or any office in the school, posters can serve to remind, educate, and teach students. For example, the school psychologist stated that posters are a tool for internalizing what’s on the poster. The remedial math/7th-grade teacher also stated that “as far as the math, it’s just a teaching tool, extension of whatever I need to work with the students”. These findings support Tibbs and Jordan’s (1994) statement about students who made a career poster in a math class. When students finished their posters, they posted them around the room to show students evidence that people use mathematics. Overall, some teachers use posters and poster exercises in support of their teaching and
do so in different ways, particularly math, social studies, and science teachers because these subjects sometimes are made more appealing and are better retained if fun elements are introduced. Posters are one way to infuse fun into the subjects.

*Skill*

The skill posters are more often widely distributed in classrooms, the library, and offices, such as the guidance office and nurse’s office, than in the hallways. These posters are most often used to teach students and sometimes staff. The data showed that these kinds of posters were used in guidance office, emotion classes, and library skills classes as well as classrooms. These findings support the findings of Ramsey and Fowler (2004), who found that the use of posters increases preschoolers’ science and mathematics learning experiences both within and outside of the classroom, and that they are beneficial to children, teachers, and parents when used during interactions and discussions. Therefore, posters may be used both inside and outside the classroom to foster discussions of subjects learned in school and reinforce messages and information, ultimately improving their learning.

*Informational Function*

These posters are used in school to reflect its culture. The findings support Dwairy’s (2003) idea that employers use pictures, awards, and furniture in offices or hallway to indicate qualities or objectives they regard as important to the workplace culture. Informational posters provide students, teachers, staff, and visitors with information about the school’s rules and policies, and the state standards for learning.
They offer insight into the values of the school, what is deemed important in the culture, as Dwairy likewise found. SAMS has specific programs that focus on the school’s rules, such as an anti-bullying program. According to Xin (2002), schools in which students are bullied less can be characterized as having a positive disciplinary climate (Xin, 2002). The findings strongly showed that the school’s intention is to foster a positive disciplinary climate through a variety of mechanisms, with the one of most interest here being the use of posters to convey messages that serve to reduce negative behaviors such as bullying. All participants mentioned the school’s anti-bullying program that uses posters to achieve its goals. For example, the emotional support/8th-grade math teacher stated that, “anti-bullying is a big one, um, no smoking, the health classes did a lot of no smoking stuff. Other than that…health, I guess the got milk thing is a health thing, you know drink milk but anti-bullying is probably the biggest thing in school rules. I mean anti-bullying is such a big thing now. Wherever you go it says don’t bully, or bullying is a crime, ya know, so…that’s probably the biggest thing, but health stuff, no smoking, wash your hands. Not a lot of leisure stuff, I guess you could say, in the school”.

The librarian described how she uses posters in the library to teach students the state standards: “in four little posters [see images in Appendix K] covers what I teach the kids in a marking period, in teaching my kids to read, understand and use, organize and present. And those are the four Pennsylvania standards that I cover in my 9-week class. The third example of informational posters is about the district’s vision, mission, beliefs, and goals. The school psychologist prefers the school district poster ‘cause that has to do with my job, and what I’m supposed to do with the students.” In this regard we noted that displaying too many posters on school rules was viewed as not helpful by participants.
Motivational Function

These posters also are called inspirational posters. Riejos et al (2001) found that presenting selected images in the form of a cartoon in the classroom is a motivating tool that students do seem to appreciate (Riejos, Mansilla, & Castillejos, 2001, p. 307). This is similar to the findings that posters with cartoons or funny pictures particularly in guidance counselor’s or nurse’s offices, trigger and appeal to students. For example, the classroom assistant in the learning support room/7th-grade becomes happy when “I walk into my office and see the duck, it just makes me happier. And I think the kids do that sometimes too.” She described the duck poster: “the one of the duckling on my wall, I love that one! I don’t know why. And I’ve been telling everybody we need to get a guidance duck. It says ‘attitude is everything,’ which is true, but the duck just makes me laugh.” According to the literature, these kinds of posters were used widely during propaganda wars to achieve different goals. Some of these goals were: to foster unity and prepare people for sacrifice; to call people to arms through such messages as, ‘Join the Army, Navy, Marines, Coast Guard’; to encourage acceptance of national policies; to sell bonds to finance the war effort; to spur war industry productivity; to promote the conservation of materials; to inform the public of expected behavior and ways to act; and to channel emotions—hate, courage, fear, and fraternity—in ways conducive to success (Allen, 1994). All participants in our study emphasized that their school uses certain posters for motivational reasons.

When Rossett\(^2\) was asked about motivational posters, she said:

years ago I did a study for a fast food company about their job aids. They had them all over the walls in the back of the food production area. Nobody paid them

\(^2\) Dr. Allison Rossett is Professor of Educational Technology at San Diego State University (http://edweb.sdsu.edu/people/arossett/ARossett.html)
any attention. They had become the wall paper. When the posters/job aids are too
general or always present, they became background noise, just wall paper. To
work, they must add value, somehow, some way (Allison Rossett email,
November 13, 2008).

Public Relations Function

The public relations function has two aspects: posters from school administration
and posters from students. Posters from school administration present what is going on
inside and outside the school, and include information on campaigns being conducted to
convey some messages, for example. This study’s findings support Mahaney’s (2002)
idea that the propaganda poster is very important to educating and convincing the public
(Mahaney, 2002). Some participants mentioned the anti-smoking “kick butts” campaign
and anti-bullying program which use posters as a part of the effort. These posters show
everybody in the building or visitors that the school is engaging in different campaigns
through posters.

With regard to student-made posters, according to Zevenbergen (2001), students
enjoy constructing and assessing posters that demonstrate their understanding. Likewise,
LaBrie et al. (2007) recommended that student-designed poster campaigns be encouraged
on campuses because they are inexpensive, accurate, and consistent efforts to reduce
drinking levels among students, as one example of use. The findings from this study
support this claim that students like to design posters. Most of the participants
emphasized that students love to work on posters.
Future Research

Many institutions, organizations, and corporations are starting to use the digital screen (TV monitor) to inform their employees and customers about coming activities, achievements, news, or activity advertising. In future research the digital screen as a form of poster would be a great topic of study. Such screens are expensive, so that users may want to read some of the information on the digital screen in different settings to see if they are effective, and how they might be effective. The digital screen can display still images and video clips. Another issue is the students’ perceptions regarding poster use in school; many participants in my study stated that they did not know if students were changing their behaviors or not due to the posters. Further, interviews on this topic with parents could add valuable information on changes in student attitudes, etc.

Conclusion

In conclusion, participants appeared to recognize the importance of using posters within the school community. Understanding the five functions of posters in SAMS might lead to increased use and further acknowledgment of the importance of using and perceiving the value of posters in SAMS and what roles posters may play in SAMS.

As we’ve seen, the use of posters is pervasive in SAMS. Communicating messages is easier and more direct through the use of posters. The findings from this study may be helpful to both school districts and poster designers. Districts should consider using posters in schools because districts must communicate a vision, mission, goals, beliefs, and rules in schools in order to achieve them. Designers may enhance their products to match school needs. Some of the participants in this study had looked at other schools’ experiences with poster use to inform them of ways that they could enhance
their uses of posters in schools. The technology coordinator/business teacher, for one, talked about conducting research on the different ways in which other schools had used posters effectively and borrowing ideas. A review of the literature showed that some schools had had unique experiences in selecting and using posters (Ashby, 2002; Granlund, 2004; Mahaney, 2002). Findings from this study revealed that posters are not passive instruments in education settings; in addition to their communication and instructional purposes, they have strong dynamic quality that stems from their design and use by students and teachers, and the many opportunities they represent for use in classroom and other contexts.
References


http://www.allposters.com/


Rowland, P. (2006). It’s asking people to be competitive but without asking them to put others down. *Western Mail* (Cardiff, Wales), February 28.


APPENDIX A: Sample Email to District Superintendents

Dear Mr./ Ms./Dr.:

I am a doctoral student at Penn State University working on my dissertation research on the uses and perceived values of exhibited posters in a middle school. I am interested in interviewing one librarian, one staff member, one nurse, one counselor, and four teachers: math, science, social study, and history to explore the uses and perceived values of posters in school. Ultimately, the findings could result in the design of better school environments that promise better learning and engagement.

I would like to have permission to contact principals who could identify and sign up participants for my study. Identified staff members’ participation would be strictly voluntary.

The results of the study would be provided to your school district.

If you have any questions, or would like to meet to discuss this further, please let me know either by phone (814-321-3575) or email (kaa4@psu.edu).

Thank you for your cooperation.

Khaled Alkandari

Penn State University
APPENDIX B: Sample Email to Principal

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr.:

I am a doctoral student at Penn State University working on my dissertation research on the uses and perceived values of exhibited posters in a middle school. I am interested in interviewing one librarian, one staff member, one nurse, one counselor, and four teachers: math, science, social study, and history to explore the uses and perceived values of posters in school. Ultimately, the findings could result in the design of better school environments that promise better motivation and engagement.

Mr./Ms./Dr./XXX has given me permission to conduct my study in your school district and to contact you and the staff members and teachers you identify for possible participation.

I ask that you identify one librarian, one staff member, one nurse, one counselor, and four teachers: math, science, social study, and history whom I may contact. Their participation is completely voluntary. The results will be reported to you upon the completion of the study. The findings of this study could result in the design of better school environments for learning and engagement.

Would it be possible to set up a time to meet with you at your convenience to review my study in more detail? You may contact me by phone at (814-321-3575) or email at kaa4@psu.edu.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Khaled Alkandari

Penn State University
APPENDIX C: Sample Email to Participants

Dear Mr./ Ms./Dr.:  

I am a doctoral student at Penn State University working on my dissertation research on the uses and perceived values of exhibited posters in a middle school. Mr./Ms./Dr./XXX has given me permission to conduct my study in your school district and to contact you. Mr./Ms./Dr./XXX, your principal, has identified you as a possible participant for my study. I would be interested in setting up a time to meet with you to talk about my study. The study involves interview. Your participation is completely voluntary. Interviews will take approximately one hour while the participation will take one to two months. I would also like to have permission to contact you by email or telephone if I have additional questions or follow-up interviews are needed.  

The results will be reported to the school district upon the completion of the study. Your data will be kept confidential and in the report, there will be no identifying references to you. The findings could result in the design of better school environments for learning, and engagement. If you have any questions, you may contact me by phone at (814- 321-3575) or email at kaa4@psu.edu. I would greatly appreciate your contribution.  

Thank you in advance for your participating.  

Khaled Alkandari  

Penn State University
APPENDIX D: Interview Protocol

Thank you for your time. I appreciate your participation.

First of all, could you please tell us what your job is?

Can you tell me about posters in your school?

What do you think of the posters in your school?

What kinds of functions or purposes do you see posters serving in your school?

1. If you could put any poster in the school, what would you suggest? Why?

2. Have you noticed any posters in your school? If yes, do you remember what are they of? Why do you think they are there? What do you think they are meant to accomplish?

3. How do you feel about these posters? Do they make you feel any particular way?

4. Have they had any impact on students’ behaviors that you’ve seen? Tell me more about that.

5. Do you think that these posters are practical, affordable, and effective? In what ways? OR In what ways are they not?

6. Have you talked with your colleagues, students or parents about any posters? If yes, what did you say in those conversations? And what did they say?

7. From your perspective, do these posters reflect anything about your school?

8. Here are six posters that were displayed in your school. Is it OK if I ask you some questions about them?

   a) Tell me which one of these posters you noticed more in your school.

   b) Which one do you like the best? Why?
c) Which one do you think benefits you the most? How?

Which one do you think affects students the most? How?

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<tr>
<th>Poster No. 1</th>
<th>Poster No. 2</th>
<th>Poster No. 3</th>
<th>Poster No. 4</th>
<th>Poster No. 5</th>
<th>Poster No. 6</th>
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If you remember anything that will support your answers and provide me with more information, such as pictures, stories, and documents, please don’t hesitate to call or email me.

Thank you very much for your time. I will keep in touch with you. Thanks for your cooperation.
APPENDIX E: INFORMED CONSENT FORM
FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH
The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: The uses and perceived values of exhibited posters in a middle school

Principal Investigator: Khaled Alkandari, Doctorate Candidate
Department of Learning and Performance Systems
314 Keller Building, Penn State University
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Student’s Advisor: Alison Carr-Chellman, Professor
Department of Learning and Performance Systems
314 Keller Building, Penn State University
University Park, PA 16802-1303
(814) 855-0624; aac3@psu.edu

1. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to examine the uses and perceived values of exhibited posters in a middle school. The importance of this study comes from its focus on the school environment. The school environment has a potential influence on teachers, staff members, and students. Further, it is anticipated that the findings will lead to useful recommendations for school administrations and staff members as well as teachers.

2. Procedures to be Followed: You will be asked to answer no more than thirteen questions at one shot of interview. The classrooms are not included. In addition, the interviews with participants will be recorded.

3. Benefits: Findings might influence the practices and policies of schools. It may help to illuminate the intentionality or non-intentionality of poster usage in the school. They also might be useful for poster designers by providing information that will enable them to be more receptive and responsive to clients’ needs.

4. Duration: You will participate in one interview. The interview will take about one and one-half hours.

5. Statement of Confidentiality: Only the researcher will know your identity. The data will be stored and secured at my home in a secured locker file. In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally...
identifiable information will be shared. Files of the interviews will be saved on CD and stored in a locked cabinet in my home. These files will be deleted three years from the termination date of the study. Only I will be able to access the files.

6. Right to Ask Questions: You can ask questions about this research. Contact me at 814-321-3575 with questions.

7. Voluntary Participation: Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this signed and dated consent for your records.

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<th>Participant Signature</th>
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APPENDIX H: POSTER 3
APPENDIX I: POSTER 4

HOMELAND SECURITY IS EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY GET INVOLVED!

FOR IMMEDIATE POLICE RESPONSE CALL 911

REPORT TIPS TO THE TOLL-FREE PA TERRORISM TIP LINE
1-888-328-1919 OR VIA EMAIL TO:
SP-1TIPLINE@STATE.PA.US
APPENDIX J: POSTER 5
APPENDIX K: POSTER 6
APPENDIX L: DUCK POSTER
VITA

Khaled A. Alkandari

EDUCATION

**Ph.D. – Instructional Systems**
*Penn State University- University Park, Pennsylvania*
2009

**M. Ed. – Instructional Systems**
*Penn State University- University Park, Pennsylvania*
1998

**B. A. – Inter/Sec Biology**
*Kuwait University- Kuwait*
1992

WORK EXPERIENCE

**Lab Instructor – Science Department**
*College of Basic Education*
*The Public Authority for Applied Education and Training*
1992-1996

**Training specialist**
*Human Investment Corporate (HIC)- Kuwait*
1998 –2000

**Lecturer: Instructional Technology Department**
*College of Basic Education*
*The Public Authority for Applied Education and Training*
1998-2006

**Lecturer: Open Arab University- Kuwait**
2005

PUBLICATIONS

