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Increasing expressive vocabulary through non-traditional instruction

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INCREASING EXPRESSIVE VOCABULARY
THROUGH NON-TRADITIONAL INSTRUCTION

by
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ABSTRACT

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This study examined vocabulary teaching techniques. Its major purpose was to discover ways of teaching vocabulary to students that motivate them to use the words and allow them to understand and use these words appropriately. This study utilized a qualitative approach, examining instruction through the use of a case study. The study took place in an inclusive fifth grade classroom of twenty-five students. Sixteen of these students participated in the study. A checklist, student writing samples, and field notes were used to gather data surrounding varied forms of instruction and the ability of students to use newly learned words. Collected data was analyzed by categorizing the pre- and post-intervention vocabulary environments and coding student word uses in writing samples. This study found that the post-intervention vocabulary environment— which included varied methods for introducing words, multiple encounters with words, and activities that actively engaged students—increased the students' ability to expressively use newly learned words.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Chapter One

Introduction

"Okay everyone, we are going to study some of the important vocabulary words from the novel we are reading. Everyone's eyes up here please."

This is the natural beginning of many vocabulary lessons. Teachers start off by telling students that they are learning words from a specific content, whether it is reading, social studies, math, or science.

"Here's the list of words. There are six words here. Let's read them over. Can someone read the first word?"

Many of the students eagerly raise their hands. They love to hear their voices in the classroom.

"Carol?"

"Privy."

"Good. We'll find out what that means a little bit later. How about the second word? Jimmy?"

"Umm...reprobate."

"Great. Next? Emily?"

"Prohibition."

And so the lesson continues. The teacher calls on students to read the list of words as the students sit, raising their hands high so they can be chosen to read the next word. But this

enthusiastic population only accounts for half of the class. The teacher hasn't noticed that the other portion of the class is staring blankly at the blackboard, overhead, or chart paper waiting for the inevitable instructions they know they will hear.

"Now, take out your dictionaries and look up these words. Write the word and its definition in your Language Arts notebook."

And the students move. They know how to do this. They've done it over and over since the beginning of third grade. Walk to the shelf, pick up the dictionary, find the word, and copy the definition verbatim. But what happens after this routine? Do students understand the definitions they encounter? If they do understand, do they remember what the words mean? Do these words become part of the students' vocabulary repertoire? Chances are the answer to these questions is a resounding no. Students often do not gain ownership of the words they encounter during this vocabulary instruction, and they certainly do not begin using these words frequently and in a wide range of contexts. A strong and expansive vocabulary is often seen as evidence of a well-educated person. It is also an important tool that allows people to clearly and effectively express their thoughts, feelings, and opinions. Without vocabulary instruction that engages students and encourages them to become collectors and owners of words, students will be less and less likely to become expressive adults with extensive vocabularies.

Research Problem and Questions

As I have eavesdropped on the conversations of many young adults within the schools I have been in, I have noticed a pattern that concerns me. While in class, it seems that students can spout off definitions of any word they are studying. "A landform is a physical feature of the earth's surface." "Migrate means to move from place to place."

Students can easily answer questions that ask them to define words that they have memorized. However, when they are asked to begin using these words, complications occur. When asked to give examples of landforms, one student responded that iron and coal are landforms. The definition that this student had memorized had not helped him to develop a full understanding of the word and led him to confuse landforms with natural resources. When asked to go home and attempt to use the word migrate while talking with a parent or other family member, another student reported that she hopped from one spot to the next and told her mother she was migrating. The true, deep meaning of this word had been lost on this student, and she was using migrate in a way that was inappropriate considering the connotation of its meaning. Teachers are constantly teaching students new words. However, the problem for some students is that they never truly learn the words. They use the words inappropriately and cannot apply the definitions to regular use. These types of misinterpretations and misuse led me to examine the issue of vocabulary instruction. I developed the following questions that will guide this study: How are words generally taught within the classroom? Is this effective in allowing students to integrate new words into their working vocabularies? Do students retain word meanings over a period of time? Finally, as I considered all of the examples of student work and conversations I had seen and heard, I asked myself, "How can I teach vocabulary words so that students truly understand the words and use them appropriately in their everyday writings and conversations?"

<u>Related Research</u>

Much of the previous research on vocabulary development has focused on the connection between vocabulary and reading comprehension while less research has been

completed on the effects of instruction on oral and written vocabulary. Despite this fact, much has been said about the effectiveness of different instructional methods. McKeown (1993) studied the nature of dictionary definitions and their ability to convey meaning to students. She concluded that many dictionary definitions do not allow students to understand words and that substantial adjustments should be made if students are to be expected to glean word meanings from dictionary definitions. Scott and Nagy (1997) also looked at definitions, focusing solely on unfamiliar verbs. They also concluded that definitions have numerous limitations, including the problems of simplistic substitution, sense selection error, and fragment selection. Discovering word meaning from context has also been addressed in numerous studies. Nilst and Olejnik (1995) look at both context and dictionary definitions and their effect on levels of word knowledge. When instructed through definitions and context, students performed best on the easiest tests of word knowledge and performed worst when expected to create their own sentences. An important aspect of this research is the fact that, even when definitions were reformatted to follow McKeown's (1993) suggestions, subjects continued to perform poorly on sentence generating activities. Thus, research has consistently found that dictionary definitions and context clues, no matter how concise and clear, do not lead to deeper levels of word knowledge. This inability to develop a deep knowledge of words leads directly to the question upon which this study will focus. Without a deep understanding of words, students will never be able to use words independently in writing and speaking.

Some researchers have looked at developing vocabulary instruction that enhances expressive vocabulary and focuses on rich understanding of word meanings. Graves (1987) looks directly at the relationship between vocabulary instruction and quality of

writing. Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002), in their work *Bringing Words to Life*, outline the importance of vocabulary instruction and apply their findings from numerous studies in developing a complete picture of effective vocabulary instruction. Blachowitz and Fischer (2002) also offer guidelines for instruction in their *Teaching Vocabulary in All Classrooms*. Both of these works encourage instruction that places value on the depth of word knowledge, a concept explored by Stahl (1999) in his work. Nagy and Herman (1987) also take an in-depth look into the breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge and apply these findings to instruction. Their work has been referenced in numerous studies. While each of these researchers has studied the effects of instruction and the depth of word knowledge, none have focused exclusively on the question addressed in this work. Brett, Rothlein, and Hurley (1996) addressed this fact and included the question as an important one for future research.

Audience

Considering the importance of vocabulary in the development of expressive and well-informed students, this study has importance for various audiences. First, teachers, as the primary deliverers of vocabulary instruction, will find the results and recommendations within this study helpful for developing deep vocabulary learning for their students. By completing this study from the perspective of teacher researcher, I hope to reach teachers themselves, who ultimately have control over how vocabulary instruction is delivered. Students will also benefit from the findings of this research. The improvement of students' vocabulary and, in turn, their ability to communicate expressively and effectively is my ultimate goal. They are the reason this study has been undertaken and they direct the process and outcome of my work. Finally, the wider society will also benefit from this

study. The creation of more effective and well-versed communicators can only improve the overall quality of communication within society. In turn, this can help to enhance the quality of life within society by limiting misunderstandings and increasing meaningful interaction.

Purpose

Reading the existing literature on vocabulary instruction helped me to develop my own opinions about the importance of vocabulary. Research thus far is limited because it does not consider how students use words in situations that are more true to life, such as situations that require application of words or use of words in writing and conversations. I have always felt that words equal power. They make it possible for us to communicate our feelings, thoughts, and beliefs. Many individuals do not have the ability to communicate. As children, they struggle in frustration in attempts to simply make others aware of their most basic needs. Children with autism, in particular, often lack the ability to communicate their needs to others. In working with these children, much time is spent developing communication skills that include the teaching of simple words and terms. Frustration in communication does not exist only for those that lack the ability to verbally communicate. All of us struggle from time to time when trying to communicate with others. Words help us to end this struggle. They allow us to clearly state our needs and opinions. They help us to persuade others that our ideas are the best ones out there, and they make us interesting.

Have you ever talked to someone who truly challenges you? They are conversationalists, and they use words that you often do not fully understand. Yet they sound intelligent, confident, and sure of their ideas and opinions. When I walk away from

one of these conversations, I hope that I can challenge others when I speak. I hope that I leave people with the impression that I am a well-educated and confident person. I hope that I inspire them to expand their own vocabularies as others have inspired me. As I consider the value and power of words, I realize that my ultimate purpose in this study is to give children the power that comes with an expansive vocabulary and an effective means of communication. Therefore, I hope that this study will inspire me and other teachers to begin to teach vocabulary in a way that motivates students to use words and allows them to understand and use these words appropriately.

In the next chapter the existing research on vocabulary instruction will be addressed. Limitations in this research will be addressed, as well as suggestions for improvement that can truly aid students in becoming effective communicators and users of words.

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

The present study attempts to uncover forms of vocabulary instruction that will aid students in increasing their written and oral vocabularies. This study builds upon research previously completed and expands upon the narrow view that much of this research has presented. As discussed in chapter one, the current research focuses mainly on receptive vocabulary, or the vocabulary that students utilize while reading. Many studies have examined the relationship between vocabulary and reading comprehension. Each of these previous studies offers useful information for developing a more complete picture of the forms of instruction that are effective. This study will utilize this research to expand instruction to encompass expressive vocabulary. Some research has been completed on the effects of vocabulary instruction on writing; however, this research is limited and does not generally include various forms of instruction. An increase in expressive vocabulary is the major focus of this study. The limited availability of research on increasing expressive vocabulary helped me to develop my question regarding how vocabulary words can be taught so that students truly understand the words and use them appropriately in their everyday writings and conversations. This research leads me to conclude that a study of instructional techniques that increase oral and written vocabulary is worthwhile and will contribute to current understandings of vocabulary acquisition.

<u>Knowing a Word</u>

In order to understand how to increase students' understanding of words, it is important to first examine what it means to know a word. Research has been conducted on this topic by numerous professionals in the field. Much of this research points to Dale's work as a framework for the levels of word knowledge (Nilst & Olejnik, 1995; McKeown, 1993; Duin & Grave, 1987; McKeown, Beck, Omanson, & Pople; 1985; Francis & Simpson, 2003; Baumann, Edwards, Boland, Olejnik, & Kame'enui, 2003). Stahl (1999) examined Dale & O'Rourke's (1986) work and provided a clear, concise summary of their findings and descriptions. Stahl (1999) stated that there are four levels of word knowledge. The first level is the level at which a word is unknown and never seen before. Having heard a word before but not knowing its meaning is the second level. The third level occurs when the general concept of the word is known and it can be understood in context. Finally, the fourth level exists when the word is known and understood. Stahl (1999) expanded on this final level and explained that a "full and flexible knowledge" of words is most desired (p. 25). This flexible knowledge should include a full understanding of a word's definition and the way a word is used in multiple contexts. Stahl (1999) concluded his discussion of the levels of word knowledge with an explanation of the importance of considering the ultimate goal of word knowledge at the level that is needed. He explained that different circumstances call for different levels of understanding. For example, a lower level of word knowledge is needed if a student is asked to choose a definition from a field of three using context clues. A deeper understanding is needed if a student is to actually use the word when writing or speaking. Thus, in the case of expressive use of words, the ultimate, full, and flexible understanding is needed.

What Words?

After having an understanding of the levels of word knowledge, we must next consider which words are the most worthwhile to learn. Beck, et al (2002) divided words into three tiers. Tier One words consist of the most basic words that children learn easily from a young age. These words include simple words that identify everyday objects, actions, and emotions. For example, chair, run, and happy are Tier One words. Tier Three words are words that are content specific and do not easily translate into regular usage outside of a particular context. For example, a word like logarithm is specific to the field of mathematics. Having an understanding of this type of word does not generally increase vocabulary that can be used on a day to day basis. Tier Two words, therefore, are those that are used most often and can be found in various contexts. They are most useful for a higher level of communication and comprehension because they are used frequently and increase the expressive abilities of users (Beck, et al, 2002, p.8). Thus, while Tier One and Tier Three words are useful and needed, Tier Two words are those upon which instruction should focus if the purpose is to increase expressive vocabulary.

Traditional Forms of Instruction

Traditional forms of vocabulary instruction include a focus on definitions and context clues. Numerous researchers have studied these forms of instruction to discover their effectiveness (McKeown, Beck, Omanson, & Pople, 1985; Scott & Nagy, 1997; McKeown, 1993; Nilst & Olejnik, 1995; Senechal & Cornell, 1993; Brett, Rothlein, & Hurley, 1996; Beck & McKeown, 2001). Many researchers have found that definitions do not offer the type of information students need in order to perform tasks related to the words learned (Scott & Nagy, 1997; Nilst & Olejnik, 1995; McKeown, 1993). Some, like

McKeown (1993) have found that the format of definitions needs to be changed if children are to understand words (Nilst & Oljenik 1995, Scott & Nagy 1997). Others have focused on the importance of providing students with meaningful contextual exposure to words in order to increase understanding (Senechal & Cornell, 1993; Brett, et al, 1996; Beck & McKeown, 2001; Nilst & Olejnik, 1995).

Instruction with Definitions

Numerous researchers have examined the components of definitions and studied how the format of definitions can affect the understanding of words. McKeown (1993), Scott & Nagy (1997), and Nilst & Olejnik (1995) all examined definitions and their usefulness. Herman & Dole (1988) found that definitional instruction which provides phrases or synonyms defining words are only effective if there is previous understanding of the general concepts. They concluded that definitional approaches do not "foster integration of knowledge" and should not be used alone (p. 46). Traditional definitions are the concern of these researchers. The format of these definitions date back to Aristotle and include the identification of the general class or concept the word belongs to and the characteristics of the word that make it different from other words in its class (McKeown, 1993). Oftentimes the definitions found in dictionaries are contrived and difficult to understand. Definitions are developed and edited in order to fit into the limited space provided within a dictionary. This can often lead to confusing and convoluted definitions (Scott & Nagy; 1997). In their research, Scott & Nagy (1997) considered the types of errors students make when dealing with definitions. They found that fragment selection errors occur most often, more often than correct usage. A fragment selection error is one in which a student focuses on only one piece of a definition and generalizes it to the entire

word. McKeown (1993) addressed this issue in her research by altering definitions to limit the effect of fragment selection. Scott & Nagy (1997) concluded that students often fail to use the overall structure of a definition when asked to complete word-related tasks.

In her study, McKeown (1993) attempted to alter definitions so that they were easier to understand. McKeown (1993) approached definitions from a new perspective, considering the cognitive processes that are involved in understanding definitions. With these considerations in mind, she altered definitions so that they identified the role of a word, characterized the word, made meaning accessible, and arranged for attention to the entire definition (McKeown, 1993). The results were analyzed and McKeown (1993) found that students that were presented with revised definitions were able to offer distinct responses that "captured the essence of the word" while students presented with traditional definitions offered responses that were unacceptable (p. 26). Nilst & Olejnik (1995) also studied definitions. However, they placed their research directly in the context of different levels of word knowledge. They required respondents to complete four tasks, each displaying varying levels of word knowledge. Nilst & Olejnik (1995) concluded that students that had access to the most adequate definitions which corresponded with McKeown's (1993) suggestions were able to display the highest levels of understanding with the greatest consistency. McKeown (1993) also found that students could verbalize the problems they found in traditional definitions and explain how the revised definitions helped them to better understand words. In both of these studies, it was found that revised definitions could greatly improve the limitations that definitions have placed on the ability of students to display a complete knowledge of words.

While McKeown (1993) and Nilst & Olejnik (1995) found that non-traditional

definitions could improve student understanding, Scott & Nagy (1997) also looked at the formats of definitions and made a different conclusion. As a follow-up to their initial experiment on error types, Scott & Nagy (1997) conducted a second experiment that offered different formats for definitions in order to compare which formats were most effective. They utilized the conventional format that is found in most dictionaries, a conventional definition paired with a sample sentence, and a transparent format that defined words using phrases that placed the words within the definitions to display how they are used. Unlike the conclusions that McKeown (1993) made, Scott & Nagy (1997) found little difference between the three formats. Transparent definitions did not help with fragment selection errors, and no distinctions could be made between the effectiveness of the different types of definitions. Despite these two differing conclusions, it is clear that definitions offer problems for students. Altering definitions is one way that educators can attempt to increase student word knowledge. However, due to the inconsistency of results, alternate means of instruction must be investigated.

Instruction with Context Clues

A second traditional form of instruction that many researchers have addressed is the use of context clues to help students develop word knowledge. Many researchers have discussed the fact that students learn thousands of words each year (Brett et al, 1996). It is impossible for each one of these words to be taught explicitly. Therefore, many researchers, like Nilst & Olejnik (1995), conclude that most students learn words incidentally while reading and listening to others read. They also point out that children's trade books that are often read aloud to students contain numerous high level, sophisticated words (Beck & McKeown, 2001). According to Herman & Dole (1988), contextual

instruction provides one or more sentences containing a word or allows students to encounter words while reading. Herman & Dole (1988) concluded that contextual instruction requires a high level of reasoning skills on the part of students. They also concluded that contexts often do not offer enough information, nor are they effective when learners do not have previous experience with the general concepts surrounding the word. Nilst & Olejnik (1995) also found that there are many limits to the ability of context clues to provide a strong understanding of words. In their study, Nilst & Olejnik (1995) found that strong context had only a minor impact on students' ability to display knowledge of words. They concluded that multiple interactions with words is needed if students are expected to develop fluid rather than rigid understandings of words. Baumann et al (2003) also found in their study of context and morphology that an approach that includes only these two aspects of word learning is lacking in its ability to create a sufficient depth of word knowledge. Thus it can be seen that context clues alone do not aid students in developing an understanding of words appropriate for expressive use.

Vocabulary acquisition occurs in many different situations. As discussed, encountering words in context is one way in which students develop understanding of words. In order to study the role of reading experiences on the acquisition of words, various researchers have studied the development of vocabulary from listening to stories and participating in shared reading experiences (Brett et al, 1996; Senechal & Cornell, 1995; Beck & McKeown, 2001). Brett et al (1996) compared two different shared reading experiences to see which techniques work best for helping students develop understanding of words encountered. The results of this study found that the story-with-word-explanation group performed significantly better, made greater gains between pretest and posttest, and

were more likely to retain words as tested six weeks later. They also found that simply reading stories to the students did not increase word knowledge. Thus, this study supports the idea that encountering words in context alone does not sufficiently increase the understanding of those words. Although limited, some research has made mention of expressive vocabulary within their discussions about vocabulary and reading comprehension (Monroe, 1997; Jitendra, Edwards, Sacks, Jacobson, 2004; Senechal & Cornell, 1993). Senechal & Cornell (1993) in their study of word learning through reading experiences found that while receptive vocabulary was increased, the shared reading experience did not allow students to understand words enough to use them spontaneously.

McKeown et al (1985) took the extra step and studied the effects of different forms of instruction on word knowledge. They focused on instruction that included "frequent encounters with each word, rich instruction that entailed elaboration and discussion of word meanings, and opportunities to use words outside the classroom" (p. 523). They studied this form of instruction and made conclusions about how effectively they brought about "word knowledge proficiency" (p. 525). McKeown et al (1985) concluded that extended, rich instruction led students to a deeper understanding of words. Students were able to access words more easily when they received rich instruction. McKeown et al (1985) noted that the key to the deepest level of understanding was extended instruction beyond the classroom and encouraging students to use words in various contexts. They concluded that a high number of encounters with words combined with extended and rich instruction makes word meanings "readily accessible" (p. 534). This type of accessibility is most appropriate when attempting to increase expressive vocabulary.

Beck & McKeown (2001) also addressed the issue of word learning during

read-aloud experiences. They developed a procedure called Text Talk which provides suggestions for how to help children learn and understand words as they are encountered in stories. Text Talk directly teaches words encountered and encourages students to use words after the story is read. Other suggestions include repeating and rephrasing students' words while conducting conversations about stories being read, rereading sections of the stories, and using words after initial instruction. When encountering words, teachers should remind students of the context surrounding the word, give the students the meaning, say the word together, give examples, and have the students participate in independent activities. Although these suggestions are based upon Beck & McKeown's previous studies, their description of the technique does not include a test of its effectiveness.

Traditional Vocabulary Instruction and Writing

Each of the studies mentioned thus far have focused almost exclusively on increasing reading comprehension through vocabulary instruction. Few researchers have looked directly at how instruction can increase expressive use of words as I will do in this study. Duin & Graves (1987) studied the effect of vocabulary instruction on the quality of writing students produced. In their study, they concluded that students who received traditional instruction produced the poorest quality writings. They also found that they used the least number of target words. They found that the quality of their writing actually decreased after receiving traditional instruction on vocabulary words. The best writing came from the group of students that received intense instruction on the vocabulary words coupled with writing activities. Thus, Duin and Graves (1987) concluded that teaching students words before they complete expository essays improves the quality of essays completed. Zarry (1999) made a similar conclusion with less convincing results because

his study focused exclusively on instruction that included access to thesauruses. Therefore, more research in this area is needed to make solid conclusions about what forms of instruction help to improve writing and increase the use of taught words.

<center>Non-Traditional Forms of Instruction</center>

Conceptual Instruction

While Text Talk is one non-traditional way to address the issue of vocabulary acquisition, others have been studied more closely. Herman & Dole (1988) examined various forms of instruction and studied their effectiveness. They categorized instruction into three main areas: definitional, contextual, and conceptual. Conceptual instruction is described as instruction that focuses on how a word is related to other concepts and how it fits into larger contexts. Herman & Dole (1988) analyzed conceptual forms of instruction and found that they help learners develop "extensive knowledge" of a word (p. 50). This knowledge can easily be translated into a thorough and complete understanding of a word, and allows learners to have an understanding of the words on a personal level. Many researchers have made suggestions for vocabulary instruction that fall under Herman & Dole's (1988) conceptual category. Durso & Coggins' (1991) use of semantic mapping and Monroe's (1997) examination of graphic organizers both found that organizing words around major concepts increases students' abilities to display word knowledge. Each of these studies had specific focuses around expressive vocabulary and found that organization increases the level of usage during expressive tasks. Stahl (1999) expanded the discussion about organization and emphasized the importance of discussion during these activities. He concluded that the fact that students must rehearse responses before being called upon during discussions leads to a greater level of practice for all students.

<center>17</center>

Thus, he recommends the use of organizational techniques such as semantic mapping and semantic feature analysis coupled with the use of whole group instruction with sufficient use of wait time to allow all students to develop responses.

Rich and Robust Instruction

Major researchers in the field of vocabulary like Beck, McKeown, Blachowicz, and Fischer have developed entire volumes on instructional techniques that help to enhance full knowledge of learned words. These researchers recommend what they call robust instruction based upon the years of research they have completed. Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002) make numerous suggestions for teaching vocabulary in various contexts. Word Wizard is one technique they recommend be used after initial contact with target words. Word Wizard records the number of times students use and see target words during a period of time and encourages students to compete as word wizards. Initial exposure to words is essential for full understanding. Beck et al (2002) noted that meaning should be provided when students encounter words. After initial exposure, these researchers recommend forms of questioning that allow students to engage fully in activities with words. These include questions that require students to act out words, display emotions related with words, and distinguish word meanings from each other by comparing words. According to Beck et al (2002) these forms of instruction enhance students' understanding of words and places learned words at a greater depth of word knowledge.

When discussing the overall picture of what an effective word learning environment should look like, Blachowicz & Fischer (2002) created a checklist of things to look for. This checklist is based upon extensive research and corresponds well with the suggestions and findings that have been uncovered in much of the research addressed in

this study. Blachowicz and Fischer (2002) first recommend a word-rich environment. This environment provides multiple encounters with words, utilizes read-alouds daily, includes word of the day activities, displays a love for words, and emphasizes connections between spelling, phonics, and vocabulary. They also note that physical signs of word knowledge can be found in the effective word learning environment. In Blachowicz & Fischer's (2002) view, developing word learning independence is also important for enhancing students' vocabulary. The teacher's attitude towards words and vocabulary instruction will also impact the level at which students learn words. Blachowicz & Fischer (2002) see this as including rich instruction that provides definitions, context, mapping, graphic organizers, word play, and emphasis on student usage. Each of these suggestions corresponds with the findings of individual studies mentioned earlier and, together, they offer a complete picture of what robust, rich instruction in vocabulary should include.

While the current research has gathered information about effective instruction and provided numerous suggestions for instruction, very little emphasis has been placed on the specific techniques that are useful for increasing wide use of words. It may seem easy to assume that instruction that corresponds with the recommendations provided would increase students' expressive vocabularies; however, without specific research on the effects of particular instructional techniques on the likeliness that words will be used by students in their writing and conversations, true conclusions cannot be made. Researchers, like Scott & Nagy (1997) and Brett et al (1996) have pointed out in their discussions of implication for future research that students' ability to internalize words and generalize them into regular usage in writing and speaking should be the focus of future studies. Research points out that rich instruction is the key to expand vocabulary. This study will

take these recommendations into consideration when developing a form of instruction and

studying how it increases student word usage.

Chapter Three

Setting and Design

In this study I explore the effectiveness of specific vocabulary instruction techniques to improve students' expressive vocabularies. Specifically, non-traditional forms of instruction that go beyond the use of dictionary definitions and context clues were used to enhance student understanding of words. A case study that embodies the design of qualitative research was used to examine this topic in a fifth grade inclusion classroom.

Context and Setting

Community/School District

The elementary school in which this study took place is located within a large school district in southern New Jersey that includes seven other elementary schools and three middle schools. Students in this community come from a wide range of backgrounds. 83.1% of the population is white, 11.5% is black, 3% is Hispanic, .2% is native American, 2.6% is Asian American, and .3% is Pacific Islander (censtats.census.gov, Census 2000). The average family income is $62,922. While many of the students in this district come from middle class homes, some dwell in homes and apartments designed for low income families. Individuals in this district are employed mainly in white collar occupations. 33.9% of the population works in management, professional, and related occupations. 31.3% of the population works in sales and office occupations, and 13.3% work in service occupations. 20.9% of the population works in education and health and social services.

14.7% of the population works in retail. The remainder of the work force is in other industry jobs. (censtats.census.gov, Census 2000). This diverse district makes for an interesting research setting because it allows a wide range of students to be involved in the research. This will be discussed further when the characteristics of the individual students involved in the study are considered.

School Environment

The school in which this study took place is a pre-K through 5th elementary school. The school also includes three self-contained classrooms that serve the needs of students with more severe disabilities. The school is rather large, consisting of approximately eight hundred students. It draws students from housing areas of older homes, newer homes, and two large apartment complexes. Therefore, the school has a varied population. The school provides heterogeneous grouping for students in order to ensure that they are placed in the least restrictive environment. It also has a thriving inclusion program, as well as resource center pull-out for students that need replacement instruction.

The school strives to develop and maintain a school-wide learning community. The school runs numerous programs that focus on making the school environment one where students can learn and grow in comfort and security. Project Wisdom, No Bullying, and 10 Essential Rules all focus on character education and helping students and staff respect each other, deal with difficult situations, and make wise decisions. The school also has a Reading is Fundamental (RIF) program which provides students with three free books every year. This program allows students from this diverse school to receive resources that might not otherwise be available to them.

Classroom Environment

This study was completed in a fifth grade inclusion classroom consisting of 25 students. The students in this class ranged in ability level. The class contained 5 students with Individualized Education Plans to ensure that they met their educational goals. It also included 4 students with 504 plans that provided accommodations as needed. The special education teacher and general education teacher in the classroom shared teaching responsibilities in math and reading. The special education teacher was not present for instruction in other subject areas. Also, 2 students were pulled out during reading/language and 1 student was pulled out during math to receive instruction in a resource room setting. The class also included 4 students that participated in the school's gifted/talented program. While the students' ability levels varied, all students, including those with IEP's and 504's, read on a fifth grade reading level.

Ethnic diversity was also present within the classroom. 21% of the class was African American. One student was of Hispanic descent and one student originated from the Philippine Islands. Another student was a recent immigrant to America, arriving from Jamaica in February 2004. The remainder of the class was Caucasian. Students also came from a range of socio-economic classes. Three students in the class received free or reduced lunch while some students in the class came from upper middle class homes.

This classroom had a rather unique physical arrangement during the course of this study. The classroom was an open classroom, meaning this it was adjoined with another fifth grade classroom. The two rooms were open into each other at all times and the teachers in each classroom taught their classes simultaneously. While my cooperating teachers and I were teaching our students in one half of the large room, the other fifth grade

teacher was instructing her class of twenty-seven in the other half of the room. The space could easily be separated into two separate classrooms by closing the large hanging dividers. However, this was not done during the time I spent in the classroom. These two classes were the only two in the school that were utilizing the open classroom design during this period. All classrooms were equipped with the hanging dividers that, if opened, could transform two classrooms into one large area.

Student Participants

All students in this classroom were given the opportunity to participate in the study. Sixteen students participated in the study and were selected on a voluntary basis. Parental permission was received from each of the students involved in the study.

Of the 16 students involved in the study, 4 had IEP's and 1 had a 504 plan. One of these students was pulled out of the classroom for reading/language and was not present for much of the instruction. The remaining classified students did not have significant disabilities that interfered with the study. One student was classified as socially maladjusted and one had a fine motor disability. All others were classified as specific learning disabled. Also, all four of the students from the gifted/talented program participated in the study. The students that participated in the study also came from different ethnic backgrounds. 18.75% of the participants were African American, 6.25% were Pacific Islander, and 75% were Caucasian.

The Plan of the Study

The most important aspect of this study was developing and implementing vocabulary instruction that would encourage students to use the words expressively. Over the course of 4 weeks, I completed instruction on 16 words. 10 of these words were those

24

encountered within *William Shakespeare and the Globe* by Aliki which was included within the Harcourt Trophies reading series students used in class. Vocabulary instruction focused on the following words: patron bard, vagabond, congested, critical, prospered, dismantle, adornment, lavish, and shareholder. The remaining 6 words were chosen to replace the classroom's Word of the Day activities for one and a half weeks. These words were arduous, winced, inaudible, slithered, dismayed, and abruptly.

During the course of this study, various instructional strategies were utilized. First, words were introduced using a combined dictionary/context approach as well as student developed definitions and discussion. Multiple activities were used to familiarize the students with the words and deepen their understanding of the words. I implemented the Word Wizard program to encourage students to use words (Beck et al, 2002). I also conducted mini-lessons on how to determine word meaning and use dictionaries and how to incorporate newly learned words into expressive vocabulary. To further encourage students to use words, I required and challenged students to write sentences containing more than one of the new words. I also used the discussion of examples and non-examples and read-alouds to increase student exposure to the words (Beck and McKeown, 2001; Beck et al, 2002). Finally, in order to allow students to think about the words in a context beyond the written and spoken word, I incorporated art through the use of pictures and drawings. Each of these instructional strategies will be explained in more detail in chapter 4 as I examine their effectiveness and analyze the data sources I collected.

The Design of the Study

This study utilized a qualitative research design. This study will use student writing samples, observations, and field notes to examine different topics and situations. The research that occurs and the data that is collected during a qualitative study is emergent, meaning that the question guiding the study and the techniques utilized can change and develop during the study (Creswll, 2003). Because of the emerging nature of the qualitative design, a clear picture of the final research cannot be drawn until after the study has been completed. However, certain aspects of the research are consistently included within the qualitative design.

All qualitative research is "fundamentally interpretative" (Creswell, 2003, p.182). Therefore, after the data has been collected, a qualitative study requires the researcher to code and analyze his or her data in order to make conclusions about the topic or situation studied. More importantly the qualitative design requires the researcher to view the topic studied holistically (Creswell, 2003). All aspects surrounding the study must be considered, causing the results and the study to be panoramic and complex. Researchers utilizing a qualitative design must take on an active role in the research, as well as allow the participants to occupy the same level of participation. Furthermore, it is important that a qualitative study takes place within a natural setting where participants and researchers can interact and researchers can observe subjects in an environment that minimizes any effects caused by a change in environment.

This study was conducted within the classroom setting. As the researcher, I played an active role in the classroom environment. As a student teacher within the classroom, I

took on the responsibility of teacher researcher, studying the effects of my own instruction as well as the instruction that was already taking place in the classroom. Utilizing a qualitative design is most useful for studying vocabulary instruction because teaching strategies are dynamic and multi-dimensional. The qualitative design allowed me to consider numerous factors and develop approaches and techniques throughout the study. Therefore, when analyzing and making conclusions, I took all possibilities into consideration without ignoring important factors that may contribute to the success of particular teaching techniques.

In this study, vocabulary instruction was studied through the use of a case study. A case study examines a particular "individual, program, or event" for a period of time (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005, p.135) and investigates any changes that occur over time, sometimes as a result of intervention. The use of a case study is most appropriate in this situation because it encourages the active participation of the researcher as well as the in-depth study of the present condition of the topic. Finally, it allowed me to examine the results that occurred after new forms of vocabulary instruction were introduced.

Data Sources

During the course of this study, numerous sources of data were collected. First, I observed and evaluated current vocabulary instruction in the classroom. These observations allowed me to study the type of vocabulary instruction to which students were currently exposed. In order to gather data on the present level of vocabulary instruction in the classroom, I utilized an observation form and checklist developed from Blachowitz & Fischer's (2002) suggestions for vocabulary instruction. This checklist can be found in Appendix A. The checklist was again used after non-traditional instruction was

implemented. Students also wrote a brief paragraph that gave them the opportunity to use previously taught vocabulary words. These paragraphs were analyzed to examine the students' ability to properly use words that had been taught prior to the implementation of new forms of instruction. Students wrote a speech as a newly elected representative. Students were not required to use the taught words in this writing sample. However, the words were listed at the top of the page and students were encouraged to use them.

After implementing new forms of instruction and developing a robust, rich vocabulary environment, I again collected data to determine the students' ability to properly use taught words. Students were given a list of the sixteen focus words. They were instructed to write any form of creative writing they wanted such as news articles, journal entries, stories, or letters. Students were required to use at least six words. However, the student that used the most words was awarded a special Word Wizard prize. Student writing was used to analyze student understanding of the words that were taught using new forms of instruction.

A final integral data source for this study is field notes. These field notes provided me with an overall picture of the study, as well as numerous examples and discussions of how students responded to instruction and interacted with the words during instructional time. I analyzed my field notes and they will be discussed in chapter 4 to provide examples of the ways in which students utilized newly taught words. The level of usage and the depth of understanding displayed in the writing samples and field notes determined the effectiveness of the new forms of instruction in increasing expressive usage.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data collected during this study comprises the most important

step of the research. In this study, formal and informal observations took place. In order to analyze the vocabulary environment before and after intervention, instruction will be examined using the checklist I developed (Blachowitz and Fischer, 2002). This checklist will allow me to determine if a rich, robust vocabulary environment exists within the classroom at any given time.

Student writing samples and field notes were also analyzed and evaluated. While analyzing and coding this data, I noted several patterns and themes. These revolved around student usage of taught words. Frequency of use and the quality of each use were considered and evaluated to determine the effectiveness of the instruction implemented. Each time a taught word was used in a writing sample, it was coded. Table 1 below displays a sample of the coding chart that was used. By coding each use of a new word, I determined if students were able to use the words correctly, in the proper context, and without repeating examples they learned in class.

Table 1: Sample Coding Chart

	arduous	winced
Used Correctly?	X	
Defined in Context of Sentence	X	
Vague Use		
Used Incorrectly		X
No Evidence of Word Knowledge		
Evidence of Word Knowledge (Incorrect connotation or context)		X

In the following chapter, the data sources collected are analyzed and evaluated. Finally, conclusions are drawn about the effectiveness of the vocabulary instruction intervention and further implications for vocabulary instruction are suggested.

Chapter Four

Findings of the Study

Vocabulary instruction is a rather complex topic. As discussed in previous chapters, vocabulary instruction can come in many forms. The success of particular instructional techniques relies upon the goal of that instruction. In this study, that ultimate goal is increasing student usage of newly learned words. This chapter analyzes the data collected in this study in order to determine if non-traditional instruction increases students' ability and willingness to expressively use newly learned words.

Analysis of Pre-Intervention and Post-Intervention Environments

In order to analyze students' writing samples to determine if they incorporate newly learned words, it is essential to first provide an understanding of the two environments in which vocabulary instruction took place: the environment before intervention and the environment after intervention. The following sections provide a complete picture of these two contrasting environments.

Same old, same old: The Pre-Intervention Environment

As the students gradually file into class, they talk and joke with great animation. The classroom is abuzz with the most pertinent gossip of the day.

The students meander around the room until they find themselves in front of their desks. Finally, they begin to unpack. They put their book bags in the closet and take this

opportunity to share one last juicy detail.

At last, the students are ready to begin their morning work. On the board, a word is posted. The students take their bulky dictionaries out of their desks and open up their Word of the Day notebooks.

"Does anyone know what page incandescent is on?" Josh shouts out as he flips through the mammoth dictionary aimlessly.

When none of his classmates answer, he finally begins his search. First, he flips past the I's and straight to the L's. When he finds the I's, he again flips aimlessly. He takes a moment, then raises his hand for help.

"I can't find the word," he states when Mrs. Ingle approaches his desk.

Busy with taking attendance and lunch count, Mrs. Ingle turns the pages and points at the spot on the page where incandescent can be found.

Josh opens his Word of the Day notebook and begins copying down the definition:

incandescent adj.: Shining brilliantly; very bright.

Next, he thinks for a moment and then quickly jots down the following sentence:

I am incandescent.

Satisfied, he closes his notebook, stuffs it in his desk, and turns to Karen to tell her all about the MTV Movie Awards he watched on television the previous night.

~

When I first entered the classroom as a new student teacher, I was impressed that a Word of the Day program was in place at all. In classrooms in which I had previously worked and visited, no such program existed. As I observed this program, however, I noticed that students seemed to be struggling. They were not motivated to use their

dictionaries. They did not seem to understand the definitions that they wrote. They did not write meaningful sentences. And they certainly did not seem to be using the words outside of the Word of the Day activity. As I considered this program, I decided I needed to more formally observe it and any other vocabulary instruction occurring in the classroom before implementing any changes.

Vocabulary instruction occurred in this classroom in two areas. First, the Word of the Day activity each morning introduced students to a new word. Secondly, each week during reading, a new set of words was introduced and discussed. These words related directly to the selection the students were reading in their Harcourt Trophies reading series.

In order to analyze the vocabulary environment, I utilized an observation form and checklist. This checklist can be found in Appendix A. Below, each aspect of the checklist is discussed and the environment is described and categorized.

As mentioned, Word of the Day activities were incorporated into the environment. The above scenario was one that occurred on a daily basis within this classroom. Students completed a Word of the Day every morning. This activity required them to look up a word in the dictionary, write its definition and the part of speech, and write a sentence containing the word. At the end of a unit, the students' notebooks were graded for completeness and they took a multiple choice, matching, or fill in the blank test on the words. The words were not discussed at any other time during the day. Upon examining students' Word of the Day notebooks, I found that many students copied down incomplete definitions. They also wrote what I would term "lazy" sentences that did not display an understanding of the words. Many of these sentences followed rather elementary forms. For example, one student wrote, "I can abbreviate," while another said, "He is a

32

representative." Yet another student wrote, "I will use the word terminology in my speech." These students took very little time to complete this work and did not have an understanding of the words, perhaps due to a lack of additional encounters with the words.

The pre-intervention environment did provide students with context and definitions. However, both were not provided for any single word. Students were to learn Word of the Day words strictly from dictionary definitions. Words from the reading selections were introduced using context. When tested on their knowledge of these words, students simply chose a definition from a field of four. They were permitted to use the paragraph that contained the words while taking the test.

One component of a rich, robust vocabulary environment that was glaringly missing was an emphasis on student usage. Students were only required to use words when writing their sentences during the Word of the Day activity. As observed, this interaction does not seem to encourage students to become users of newly learned words. Also, as mentioned above, students' sentences often did not display an understanding of the word's meaning as they were "lazy" sentences with no real content.

Also missing was the opportunity for students to have multiple encounters with words. The students only encountered Word of the Day words during their morning activities, and reading words were not discussed outside of the reading selection. While observing the students during the weeks that they participated in the Word of the Day activities, I observed no incidents of students using the words outside of the morning routine.

Numerous other items on the checklist were also missing in this pre-intervention environment. Read alouds were not incorporated into the classroom. Also, a love for

words was not displayed or evident in student responses. Mapping, graphic organizers, and word play were also nonexistent.

When considering the checklist I developed, I found that the classroom environment included very few characteristics of a rich, robust vocabulary environment (Beck et al, 2002). The effects of this environment on students' ability to use newly learned words is discussed later in this chapter.

Something New!: The Post-Intervention Environment

~

As 9:00 a.m. quickly approaches, I finish with my last minute plans and walk toward the classroom door to welcome my students.

The students trickle into the classroom in small groups. As usual, they are chattering away about the newest video game system, the PSP, and laughing about things that had occurred in the bus line.

"Good morning, guys. You need to get unpacked and start on your morning work."

"Ms. Washart, Ms. Washart! I used the word congested last night. Can I put up a star?" Tyler asks excitedly.

"Sure Tyler. But how did you use it," I respond, challenging Tyler to once again use the newly learned word.

"I told my mom that her closet was congested with shoes?" Tyler frames his response as a question, unsure that he had used the word correctly.

"That's great. Go ahead and write your name on a star and put it on the Wizard Word Wall." I reply with a smile.

Tyler walks briskly toward the wall, jots down his name on one of the construction

paper stars, and writes the word congested in tiny print on the back.

Later in the day, I will staple his star to the Wizard Word Wall underneath congested. The Wall is gradually filling up, and I am surprised that so many students are attempting to use the words at home.

"Make sure you put your spelling homework in the bin," I remind the class.

Students file towards the front of the room, placing their homework in the bin. A small line forms in front of me, and students show me the sentences they had written using the new words and their spelling words.

I am amazed at the number of students that have embraced the Word Wizard program and are beginning to incorporate the new words into their assignments. I am decidedly pleased with the results thus far.

~

The scenario above depicts the environment after intervention instruction. As I began to implement the new vocabulary instruction in the classroom, I found that students were eager to participate. In order to enhance student understanding of new words and encourage them to use those words, I implemented varied instructional techniques. The Word Wizard program was just one that transformed the classroom into a rich, robust vocabulary environment (Beck et al, 2002).

After implementing the intervention techniques, I once again examined the environment using the checklist I developed. The environment that I had created included many of the items found on the list. Each of these components is discussed below.

First, and of great importance, was the fact that I provided students with multiple encounters with the words they were learning. Students participated in creative activities
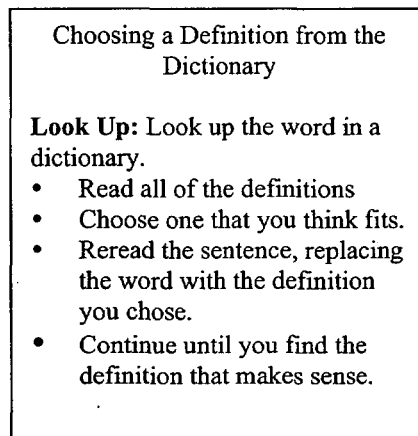
with the words. They were encouraged to use them in their writing and conversations through the use of the Word Wizard program. I also attempted to incorporate the words into each day as much as possible. If a student spoke too softly, I told them that they were inaudible, they should speak up. When a student returned artwork from art class that included a picture of a snakelike creature, I asked the students how they could describe the snake's movement. (Of course, they responded that the snake slithered.) I even described the bus room as congested when the students complained about having to sit there each morning.

Throughout the post-intervention portion of the study, I continued to utilize the Word of the Day program. However, I made alterations that encouraged students to become users of words. The following words were used to replace the Word of the Day activities in the classroom: winced, abruptly, slithered, arduous, dismayed, and inaudible. Students completed a different activity with these words each day of the week. On Monday, the students read sentences containing each word and developed their own definition for the word. Later, students shared and discussed their definitions, and we, as a class, refined them to match the meaning of the word. This technique utilized discussion to enhance student understanding (Stahl, 1999). It also allowed students to put definitions into their own words, avoiding problems associated with definitions (McKeown, 1993). On Tuesday, students brainstormed situations in which they could use each word. On Wednesday, students were given a page for each word. Each page contained a vocabulary word written in large block letters. Students then took the word and transformed it into a picture that represented the meaning of the word. Student samples can be found in Appendix B. On Thursday and Friday, students completed writing samples using the

words.

When introducing words, I also used an approach that combined context clues and dictionary definitions. Students read a paragraph containing the ten focus words from *William Shakespeare and the Globe*, determined the part of speech of each word, and then worked with their dictionaries to define the words. By combining dictionary definitions and context clues, and later requiring students to work creatively with these words, I encouraged them to look beyond the definitions. For the initial introductory activity, students created personal dictionaries. I conducted a brief lesson before this activity to instruct students on how to choose appropriate definitions from a dictionary to fit a specific context. Figure 1 below displays the bookmark that students were given to remind them of the essential steps for selecting an appropriate definition. Students worked diligently

Figure 1: Bookmark for Choosing a Definition from the Dictionary

Choosing a Definition from the Dictionary

Look Up: Look up the word in a dictionary.
- Read all of the definitions
- Choose one that you think fits.
- Reread the sentence, replacing the word with the definition you chose.
- Continue until you find the definition that makes sense.

during this activity. They used dictionaries to find the words and then tested each definition, writing one that made sense to them and to the context in their personal dictionary. Later, as we encountered the words in read alouds and guided reading, we discussed them to help students develop a fuller understanding of the words.

I also continuously emphasized student usage. In order to encourage students to incorporate newly learned words into their vocabulary, I implemented the Word Wizard program. I developed a bulletin board in the classroom that became the Word Wizard Wall. Each week, the newly taught words were placed on the Word Wizard Wall. As described in the above vignette, each time a student used a Wizard Word from the wall, a star with his or her name on it was placed underneath the Wizard Word they had used. At the end of the instructional period, the uses of each Wizard Word were tallied. The student with the highest number of uses was awarded the Ultimate Word Wizard. Word Wizards were also named for each individual Wizard Word.

In order to further encourage students to use words expressively, I provided them with suggestions for how to begin using newly learned words. The students received a bookmark that outlined these suggestions. Figure 2 below shows the bookmark that students received to help them remember these suggestions. Students then participated in activities that forced them to use the words. Students were required to brainstorm at least two situations when they could use each of the taught words. They then participated in a challenge. Students were challenged to write a sentence using one of the new words. They were then challenged to write a sentence using two words, then three words, and so forth, until they could create a sentence using all of the newly learned words. One student wrote: "The huge poisonous snake abruptly slithered up the arduous path, but when stepped on, winced in an inaudible way that made him feel dismayed."

Figure 2: Bookmark for How to Use Newly Learned Words

How to Use Newly Learned Words

When you learn new words, it is important to start using them right away. the more you use the word, the more you will understand it!

Here are some tips to help you use your new words:

1. SAY the word:
- Say it out loud a few times so you can get used to the sound.

2. THINK of times you can use the word:
- Write down at least three situations when you could use the word.

3. KNOW the part of speech:
- Knowing the part of speech will help you use the word correctly.

4. USE a new word at least once everyday:
- Everyday, choose a new word to use. Spelling sentences and other writing assignments are the perfect opportunity. Also, try to use a new word in conversations at least once each day.

Perhaps of most importance was the fact that I displayed a love for words and encouraged my students to develop that same love. Specific activities were used in order to aid students in viewing words creatively. By tapping into students' creativity, I allowed them to refine their understanding of the words and make the words more personal. Throughout instruction, I asked students to show me a face that represented a word or briefly act out a specific word. Students enjoyed showing me how they would wince. Others acted out the word inaudible, holding their hands to their ears while other students silently moved their mouths as if whispering. While this activity did not provide students with elaborate or wordy definitions, it allowed them to gain ownership of the words and

connect the words to something with which they were familiar.

Students also had the opportunity to draw pictures which represented words. Students participated in a group activity that required them to create a poster for one of the vocabulary words. A lesson plan for this activity can be found in Appendix C. Each poster included a picture representing the word and a sentence describing the picture. Students then presented their posters to the entire class, providing them with an opportunity for discussion surrounding the words. One group, assigned the word dismayed, drew a picture of a young baseball player with a sad look on his face. In the background, a score board read Home: 2 Visitors: 5. Underneath the picture, a sentence was written: The boy was dismayed when his team lost the game. This group was able to work with the word they were assigned, create a picture that displayed the word, and write a complete sentence using the word. They did all of this while working in a group, holding heated discussions on the best way to represent their word. In fact, one group spent nearly half of the activity period discussing whether a picture of a boy walking away from his friend or a picture of a girl jumping out of a bush would better represent the word abruptly. Both of these examples display how students were able to become actively engaged with the words while also sharpening their understanding of those words. These activities seemed to make it possible for students to view learning new words as fun and interesting and, in turn, to help them develop a love for learning new words.

During this study, I did not incorporate instruction that utilized graphic organizers or semantic mapping. While these two components of a rich, robust vocabulary environment were not present, the abundance of other aspects that were included led me to conclude that the post-intervention environment provided students with rich, robust

vocabulary instruction.

Analysis of Writing Samples

The major source of data for determining the success of the above described interventions was the writing samples that students completed after learning the new words. A sample of a pre-intervention and post-intervention student writing can be found in Appendix D. In analyzing these samples, I decided that the frequency at which students use words and the ability of students to use words correctly and concisely would determine how successful instruction was in increasing students' expressive vocabularies.

Do We Have To: Motivation to Use Words in Writing Samples

A major consideration for the success of vocabulary instruction is the willingness of students to incorporate newly learned words into their writing. The frequency at which students use newly learned words speaks directly to the ability of the program to increase expressive vocabulary.

Pre-Intervention Writing Samples

In the pre-intervention writing samples, students wrote a speech as a representative of the government. I chose this writing sample because the words included in the Word of the Day unit fit this context. These words were terminology, oscillate, bay, representative, index, invert, abbreviate, incandescent, amplitude, and inaugurate. As mentioned in chapter 3, students were not required to use the words in their writing. However, they were encouraged to do so. The table in Appendix E displays the analysis of these writing samples.

Of the fifteen students that completed samples, only 28% chose to use one of the words in their writing. This amounted to a total of 25 uses. The word bay was used most

often in the fifteen writing samples, for a total of nine times. I was surprised that only four students used the word representative despite the fact that this word fit easily into the context of the paragraph. Finally, I was also surprised that only three students used the word inaugurate, considering that it was used in the directions for the activity.

While observing the students during this activity, I found that they were not motivated to use the words. They did not ask if they could use a dictionary to find the meaning of any of the words. Also, no one asked me about the meaning of any of the words on the list. Instead, numerous students asked, in the whining tone only a student can produce, "Do we *have* to use those words?"

Post-Intervention Writing Samples

Throughout the post-intervention portion of this study, students were encouraged to use words. This encouragement carried over into the post-intervention writing samples that students completed. As mentioned in chapter 3, at the end of the study students were required to write a piece of creative writing including at least six of the sixteen words that were the focus of the study. It was quite obvious that students were eager to use the newly learned words as much as possible in their writing. In the sixteen writing samples, newly learned words were used a total of 289 times. This was particularly impressive when considering that new words were used only 25 times in the pre-intervention samples. The table in Appendix E displays the word usage in these samples.

Of the sixteen participants, only one student used the minimum six words. Each student used an average of 20.6 words, with a median number of uses at 11. When compared with the average number of uses in the pre-intervention writing sample, 1.6, and the median number of uses, 2, it seems evident that students were much more motivated to

use the words after the interventions were implemented.

Can They Use It?: Word Usage in Student Writing Samples

Pre-Intervention Writing Samples

Incorrect usage

As I analyzed the pre-intervention writing samples, I found a tendency for students to use words incorrectly. The table in Appendix E displays the results of this analysis. Out of the total of 25 uses in all of the students' writing, 9 were incorrect. One student wrote in his speech, "Thank you for being inaugurate." This student had no concept of what the word inaugurate means, nor did he have knowledge of the part of speech of the word. Another student wrote, "It is very amplitude with words." Once again, this student displayed no knowledge of the word's meaning or proper usage.

While 9 out of 25, or 36%, may seem like a relatively small ratio, it is important to note that the word bay accounted for 9 out of the total 25 uses. This word proved to be the one that students not only used most frequently, but also used with the most precision. One student wrote, "I come from the city by the bay." Another stated, "I will also start another clean up project for the Delaware Bay." In this case, the students that attempted to include bay in their writing were much more successful than those that attempted to include other words. When excluding the 9 uses of the word bay, 50% of the remaining 16 uses were incorrect.

Correct Usage

Students were able to use words correctly in their pre-intervention writing samples. 64% of the total uses were correct. However, representative was the only word on the list that was used multiple times and was used correctly each time. A total of four students

used the word representative in their sample. One student eloquently ended her speech by stating, "When I start this clean up project, I will feel like a representative of many in our nation." This student displayed a clear understanding of the word and was able to use it to describe her role as President. While many students were unable or unmotivated to use the words in their writing, some were able to use specific words, like representative, correctly. However, less than half of the total uses displayed a full understanding of the word when used.

Post-Intervention Writing Samples

Incorrect Usage

In the post-intervention writing samples, words were used incorrectly a total of 26 times. Once again, the table in Appendix E displays the full analysis of word usage in these samples. Sixteen of these uses were completely incorrect and displayed no knowledge of the meaning of the words. One student wrote, "People were vagabond because they didn't know were the Wachovia Center was." In this sentence, the word vagabond is used as a synonym for confused or wondering. Since vagabond is a noun, this student did not use the word correctly at all, using it as a verb instead. Despite this example and other incidents of incorrect usage, the vast majority of students displayed some knowledge of word meaning. Only 9% of the uses were incorrect.

Incorrect Connotation

Some students wrote sentences that included the newly learned words but displayed only a slight understanding of the words. These students included words, but used them in the wrong context or with the incorrect connotation. In the post-intervention writing samples, there were ten examples of incidents when students used words with the incorrect

connotation. One student wrote, "After they cut my ear, I was inaudible." This student confused inaudible to mean the physical inability to hear, instead of describing a sound that cannot be heard. The student was familiar with the general concept of the word, but did not understand it fully. Another student wrote, "All of a abruptly, I winced because a kid hit me with his bike." This student used the word abruptly to replace the word sudden. He understood that abruptly was related to the word sudden, but did not use it correctly. His understanding of the word was slightly superficial and not deep enough to allow him to use the word correctly. Although incidents of usages with the incorrect connotation occurred, these accounted for only 3.5% of the total word uses. Also, of the 26 incorrect uses, 38.5% displayed some understanding of the meaning while only 11% of the incorrect uses in the pre-intervention samples did the same.

Correct Usage

Students were overwhelmingly able to use newly learned words correctly in their post-intervention writing samples. 91% of the words included in post-intervention writing were used correctly. Of the 289 uses, 263 were correct. Students were able to construct impressive sentences. As mentioned earlier, in the pre-intervention environment, students often wrote "lazy" sentences. In the post-intervention samples, however, sentences were much more complex and displayed an understanding of the meaning of the newly learned words. For example, one student wrote: "When she said she wanted to be a gymnast, her family was dismayed. They did not have enough money to put her in this gymnastics academy." This student was not only able to use the word correctly grammatically, as students do when they write lazy sentences, but she was also able to display an understanding of the word through the context in which she used it. The majority of word

uses in the post-intervention writing samples also accomplished this. A total of 72% of the correct uses were situations in which students defined the word through the context of the sentence.

Conclusions

The above findings provide a clear picture of the success of the two vocabulary instruction programs. After the interventions were put into place, a rich, robust vocabulary environment was established. In this environment, students were more motivated to use newly learned words. This was displayed through the sheer number of uses in the post-intervention samples as compared to the pre-intervention samples. This finding was the most significant, as new words were used only 25 times in the pre-intervention samples. Students were also more capable of using words correctly. As stated above, 91% of the uses in the post-intervention samples were correct while only 64% were correct in the pre-intervention samples. Students were also more likely to write sentences that displayed their knowledge of the word's meaning. Table 2 below displays these findings.

Table 2: Comparing Pre-Intervention and Post-Intervention Writing Samples

	Pre-Intervention	Post-Intervention
Used Correctly	**64% of total**	**91% of total**
Defined in Context	75% of correct	72% of correct
Vague Use	25% of correct	28% of correct
Used Incorrectly	**36% of total**	**9% of total**
Word No Evidence of Knowledge	89% of incorrect	62% of incorrect
Evidence of Word Knowledge	11% of incorrect	38% of incorrect
Total Times Used	**25 total uses**	**289 total uses**

Thus, overall, the post-intervention samples showed that students were able to successfully incorporate newly learned words into their writing while the pre-intervention samples showed that students were less motivated to use words and were less likely to use them correctly.

Chapter Five

Conclusions

In studying two very different vocabulary environments and analyzing students'

writing samples, I have concluded that the post-intervention environment more effectively

enabled students to include newly learned words in their writing. This conclusion leads me

to the all-important question, "So what?" This chapter provides recommendations for

vocabulary instruction based on these findings. It also makes suggestions for future study

in the area of expressive vocabulary.

<u>Recommendations for Teachers Looking to Increase Expressive Vocabulary</u>

This study offers evidence to support the development of a rich, robust vocabulary

environment in order to enhance student ability to incorporate newly learned words into

expressive vocabulary. Other studies have also supported the use of non-traditional forms

of instruction that go beyond providing students with dictionary definitions and context in

order to increase the depth of word knowledge that students display (Herman & Dole,

1988; Durso & Coggins, 1991; Monroe, 1997; Stahl, 1999; Beck et al, 2002; Blachowitz &

Fischer, 2002). However, few studies have addressed expressive vocabulary specifically.

After analyzing the data and concluding that students were more likely and better able to

include newly learned words after intervention instruction was delivered, I have developed

recommendations for teachers that are looking to improve students' expressive

vocabularies. These recommendations have emerged from the patterns I observed as I

delivered instruction and analyzed my collected data. Three main themes have developed. First, introducing words is key to success. Secondly, students must have multiple encounters with newly learned words. Finally, students must be actively engaged in instruction.

Introduction to New Words: A Critical Component

It is important to point out that before students can be expected to use words in creative activities or incorporate them into their vocabularies, they must be introduced to those words. As described in chapter 4, in the pre-intervention environment students were introduced to words strictly through the use of dictionary definitions or context. In the post-intervention environment, however, definitions were provided along with context. Words were also introduced through context coupled with student generated definitions and discussion. The data analyzed in chapter 4 suggests that students were better able to use newly learned words in the post-intervention environment. Considering this conclusion and the two vocabulary environments, I found that introducing words was extremely important to the vocabulary instruction process.

During an activity in which students were provided with vocabulary words in context, it became obvious that context alone could not give students an understanding of the true meaning of a word. When introducing the word abruptly, students were given a sentence that read, "I can't believe it! Right in the middle of our conversation, Peter turned around and abruptly walked out of the room." They were then asked to write a definition for the word based on this context. Some students defined it as meaning noisily. The context alone had not led them to the true definition. They needed more instruction on the word in order to fully understand it. Other students, however, came up with definitions that

were closer to the word's actual meaning, stating that rudely and suddenly were synonyms for abruptly. As a class, we were then able to discuss the word and create a class definition which read "when something happens suddenly and without notice." Students were then able to give examples of things that could occur abruptly. One student said, "The dog abruptly pulled the leash and ran away." Through this activity, students were able to make connections between words and their own lives as well as begin to develop a complete picture of the word's meaning.

The above is just one example of how context or definition alone does not lead to a deep and flexible understanding of words (Stahl, 1999). Others occurred throughout the study and are evidenced in the findings. Baumann et al (2003) found that context alone does not lead to expressive use. Thus, this study supports this conclusion and has found that introducing words strictly through context or definitions is not sufficient if the ultimate goal is to have students use newly learned words in their writing and conversations. Instead, I recommend that a combination of dictionary definitions, context, teacher provided definitions, student generated definitions, and, perhaps most importantly, discussion are used to introduce students to new words. Stahl(1999) and Beck et al (2002) also suggest that discussion is an essential component of vocabulary instruction. This study further supports their conclusions, applying them to expressive vocabulary.

Students Must Have Multiple Encounters With Words

The most glaring difference between the pre- and post-intervention vocabulary instruction was the number of encounters students had with the newly learned words. As discussed in chapter 4, prior to the intervention students encountered the words only once or twice during instruction. The intervention instruction, however, was focused largely

50

around allowing the students to encounter the words as much as possible. Students participated in creative activities with the words. They were encouraged to use them in their writing and conversations through the use of the Word Wizard program. Finally, the words were used to describe different occurrences throughout the course of the day.

The importance of multiple encounters with words was made clearer when analyzing the students' writing samples. Many of the words that students used most often were those with which they had the most encounters. For example, lavish was used a total of 36 times in the post-intervention writing samples. Students encountered this word frequently. Lavish was used multiple times in *William Shakespeare and the Globe*, and we discussed the word each time it was used. I also used lavish to describe things that the students related to. This included lavish birthday parties, lavish dresses, and lavish houses. This word is just one example of one that students encountered often. These multiple encounters allowed students to continuously refine their understanding of the word and made them feel more comfortable using it in their writing.

Therefore, the final recommendation that develops from the findings of this study is providing students with multiple encounters with words. Other researchers have made similar conclusions when studying varying depths of word knowledge (Nilst & Olejnik, 1995; Blachowitz & Fischer, 2002; McKeown et al, 1985). Once again, this study supports their findings and applies them directly to expressive vocabulary.

Students Must Be Actively Engaged

One of the most interesting patterns that emerged as I analyzed my data was the fact that students were actively engaged throughout the implementation of new forms of instruction. The instructional techniques used in this study allowed students to work

actively with the words. The group projects, decorate the word activity, and Word Wizard program all engaged students with the words. These programs helped motivate students to use the words.

The Word Wizard Wall is a prime example of the great interest in the words that students developed. A total of 11 were awarded Word Wizard certificates over the course of the study. These students, and the others that had stars placed on the Word Wizard Wall, were motivated by the wall to use the words they were learning. This activity allowed students, many of whom were not the highest achieving students in the class, to be honored in a way they had not experienced before. Of the 11 Word Wizards, two were students with IEP's or 504's and one was a C student diagnosed with ADHD, and one was a former ESL student.

The findings discussed in chapter 4 suggest that students were much more likely to use newly learned words after participating in these types of engaging activities. This engagement and the emphasis on student usage that the Word Wizard program provided were major contributors to the success of the intervention instruction. Therefore, it is important that vocabulary instruction that occurs in the classroom actively involves students, allows them to work creatively with the words they are learning, and encourages them to use the words they are learning through a program similar to the Word Wizard program. These findings are supported by other researchers in the field, as Beck et al (2002) also concluded that students must be engaged fully in activities with words.

Suggestions for Future Research

Conceptual instruction using graphic organizers and semantic mapping was one form of instruction that this study did not utilize. Herman & Dole (1988), Durso &

Coggins (1991), and Monroe (1997) found that these forms of instruction were successful at increasing student knowledge of words in the area of receptive vocabulary. This type of instruction may also be useful for increasing expressive usage of newly learned words. However, further research must be done in order to conclude that instruction around concepts of new vocabulary can effectively impact expressive vocabulary.

Future study is also needed in order to discover if the rich, robust instruction that occurred in this study leads to complete integration of newly learned words into students' working vocabularies. This study looked at the use of new words shortly after they were learned. Since increasing expressive vocabulary is the ultimate goal of this vocabulary instruction, it is important that the ability of students to retain word knowledge and usage over extended periods also be studied so that the success of this form of instruction can be further proved.

Finally, when analyzing students' expressive usage of newly learned words, this study did not consider oral vocabulary but instead focused solely on written vocabulary. Future research should specifically address vocabulary in oral communication. Considering the fact that oral communication is a highly essential skill for life success, studying ways to increase oral vocabulary would be a valuable endeavor. Furthermore, it would be worthwhile to discover if the same type of instruction successfully leads to oral and written expressive use of words.

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Appendix A

Vocabulary Environment Checklist

Could the environment be categorized as a rich, robust vocabulary environment?

COMMENTS/DESCRIPTIONS

_____Multiple encounters with words

_____

_____

_____Daily read-alouds

_____

_____

_____Word of the Day activities

_____

_____

_____Displays a love for words

_____

_____

_____Emphasizes connection between
       spelling, phonics, and vocabulary

_____

_____

_____Provides definitions

_____

_____

_____Provides context

_____

_____

_____Utilizes mapping

_____

_____

_____Utilizes graphic organizers

_____

_____

_____Utilizes word play

_____

_____
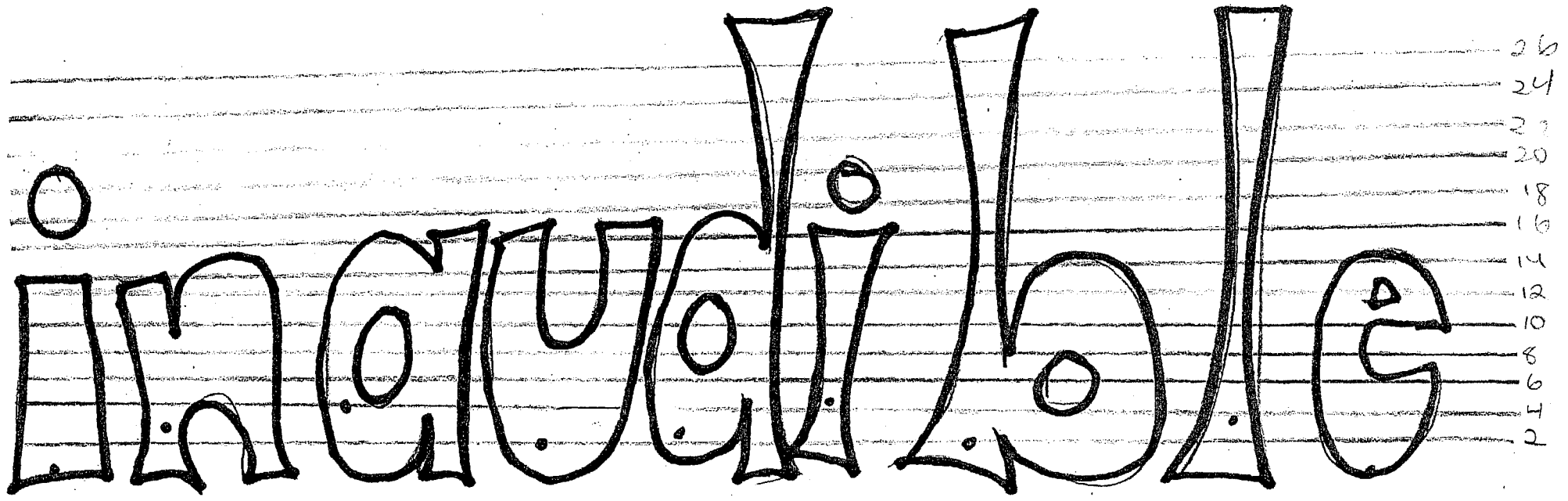
_____Emphasis on student usage

_____

_____

Appendix B

Decorate the Word Student Sample

arduous

S.A.T

noise meter

inaudible

26
24
22
20
18
16
14
12
10
8
6
4
2

Appendix C

Can You Picture My Wizard Word? Lesson Plan

Language Arts Literacy: Vocabulary Building Activity

Standards:
3.1 5th F.1, F.2
3.3 5th D.7, D.8
3.4 5th A.3

Objective: SWBAT draw a picture that corresponds with a vocaublary word and explain how it represents that voclabulary word.

Materials: white poster board : one piece for each group
              Role Explanation hand-out

Procedure:

Introduction: To introduce the lesson, explain to the students that we have already been working with six vocabulary words for the past two days. Today, the students should start thinking about the words creatively. First, remind the students of the words and their meanings. Now, explain that the students will be thinking of the words visually. They will be working with a group to draw a picture that represents one of the words.

1. Explain that the students will now be splitting into groups of four to five students. (Pieces of colored construction paper with numbers placed underneath students' desks is one creative way to split students into groups). When students are in their groups, they will be completing an activity using the vocabulary words. Each group will be required to draw a picture that represents their vocabulary word. They must then write a sentence on their poster explaining how the picture represents their word. At the end of the lesson, each group will present their poster to the class, discussing how their picture represents the word. Each member of the group will have a specific job. Review the different jobs students will have. Discuss the rules for working in groups. Write these on the board: quiet, compromise, marker colors, follow the leader. Discuss the fact that each student in the group will have a specific color and their color must be represented on the poster.

2. Model the process for the students using one of the words. Draw a picture, write and sentence, and present to the class.

3. Split the students into their groups and hand out materials. Allow the students five minutes to decide what they will draw and ten minutes to complete the drawing.

4. After fifteen minutes, gather the students and seat them back at their desks. Discuss listening skills: how do I know you are listening? Allow the groups to present and discuss each picture.

5. To close the lesson, ask the student how they think drawing a picture will help them with the words. Focus in on actually using the words and how drawing the picture makes

it easier to think of situations when the word could be used. Encourage students to use the word and get their names on the word wizard wall.

Appendix D

Pre- and Post-Intervention Student Writing Samples

STUDENT SAMPLES

Pre-Intervention Writing Sample

I am a <u>representative</u> for the United States of America. I will be in <u>inaugurate</u> for four years. I will <u>abbreviate</u> my speech to you. My speech is as long a <u>bay</u> and that is pretty long. I will use my <u>index</u> to <u>abbreviate</u> my speech. It is very <u>incandescent</u> it is better than that. I might <u>invert</u> it. It is very <u>amplitude</u> with words. I will use the word <u>terminology</u> in my speech. I will swing <u>oscillate</u> when I am speaking.

Post-Intervention Writing Sample

Dear Mommy,

      I was <u>dismayed</u> when you told me I had to do chores! Not to be <u>critical</u>, but it's a waste of time. I don't want to grow up and be a <u>vagabond</u>, but chores are too <u>arduous</u> to do. It takes too much time. What am I going to do, <u>dismantle</u> the fridge?! I wish you were <u>inaudible</u> to me. You always say that I am a <u>patron</u> of the mall and movies, and you're tired of giving me money! Our apartment is <u>lavish</u> enough. On the bright side, I can't argue with a <u>congested</u> wallet full of money. I hope you make the right decision and say no chores.

Love,
Zyl

Appendix E

Complete Pre- and Post-Intervention Writing Sample Analysis Tables

Analysis of Pre-Intervention Writing Samples
Totals from All Writing Samples

	Total Uses	Defined in Context	Vague Use	Total Used Correctly	No Word Sense	Partial Word Sense	Total Used Incorrectly
terminology	1	0	1	1	0	0	0
oscillate	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
bay	9	7	1	8	1	0	1
representative	4	3	1	4	0	0	0
index	1	1	0	1	0	0	0
invert	2	1	0	1	1	0	1
abbreviate	1	1	0	1	0	0	0
incandescent	2	0	0	0	2	0	2
amplitude	2	0	0	0	1	1	2
inaugurate	3	0	1	1	2	0	2
Total	25	12	4	16	8	1	9

Analysis of Post-Intervention Writing Samples
Totals from All Writing Samples

	Total Uses	Defined in Context	Vague Use	Total Used Correctly	No Word Sense	Partial Word Sense	Total Used Incorrectly
arduous	12	7	3	10	0	2	2
winced	16	13	3	16	0	0	0
inaudible	11	9	1	10	1	0	1
slithered	22	17	5	22	0	0	0
dismayed	18	13	2	15	2	1	3
abruptly	13	5	4	9	3	1	4
patron	22	16	3	20	2	0	2
bard	49	44	5	49	0	0	0
vagabond	18	12	3	15	2	1	3
congested	14	11	2	13	0	1	1
critical	16	13	1	14	0	2	2
prospered	7	6	0	6	1	0	1
dismantle	10	9	0	9	0	1	1
adornment	2	0	2	2	0	0	0
lavish	34	6	22	28	4	2	6
shareholder	25	9	16	25	0	0	0
Total	**289**	**186**	**72**	**263**	**16**	**10**	**26**