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ABSTRACT
                This document discusses a program designed to decrease
students' off-task behaviors in order to help create a positive learning
environment. The targeted population consisted of elementary students from
two midwestern communities. Children attended schools in both lower-middle
class and upper-middle class schools. The problem of off-task behavior was
documented through Teacher Social Skills Surveys and Student Social Skills
Surveys, which revealed a high frequency of classroom disruptions. Analysis
determined that the Student Behavior Observation Checklists supported
findings from the teacher and student surveys. The probable cause data
collected from student survey responses revealed a lack of strategies for
handling a variety of conflict situations in the classroom. The school
faculty reported a high frequency of student off-task behaviors in the
classrooms, which took away from instructional time. A review of solution
strategies emphasized positive social skill development and providing ample
class time for student reflection on a variety of issues related to social
skills. The final results of the Student Social Skills Surveys and the
Student Behavior Observation Checklists revealed a decrease in disruptive,
inappropriate behaviors. A majority of students were positively influenced by
the strategies and as a result, their social skills improved. (Contains 15
figures and 29 references.) (JDM)

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DECREASING DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIORS
THROUGH
SOCIAL SKILLS INSTRUCTION

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Dedication

We dedicate our action research paper to
our friends, family, colleagues,
and children who touch our lives.

Abstract

This report describes a program for decreasing student off-task behaviors in order to create a positive learning environment. The targeted population consists of elementary students from two midwestern communities. The children from School A and B reside in a lower-middle class community, and the students from School C reside in an upper-middle class community. The problem of off-task behavior was documented through Teacher Social Skills Surveys and Student Social Skills Surveys, which revealed a high frequency of classroom disruptions. The researchers found the Student Behavior Observation Checklists supported findings from the teacher and student surveys.

The probable cause data collected from student survey responses revealed a lack of strategies for handling a variety of conflict situations in the classroom. The school faculty reported a high frequency of student off-task behaviors in the classroom, which took away from instructional time.

A review of the solution strategies suggested by experts in the field of education, combined with analysis of the problem setting, has resulted in the selection of three major categories of intervention: researchers provided an instructional emphasis on positive social skills practice, researchers held regularly scheduled class meetings to discuss topics related to social skills, and researchers provided ample class time for student reflection regarding a variety of issues related to social skills.

The final results of the Student Social Skills Surveys and the Student Behavior Observation Checklists revealed a decrease of disruptive inappropriate behaviors. A majority of students were positively influenced by the strategies and as a result, their social skills improved. However, some students were less influenced by social skills instruction because of behavior disabilities, dysfunctional families or years of exposure and experience displaying inappropriate behaviors.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

The targeted Kindergarten class in School A, the targeted first grade class in School B, the targeted third grade class in School C, and the targeted fifth grade class in School A exhibit disruptive behaviors (such as talking out of turn and inappropriate touching). These disruptive behaviors create a negative classroom climate and interfere with student learning. Existence of this problem is evidenced in the Teacher Social Skills Surveys (Figures 1, 2 and 3) and the Student Behavior Observation Checklists (Figures 4, 5, 6 and 7).

Local Setting

School A

School A is located in a major metropolitan area in the midwestern region of the United States. School A has a current population of 520 students ranging from kindergarten to sixth grade. Forty-three and one-tenth percent of the students are Caucasian, 18.8 % of the students are African-American, 34.6 % of the students are of Hispanic origin and 3.7 % are Asian/Pacific Islander. Of the students in School A, 47.9% can be categorized as low-income. According to the State School A Report Card (2000), low-income students may come from families receiving public aid, they may be in institutions for neglected or delinquent children, may be supported in foster homes, or may be eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches. According to the State School Report Card (2000), the attendance record of the students in School A is 95.6 %. There is an 86.7 % mobility rate among the students in School A and the rate of chronic truancy is 6.2%.

School A currently employs 61 full-time and part-time personnel, with 28 of these individuals being certified teachers. School A welcomed a new principal in the fall of 1999. Of the 28 teachers, 87.8% are Caucasian, 9% are of Hispanic origin and 0.7% are of Asian/Pacific Islander origin. The teachers in School A have an average of 23.3 years of teaching experience. Ten teachers have earned their Master's degree and four are in the process of earning their Master's degree (State School A Report Card, 2000).

School A celebrated its 50th anniversary in the year 2000. The building consists of 20 classrooms and 2 mobile classrooms on site. The building has undergone major construction twice during its existence. The last addition was completed in 1998; this added a classroom, family center, an office for social work, a conference room, an expanded main office, and a gymnasium, (State School A Report Card, 2000).

School A focuses on the improvement of reading scores. Project Accelerated Literacy (P.A.L.) is an extended day support program provided for kindergarten students lacking literacy skills. Reading Recovery is a pullout program for first and second grade students that need additional support in basic reading skills. School A also has a reading support teacher available to work with teachers and students to improve reading. School A also contains three bilingual classrooms with the ultimate goal to mainstream students into English-only classes, so they can successfully perform at their level of potential. According to the State School A Report Card (2000), School A devotes 120 minutes each day to language arts instruction as an additional effort to improve reading scores.

School B

School B is located in a major metropolitan area in the midwestern region of the United States. There are a total of 585 students ranging from Pre-K through 6. The ethnic break down

is 61.6% Caucasian, 11.0% African-American, 20.6% Hispanic, and 6.3% Asian/Pacific Islander. Of the students in School B, 18.0% can be categorized as low income. There is an 8.0% limited-English proficiency population. Attendance for school B is 95.8%. There is no chronic truancy. The mobility rate is 22.9% (State School B Report Card, 2000).

There are 27 full time teachers, 2 job share teachers, 16 teacher aides, and 20 lunchroom staff at the school B. The average number of years of experience is 14 years. The average educational level attained is Master's degree (State School B Report Card, 2000)

School B is two years old. There are 37 rooms in the building. School B has 18 regular education classrooms, 2 Exceptional Needs One (EN1) classrooms for children who receive special education services and 9 preschool classrooms. The children are pulled out of the classroom for speech, social work, and other special needs classes. The children also go to the art, music, and physical education rooms for these specials. The EN1 students join the regular education students for specials. Some EN1 students also join classrooms for guided reading.

School C

School C is located in a major metropolitan area of the midwestern region of the United States. The total student population at school C is 660 as of November 2000. The racial-ethnic background is 95.0% Caucasian, 0.6% African American, 2.9% Hispanic, 1.5% Asian/Pacific Islander, and no Native Americans. There is no chronic truancy. The mobility rate at this school is 6.5%. The percentages of students who are eligible for English as a Second Language (ESL) are 2.1%. Two-tenths of a percent of students receive free lunch (State School C Report Card, 2000).

The total number of classroom teachers at school C is 26. The number of classroom aides is 15. There are nine special teachers, and nine Project Success instructors. The number of

learning support staff is seven. There are seven lunchroom staff individuals. And there are 11 other staff members. School C welcomed its new principal in July 1999 (State School C Report Card, 2000)

School C was established in 1929. The school originally had six classrooms, five teachers, and 96 students. There have been seven additions since. In the fall of 1999, four additional classrooms were built, as well as an additional gym/cafeteria, band room, and music room. A second teacher/guest parking lot was also added. Currently there are a total of 30 classrooms in the school (State School C Report Card, 2000).

The students at school C are all taught in self-contained, heterogeneous classrooms by grade level (K-5). All students with special needs are mainstreamed in the classrooms. Students leave the general classrooms to attend art, physical education, and music lessons, instructed by teachers that are specialized in the given areas. A student may be pulled out of the self-contained classroom to receive one or more of the following programs this school has to offer: speech, special education, band, orchestra, social services, accelerated and enrichment program, ESL, and/or Project Success. Specially trained personnel run all programs (State School C Report Card, 2000).

<div align="center">Community Setting</div>

School A and School B

School A and B are located in a large unit district in the midwestern region of the United States. The district boundaries overlap three counties and include all or part of seven townships. The district is composed of 38 elementary schools, 7 middle schools, 4 comprehensive high schools, and 1 alternative high school. The school district has a total enrollment of 34,983 students ranging from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade. Elementary school enrollment is

21,846 students. The middle schools have a total student enrollment of 5,100, and the high schools have a total of 9,629 students. The district employs 4,343 full-time and part-time personnel. Of these individuals, 2,304 are teachers. The average years of teaching experience in this district are 14.5 years. The district's student population includes a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. In a recent bilingual census approximately 66 different languages were noted among the students in the district. Approximately 58.9% of the students in the district are Caucasian, 7.6% of the students are African-American, 27.0% of the students are of Hispanic origin, 6.3% are Asian/Pacific Islander and less than 0.1% of the students are Native American. Twenty-nine point two percent of the students in the district are children of low-income families. Eighteen point eight percent of the students speak English as a second language. The district expenditure per pupil in 1999-2000 was $6,953 (State School A Report Card, 2000).

School C

School C is located in a community unit school district made up of four elementary schools, one middle school and one high school. Total student enrollment is 4,541. Elementary enrollment is 2,374, middle school is 1,164, and high school is 1,280. The school district employs 759 individuals. Of these individuals, 319 are teaching faculty. The average years of teaching experience in this district are 12.8 years. The percentage of teachers with a Master's degree or above is 58.8%. The pupil-teacher ratio at the elementary schools is 19:7:1 (State School C Report Card, 2000).

New and expanding housing developments are significantly increasing the enrollment of each of the schools. There are plans to build a fifth elementary school in the near future. Currently, the high school and one elementary school are building additions. The student mobility rate of the district remains below state average. Student performance on nationally

standardized achievement tests continues to indicate performance levels above state and national

norms (Mission, Goals, and Actions: School C, 2000).

The racial/ethnic population distribution of school C's district is 96.3% Caucasian,

0.5% African American, 1.6% Hispanic, 1.5% Asian/Pacific Islander, and no Native Americans.

Low-income families constitute less than 1.1% of the student population. The truancy rate is

0.1%. The district expenditure per pupil in 1999-2000 was $6,756 (State School C Report Card,

2000).

The population of the school C's city is approximately 18,800. The community is

considered affluent, and is located in an area that continues to grow and prosper. Predictions

forecast a population growth spurt up in excess of 20,000 in the next decade.

The district covers an area of 23 square miles and is part of a corridor that is recognized

for its attraction of high technology industry and residential growth. The city's economic

prosperity thrives on retailing, as well as light manufacturing and research. More than 50

manufacturers and research companies are located here. Residents and visitors alike are attracted

to this community to enjoy the ambiance and quaint downtown shopping area. Today, new

homes are being built to accommodate district C's steadily rising population and business

growth. The median household income, as of 1997, is $49,744. The citizens of district C hold

high expectations for student performance, which is demonstrated through exceptional

involvement in school-sponsored programs and high expectations for standardized test scores

(School C Mission, Goals, and Actions, 2000).

National Context

Public schools encounter many challenges when dealing with the enormous responsibility

of educating our nation's youth. One of the greatest challenges teachers face is dealing with

behavior problems. Children's lack of social skills leads to an increase in discipline problems; it interferes with student learning, and takes away from instructional time. As adults, weak social skills are responsible for much of the unemployment (Elksnin & Elksnin, 1998). Likewise, "90% of job loss is related to social problems," (Costa, Bellanca, & Forgarty, 1992).

During most of its existence, the <u>Annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitude Toward the Public Schools</u> has identified "lack of discipline" as the most serious problem facing the nation's educational system. This year 18% of the respondents ranked lack of discipline as the top problem. When answering an open-ended question as to what they would like to change in the public schools, 12% mention discipline, more control and stricter rules (Rose & Gallup, 1999). Discipline problems disrupt the flow of classroom activities and interfere with learning. Approximately one-half of all classroom time is taken up with activities other than instruction, and discipline problems are responsible for a significant portion of lost instructional time (Cotton, 1990). A portion of these problems may be due to poor classroom management. According to Banks as quoted by Schwartz (1997), "Traditional means of 'controlling' a classroom can actually exacerbate children's aggression, provoke a teacher-child argument, or invite bad behavior." (p. 3).

Students lacking in social skills contribute to discipline problems and loss of instructional time in the classroom. Improved social skills lead to fewer problem behaviors in the classroom. According to the data collected from the Social Skills Rating System from the American Guidance Service Inc., as noted in Elliot's (1999) educational literature, students with strong social skills are likely to have higher scores on tests of achievement such as, <u>The Illinois Test of Basic Skills,</u> (1999).

Poor social skills affect classroom climate negatively. In addition, the child who has weak social skills carries this with him/herself throughout life. Social skills enable individuals to experience positive consequences during social interaction. Research examining outcomes of children with poor social skills has yielded some startling results. According to Gresham (1981), children who have poor social skills are at a greater risk for dropping out of school and juvenile delinquency rates are higher for these individuals. Over the past decade, violence in society and in the classroom has increased dramatically. The American Psychological Association (1993) reported that children are committing violent acts at younger ages, more than ever before. Many of these violent acts are the result of lack of self-control.

Extensive research has been conducted focusing on educators' as well as the public's perceptions in regard to discipline problems. Tulley and Chiu (1998) collected students' perceptions of classroom discipline through anecdotal narratives. Students' responses were organized into five categories. These categories were disruption (talking, or behavior that deliberately interrupts instruction), defiance (disrespectful or uncooperative behavior, not following instructions), aggression (fighting, pushing, tripping), incomplete work, and miscellaneous behaviors (e.g. cheating, writing notes, lying). Almost half, 43% of the 134 incidents described in the student narratives indicated that disruptions are the most frequently occurring off-task behaviors observed in the classroom. Thus educators, society, and students alike believe that poor social skills have a negative impact on the climate within the classroom.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM EVIDENCE AND PROBABLE CAUSE

Problem Evidence

In the targeted kindergarten and fifth grade classes at School A, the targeted first grade

class at School B, and the targeted third grade class at School C evidence of disruptive behaviors

was gathered through the use of three instruments. The first instrument developed by the

researchers for the purpose of this study, was a Teacher Social Skills Survey (Appendix A). The

first part of this survey asked teachers to rate their feelings towards social skills behaviors that

occur in their among their students. In the second part of the Teacher Social Skills Survey,

teachers were asked to complete short answer questions regarding their own teaching of social

skills. Another researcher-developed instrument that was used for gathering data was the

Student Social Skills Survey (Appendix C). In this survey, students were asked to rate

themselves and their peers on their social skills and school behaviors. Lastly, the researchers

developed an Observation Checklist (Appendix B). The checklist was used in the researchers

respective classrooms for the purpose of recording the frequency of disruptive behaviors. All of

the instruments were used to gather data and record evidence of disruptive behaviors in the

classrooms.

Forty-five teachers were surveyed at the three sites using the Teacher Social Skills

Survey (Appendix A). A summary of the results is presented in Figure 1. When analyzing the

data reported from the Teacher Social Skills Surveys (Figures 1, 2 and 3), it became evident that

not listening, talking out of turn, and not keeping hands to themselves were the most frequently

occurring disruptive behaviors. Of the 45 teachers surveyed, 67% report that the occurrence of

students not listening takes place in their classroom at a frequency of once an hour. Talking out

of turn is reported by 56% of the teachers to occur once an hour. Not keeping hands to

themselves occurs at a less frequent rate, once per day, but is reported as a problem by 47% of

the teachers surveyed (see Figure 1).

Statement	Once an hour	Once a day	Once a week	Once a month	Never
1.Being wild and/or silly	20%	51%	13%	13%	2%
2.Not keeping hands to him/herself	29%	47%	9%	13%	2%
3.Not listening	67%	31%	2%	0%	0%
4.Talking out of turn	56%	33%	4%	18%	0%
5.Showing aggressive behavior; pushing, hitting, kicking, etc.	0%	27%	27%	24%	22%
6.Name calling	2%	20%	24%	33%	20%
7.Tattling	24%	22%	33%	16%	4%
8 Lying	4%	16%	33%	33%	13%

Figure 1. Results of Teacher Social Skills Survey.
Percentage of teachers reporting frequency of specified behaviors, September 2000. N=45

	SA	A	U	D	SD
1. Social skills should be taught and practiced in the home.	96%	4%	0%	0%	0%
2. Social skills should be taught and practiced in the classroom.	78%	18%	4%	0%	0%
3. Lack of social skills creates a negative classroom climate.	80%	16%	4%	0%	0%
4. Off-task behaviors interfere with the child's learning.	82%	18%	0%	0%	0%
5. Off-task behaviors interfere with other students learning.	76%	24%	0%	0%	0%
6. Students are able to work in cooperative groups.	36%	49%	9%	4%	2%
7. Students demonstrate polite manners.	11%	51%	18%	18%	2%
8. Students are respectful of adult authority.	20%	47%	18%	16%	0%

Figure 2. Results from the Teacher Social Skills Survey. September, 2000. N=45

Of the teachers surveyed, 96% strongly agreed that social skills should be taught and practiced in the home. Another 78% believe that social skills should be taught and practiced in the classroom. Eighty-two percent of the teachers' report that off-task behaviors interfere with the students learning and 78% believe that the off-task behaviors also interfere with other students learning.

The data becomes more meaningful when the responses from the short answer portion of the Teacher Social Skills Survey (Appendix A) are also considered. A summary of these results is as follows in Figure 3.

1. Do you actively teach social skills in your room?

Teachers' Responses	Number of teachers for each
Yes	37
No	8

2. If you do teach social skills, what model/program do you use?

Teachers' Responses	Number of teachers for each
Their own	20
Second Step	5
None	4
Character Counts	4
Conflict Management	3
Making Good Choices	2
Peacemaking	2
Behavior Modification	1
Creekside Rights and Responsibilities	1
A, B, C	1
Responsive Classroom	1
Life skills	1

3. Have you created your own model/program for teaching social skills and if so, what do you do?

Teachers' Responses	Number of teachers for each
No	20
Discussion	8
Modeling	7
Classroom Management	6
Expectations/Rules	4
Positive Reinforcement	3
Role-playing	3
Class community	3
Practicing	2
Class meetings	2
Reflection	2
Literature	2
Cooperative learning	1

4. Does social skill instruction take place on a regular basis in your classroom? Please indicate how often.

Teachers' Responses	Number of teachers for each
When appropriate	19
Every day	13
Once a week	9
Never	4
Three times a week	2
Once a month	1

5. In what ways do you allow time for students to respond to instruction of social skills and how?

Teachers' responses	Number of teachers for each
Discussion	22
None	15
Role-playing	12
Journal	5
Peer interactions	5
Wait time	2
Pictures	2
Cooperative Learning	2
Class meetings	2
Peer reinforcement	1
Conferencing	1
Worksheets	1
Games	1
Opinion Polls	1
Acknowledgement cards	1

6. In what ways do you allow time for students to reflect to instruction of social skills and how?

Teachers' Responses	Number of teachers for each
None	17
Journaling	16
Discussion	13
Time out	5
Wait time	4
Class meeting	3
Conferencing	2
Draw feelings	1
Letter home	1
Self-evaluation	1

7. What amount of time is provided to practice social skills instruction and how?

Teachers' responses	Number of teachers for each
Modeling	8
As needed	8
Role-playing	7
30 minutes a week	6
15 minutes a day	5
15 minutes a week	4
No time	4
All day	3
Very little	3
Not sure	1
Class meeting	1
Conflict management	1

8. How do students have a voice in establishing expectations for classroom behavior?

Teachers' responses	Number of teachers for each
Writing class rules	23
Class meetings	8
They don't	8
Voicing opinions	2
Contract	2
Problem solving	1
Cooperative groups	1

9. How do your students have a sense of ownership in your classroom?

Teachers' responses	Number of teachers for each
Setting up class rules	13
Various ways	12
They don't	8
Weekly jobs	7
Organizing the classroom	5
Caring for class supplies	3
Display students' work	2
Decision making	2

10. If you were only able to teach one social skill, which one would you choose and why?

Teachers' response	Number of teachers for each
Respect	28
"Golden rule"	3
"I messages"	2
Self-awareness	2
Personal best	1
Good listening	1
Sharing	1
Hands to yourself	1
Kindness	1
Value individual differences	1
Perseverance	1

Figure 3. Summary of responses from the Teacher Social Skills Survey – short answer portion. September, 2000. N = 45

Although 78% of the teachers surveyed feel that social skills should be taught at school and 43% report that they do teach social skills, when asked how often they teach social skills the most frequent response was "when appropriate". This indicates that social skills instruction is not taking place on a regular and consistent manner. Students are also only given limited opportunities to respond to and reflect on the social skill instruction. The researchers also found that many teachers interpreted social skills as various forms of classroom management.

The researchers also gathered qualitative evidence of disruptive behaviors at the site-based schools through the short answer portion of the Teacher Social Skills Survey (Appendix A). Although thirty-seven of the forty-five teachers surveyed commented that they actively teach social skills in their classroom; an overwhelming number of teachers do not have a set program to follow. Likewise, according to a majority of teacher responses, social skills are not explicitly taught on a day-to-day basis, rather they are addressed as problems occur in the classroom setting. Nearly half the teachers surveyed reported they do not allow time for reflection

Evidence of disruptive behaviors was also gathered from the Student Behavior

Observation Checklists (Appendix B) that the researchers used in their classrooms. Seventy-six

students in the first, third, and fifth grade classes were observed for thirty-minute period during a

cooperative group activity. This observation occurred during the beginning phases of the action

research program. A trained observer recorded the frequency of the disruptive behaviors.

Results of the Student Behavior Observation Checklists (Appendix B) are shown in Figures 4, 5,

6, and 7.
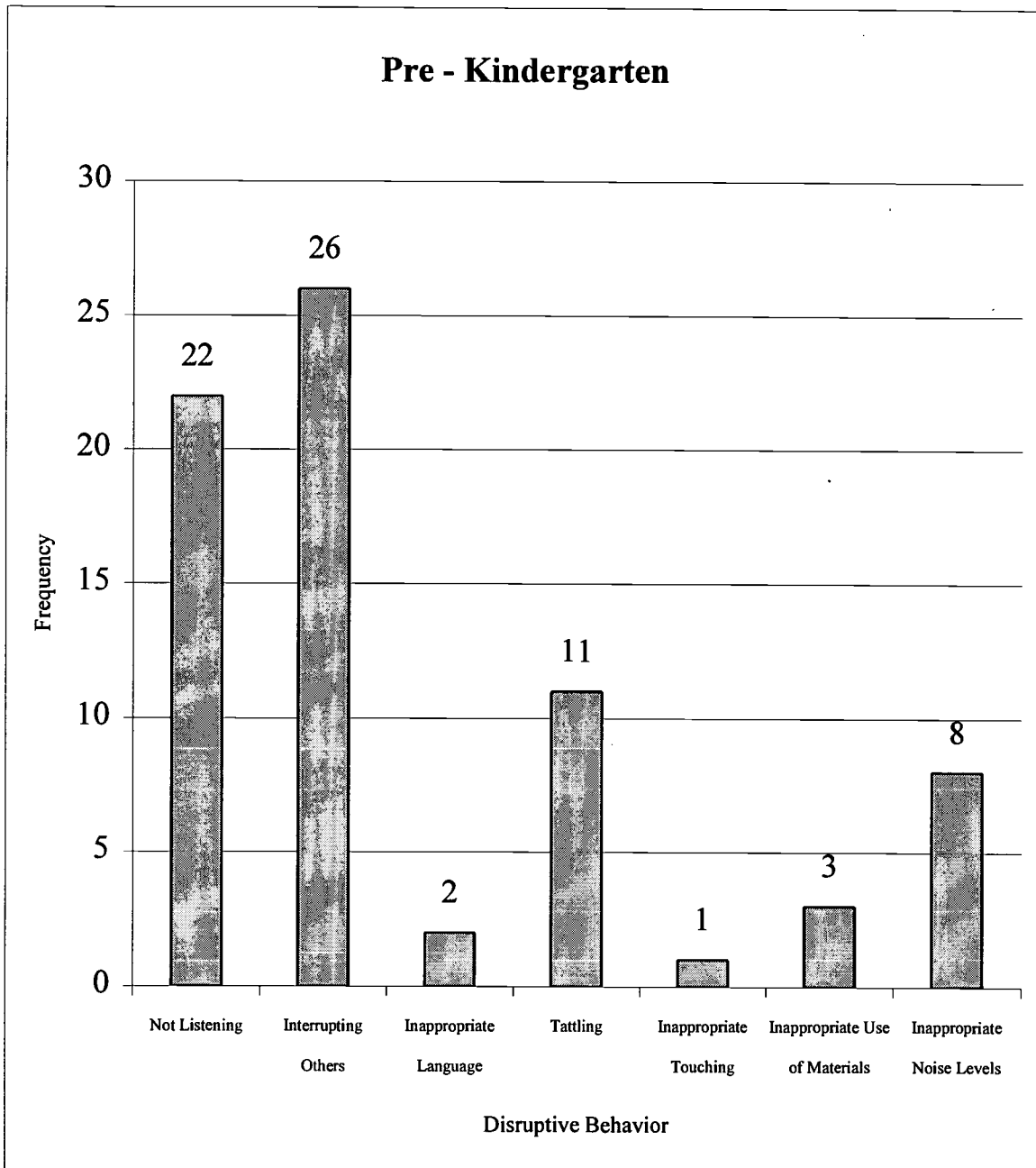
Pre - Kindergarten

Figure 4. Frequency of specified behaviors occurring in a kindergarten classroom during a thirty-minute period. September, 2000.

Pre - 1st Grade
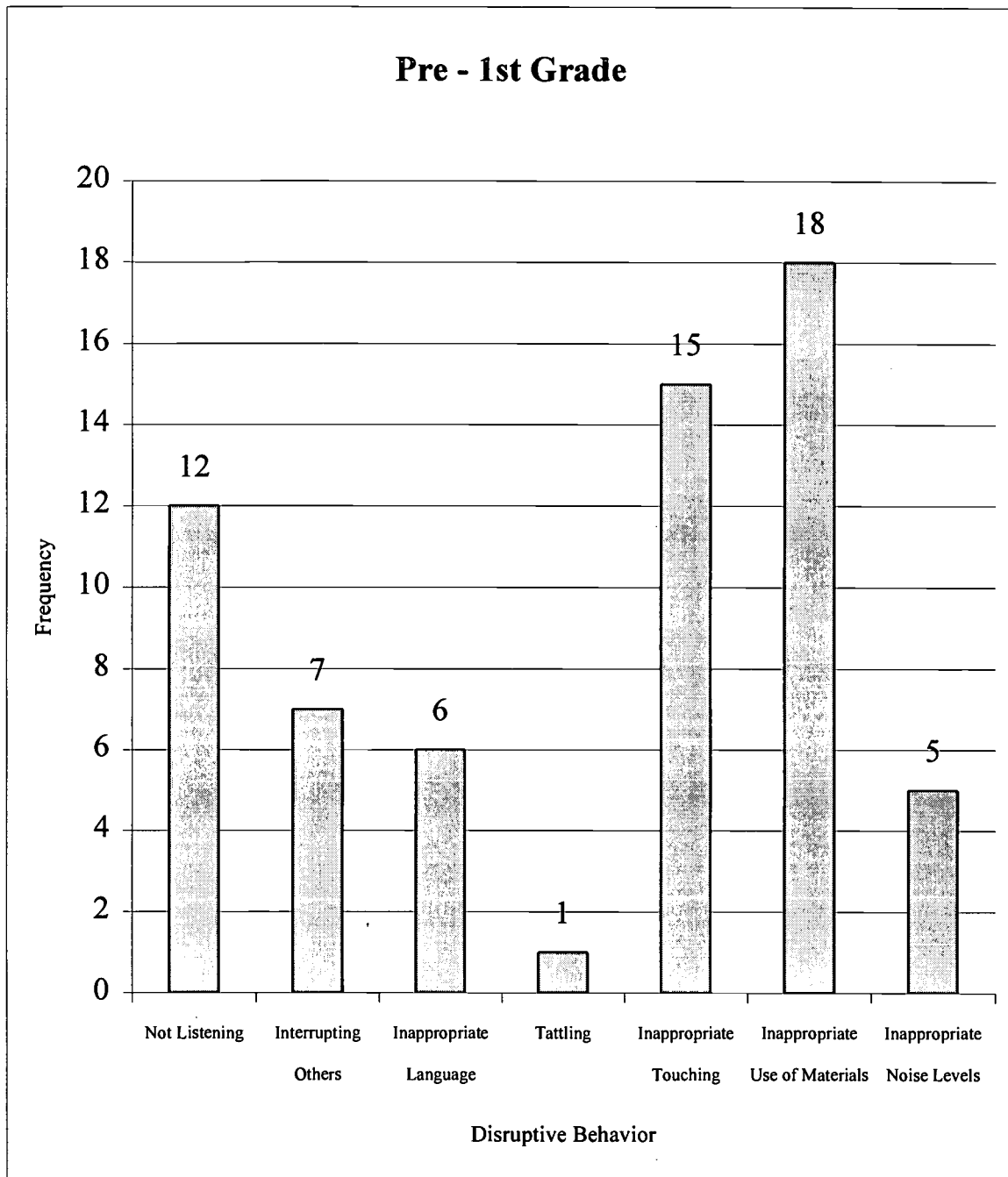

Figure 5. Frequency of specified behaviors occurring in a first grade classroom during a thirty-minute period. September, 2000.

Pre - 3rd Grade
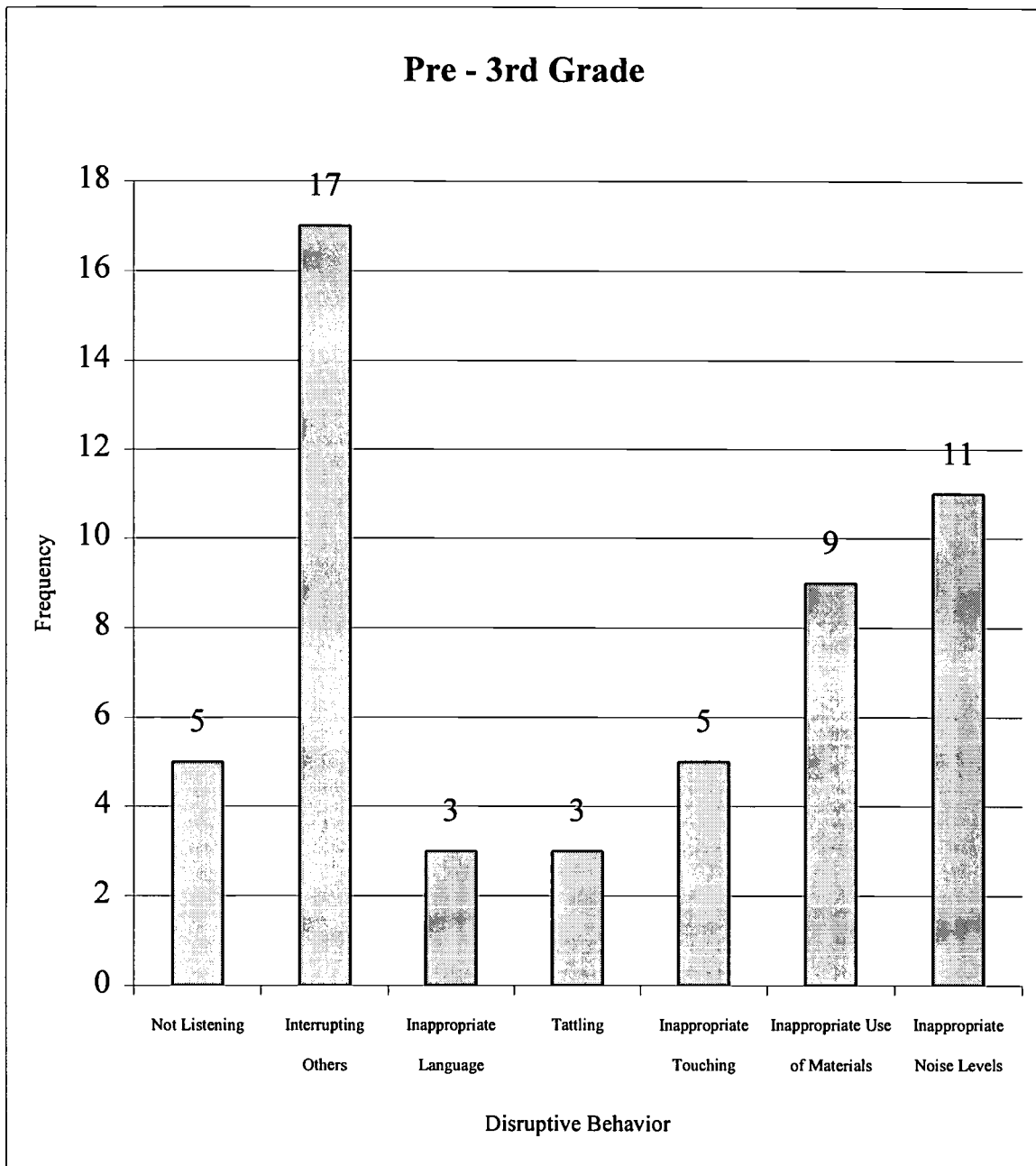
Figure 6. Frequency of specified behaviors occurring in a third grade classroom during a thirty-minute period. September, 2000.
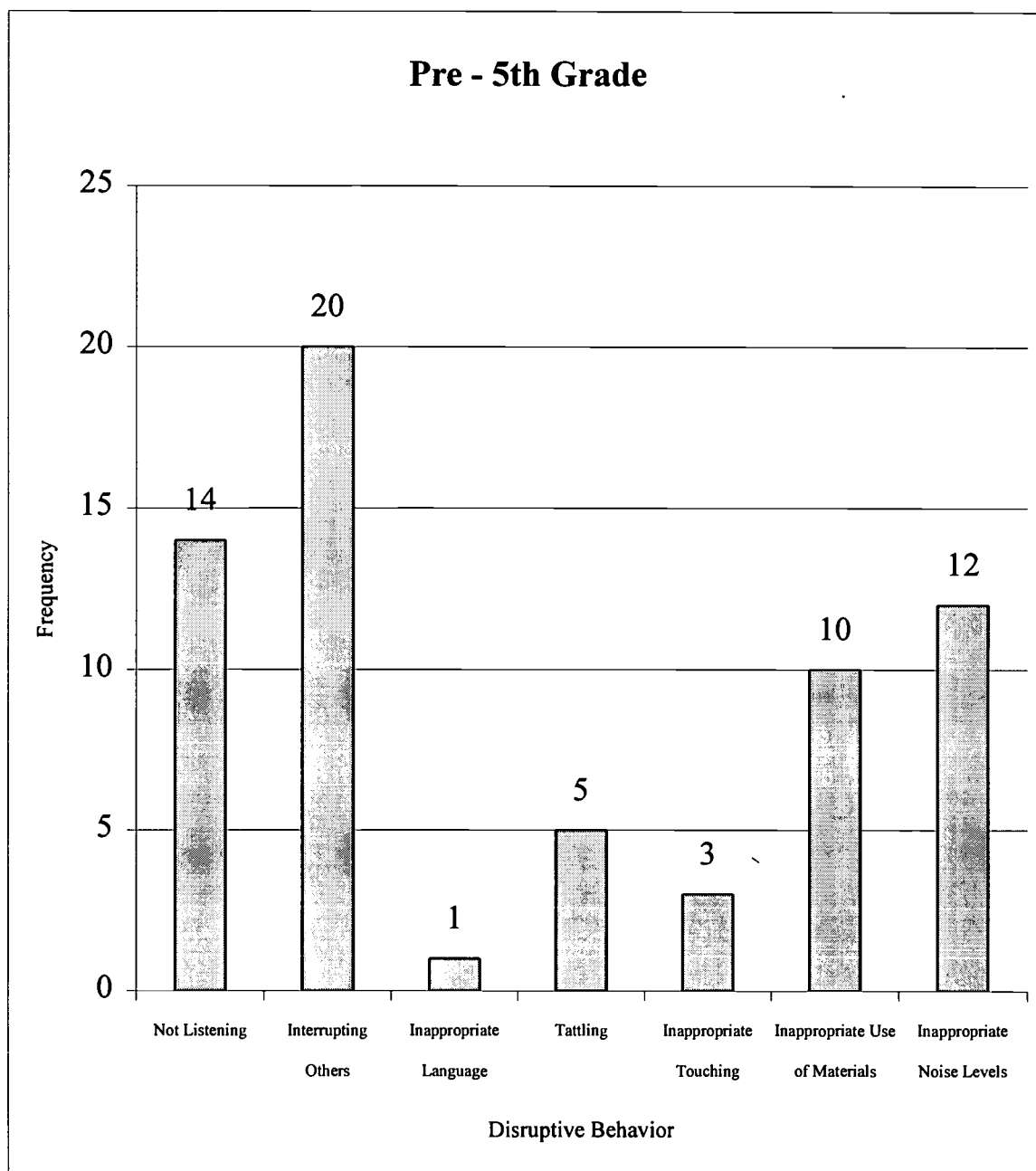
Pre - 5th Grade

Figure 7. Frequency of specified behaviors occurring in a fifth grade classroom during a thirty-minute period. September, 2000.

During the observations, four of the targeted behaviors occurred significantly more often than the other behaviors. The off-task behaviors, which were more prevalent, included interrupting others, inappropriate use of material, inappropriate noise level, and not listening. The final instrument used to collect data for problem evidence was the Student Social Skills Survey (Appendix C). The Student Social Skills Survey (Appendix C) requested that students rate their own behavior and their classmates' behavior. The scale used was *always*, *sometimes*, and *never*. A summary of the results follows in Figures 8 and 9.

	Always	Sometimes	Never
1. Students always raise their hands before talking.	38%	58%	4%
2. Students in our class use inside voices.	35%	58%	7%
3. Students in our class are good at taking turns.	62%	36%	2%
4. Students in our class encourage and help each other.	42%	49%	9%
5. Students in our class are careful with materials.	80%	18%	2%
6. Students in our class put materials away when they are done.	62%	35%	4%
7. Students are respectful of adults.	69%	25%	5%
8. Students are respectful of other students.	45%	51%	4%
9. Students are able to solve conflicts by talking about it, ignoring, or walking away.	42%	40%	20%
10. Students get into fights in the classroom and/or playground.	5%	40%	56%
11. Students in our class don't share.	7%	16%	76%
12. Students in our class are bossy.	9%	20%	71%
13. Students in our class scare others.	11%	20%	69%

Figure 8. Results of the Student Social Skills Survey. September, 2000

	Always	Sometimes	Never
1. When someone is talking, I wait my turn.	80%	18%	2%
2. I use a quiet voice when working in the classroom.	71%	25%	4%
3. I take turns and share materials.	80%	20%	0%
4. I encourage and help others.	60%	38%	2%
5. I put materials back where they belong.	85%	13%	2%
6. I use the words "please" and "thank you" with my friends and adults.	65%	29%	5%
7. When I have a problem with another student, I talk to them about it.	42%	47%	11%
8. If I can't solve a conflict by talking with the person, I walk away way or talk to the teacher.	49%	40%	11%
9. I know the difference between tattling and telling the teacher some-thing important.	69%	27%	4%
10. During independent work, I get my assignments finished.	55%	42%	4%
11. When I finished my assignments, I know what I should do.	69%	25%	5%
12. During free time I choose appropriate activities.	84%	16%	0%
13. I feel comfortable sharing my ideas in the classroom.	49%	47%	4%
14. I feel safe in my classroom.	76%	20%	4%
15. I have friends in my classroom.	73%	25%	4%

Figure 9. Results of the Student Social Skills Survey. September, 2000

When reviewing the data gathered from the Student Social Skills Survey the researchers found some significant findings. Thirty percent of the students surveyed indicated that they perceive themselves and their classmates as not always respectful towards adults.

Several questions focused on how students deal with conflict and the occurrence of aggressive behaviors. When students were asked how they perceive their own responses to a conflict with other students, 91% indicated they always talk to their peers, walk away from the conflict, or tell the teacher. However, nearly half of all students surveyed perceived their class as a whole as having a tendency to get into fights in the classroom and or on the playground. Interestingly, 22% of teachers surveyed responded that aggressive behavior such as pushing, hitting, or kicking is never observed in the classroom.

An analysis of the Teacher Social Skills Surveys (Figures 1, 2 and 3) and the Student Social Skills Surveys (Figures 8 and 9) yielded a significant observation. When asked if students wait their turn when someone is talking, 80% of students surveyed answered they always wait and 18% reported they sometimes waited their turn. However, 56% of the teachers surveyed indicate that talking out of turn occurs at a frequency of at least one time each hour of the school day.

<div align="center">Probable Cause</div>

Disruptive behaviors in the classroom plague many teachers. Much research has been conducted in order to determine why students engage in these types of behaviors. According to Costa, Bellanca, and Fogarty (1992), as the number of students lacking in knowledge about how to behave appropriately increases, the less time teachers have to spend on academic work. "More time is spent on correcting negative behavior, stopping for interruptions, and managing conflicts," (p. 201).

Costa, Bellanca, & Fogarty (1992) state that there are three factors that have contributed to in an increase in disruptive behaviors: the first contributing factor is the increase of single-parent families. It is not that parents are bad parents; they just do not have the time or energy to properly supervise their children, model positive values, communicate expected behavior, correct or redirect misbehavior, and teach appropriate social skills. Parents are "struggling to earn the dollars to keep the family fed and clothed. The result is more students arriving at the school house door without the basic social skills in place," (p. 202). The second factor causing disruptive behaviors is television models. The adult models that children observe on television use uncaring and violent behaviors to solve problems. The last contributing factor is an unclear focus on values in school as left students without any guidance regarding appropriate moral development.

Another significant cause leading to disruptive behaviors is lack of academic success. According to Kauffman and Burbach (1997), placing students in an instructional setting in which they cannot experience academic success leads to an increase in disruptive behaviors. Many times in today's society, students are pushed forward to the next grade level before they are ready, or they are placed in a class without specific special services needed for success. Research has shown that when students are provided opportunities to experience academic and social success their behavior improves (Cotton, 1997). For example, 63% of third graders at school A and 48% of fifth graders at school A performed below standards on the Illinois Standards Achievement for reading in the 1999-2000 school year, (State School Report Card A, 2000).

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

Research indicates that the use of: conflict management, behavior modification, positive behavior support, functional assessment, responsive classroom approach, judicious discipline, open class meetings, direct instruction, conflict resolution, journal reflections, and cooperative learning, will result in a decrease of disruptive classroom behaviors. Support can be found in professional literature that the preceding interventions will also help to foster a warm and caring environment. Engaging students in activities that promote self-awareness, cooperation, personal values, and the development of self-help skills has been proven to be successful for decreasing off-task behavior.

Conflict Managers

Many schools from the United States, Great Britain, Canada, and elsewhere have implemented a conflict manager program in their schools. Conflict managers are students who have been selected by their peers. They have been trained to offer help to resolve conflicts that start in the classroom, hallways, or recess during school. If a problem arises between students, "conflict managers help them by using a problem-solving process to clarify the nature of the dispute and to reach a solution satisfactory to both students" (Drew, 1987, p. 12). Conflict manager programs have been found to have many positive results. "A principal in Lancaster, Pennsylvania estimates that there has been a greater than 75 % drop in the number of incidents that make their way into his office" (Drew, 1987, p. 13) due to implementing this peer program. In addition, the conflict managers themselves have benefited from going through the training and

helping others. Teachers have responded noticing an increase in self-esteem as well as language skills in these students.

Behavior Modification

Researchers have identified behavior modification to be an effective intervention for dealing with classroom misconduct (Cotton, 1997). Brophy describes behavior modification as actively involving the students in "planning and shaping their own behavior" (Cotton, 1997, p. 3). This is accomplished through the use of contracts with their teachers and exposure to specific activities. These activities are designed to help them actively monitor and evaluate their own behavior, learn techniques of self-control and problem solving, and to set goals and reinforce themselves for achieving these goals. The reinforcement is contingent on the performance and is given sparingly (Cotton, 1997).

Positive Behavior Support (PBS) and Functional Assessment (FA)

Positive behavioral support (PBS) includes long-term strategies to reduce inappropriate behavior, teach more appropriate behavior and the necessary supports for successful outcomes (Warger, 1999). The PBS model is used along with functional assessment (FA) to gather information to further understand a student's problem behavior. Functional assessment (FA) allows teachers to design an appropriate intervention plan to improve the social and behavioral performance of each child. The Office of Special Education Programs agrees that these approaches are effective in assisting students with challenging behaviors (Warger, 1999). Effective Behavioral Support is one PBS model, which emphasizes a school-wide system that defines, encourages, and teaches appropriate behavior in children in elementary and middle schools. Research studies have shown that when Effective Behavioral Support strategies are implemented school-wide, children benefit by having an environment that is conducive to

learning. In 1997, at a middle School in Oregon, there was a 42% decrease in office referrals during the course of a year after implementing an Effective Behavioral Support Program (Warger, 1999). The students tend to learn more about their own behavior, learn to work cooperatively, and support each other as a community (Warger, 1999).

Responsive Classroom Approach

The Responsive Classroom Approach is a social curriculum that acknowledges a students' need to feel pleasure and significance as a member of the classroom community. There is an emphasis placed on instruction in the social skills of cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control within the context of daily classroom life. There are seven major components of the Responsive Classroom Approach. These are morning meetings, rules and logical consequences, guided discovery, classroom organization, academic choice, assessment and reporting to parents (Elliot, 1999).

A study was conducted from 1996-1998 with first, second, third, fourth and fifth graders in two school districts. One of the schools used the Responsive Classroom Approach and the other was the control group. The study assessed three areas: socials skills, problem behaviors, and academic achievement. Assessments took place in the fall of 1996, in the spring and fall of 1997, and the last assessment took place in the spring of 1998. The students that participated in the study attended an urban, citywide Chapter 1 school that had the second highest level of poverty of all the schools in the district. Seventy-five percent of the students came from a low socio-economic level, and 95.4 % qualified for reduced or free lunches (Elliot, 1999).

The result of the study showed that the students who were exposed to the Responsive Classroom Approach improved their social skills and classroom behavior. Over the two year period teachers reported that 38 % of students involved in the study showed an increases in

social skills, while those teachers that were part of the control group only reported that 25% of their students showed an increase in social skills. More significantly, teachers that participated in the study stated that 30% of the students showed a decrease in their problem behaviors. Only a little more than 10% of students whose teachers were in the control group showed a decrease in their problem behaviors. This data makes sense: greater social skills lead to fewer problem behaviors in the classroom. Students were also given the opportunity to rate their improvement. Of the students involved in the study, 42% responded that their classroom behavior had improved over the course of the study. When students in the control group where questioned about their classroom behavior over the two-year period, only 18% reported an improvement in their classroom behavior (Elliott, 1999).

Judicious Discipline and Open Class Meetings

Judicious Discipline is a comprehensive approach to democratic classroom management. It helps students learn how to act respectfully and responsibly. This approach uses a step-by-step process and class meetings as its framework. Judicious Discipline leads to a decrease in dropout rate, acts of violence and referrals to the office, and an increase in levels of daily attendance (Landau & Gathercoal, 2000).

A study conducted by Landau and Gathercoal in Minnesota focused on assessing students' attitudes towards school and how the Judicious Discipline program was affecting them. The study took place in sixth-grade classrooms only. Surveys were used to determine stages of social development evident in the students who were participating in the study. The four possible stages that became evident from the questionnaires were dependence, rebellion, cohesion, and autonomy. The survey showed that most students were at similar stages of social development at the beginning of the study. By February of 1996, changes were already

becoming evident from the surveys. Results indicated that students participating in the study were beginning to feel more empowered and had a greater sense of belonging to the group. By May 1996, it became apparent that the class meetings had made a significant difference in students' attitudes. Those students whose teachers and continued to use class meetings maintained high levels of student autonomy. However, those students whose teachers had failed to continue to use the class meetings in their classrooms regressed to levels of dependence and rebellion (Landau & Gathercoal, 2000).

Judicious Discipline has led to many positive outcomes for those teachers and students involved in the study. Students had the opportunity to journal about their feelings and one journal entry provides a wonderful example of the positive effects of the class-meeting component of the program. "At class meetings we have time to talk about problems and concerns. We also decide how we want to do things. Class meetings are good for learning new stuff. They are also good for solving problems" (Landau & Gathercoal, 2000, p. 452).

Glasser (1992) describes open meetings as regularly scheduled times when all the students and the teacher sit together to discuss important topics. During open class meetings, each member has the opportunity to express his/her own thoughts and feelings. In addition, students develop the attitudes and skills that are necessary to listen to the thoughts and feelings of others (Emmett et al., 1996). The goal of the open meeting is to model and practice a variety of problem-solving strategies and social skills.

There are many attitudes and skills that are practiced and improved through open meeting participation. Students learn to trust and depend on each other to help solve problems and work through their feelings. When trust is established and students are given the opportunity to use group problem-solving skills, there is a decrease in the need for teacher intervention due to

conflicts (Emmett et al., 1996). According to Schneider, "A significant part of moral development comes through dialogue, reflecting on experience, and looking at how our behaviors affect others" (Schneider, 2000, p. 23). During class meetings, students are given opportunities to suggest topics as well as generate solution strategies.

Direct Instruction of Social Skills

Social skill instruction works best in the direct instruction transfer model developed by Johnson and Johnson. This model includes six key steps: the hook, the lesson, the practice or follow-up, the reflection or discussion, feedback and celebration, and transfer (Costa, Bellanca, & Fogarty, 1992). Direct instruction should provide students with the necessary foundation that enables them to mutually respect one another. The direct instruction model makes abstract social skills more concrete. Students learn specific behaviors associated with certain social skills, then practice using the skills, self-evaluate their own progress, and experience being in an environment where "caring becomes an authentic weave in the fabric of their school-life tapestry, not an isolated afterthought," (Costa, Bellanca, & Fogarty, 1992, p. 206). It is important for our classrooms to be safe environments where students feel comfortable taking risks in order to reach and to excel beyond their own perceived abilities. Each student should feel valued and important in the classroom.

Conflict Resolution

Teaching conflict resolution strategies is one effective way to reduce negative classroom behaviors. According to Drew (1987), by applying these strategies, a student learns to use "I-messages" to describe how he/she feels, identifies what the problem is, and finds solutions. By teaching conflict resolution strategies, students are empowered to solve their own conflicts without disrupting the class or their teacher. The conflict resolution method is based on a

problem-solving approach. It involves the teacher modeling conflict resolution, breaking the

parts up into teachable steps, and setting time aside to teach and role-play situations (Drew,

1987).

Journaling and Reflection

There are many benefits to using journal writing as a form of reflection. According to

Routman (1991),"Journals provide a non-threatening place to explore learnings, feelings,

happenings, and language through writing," (p. 197). Another educational researcher, Fogarty

(1997) from Brain Compatible Classrooms, states, "Without the benefit of reflection, much of

the initial learning could be lost. The reflection gives students time to scrutinize, observe, and

question. In the reflection phase of learning, the mind sorts and synthesizes, rearranges and

reconnects," (p. 184). When students are encouraged to keep journals they often make

discoveries about themselves.

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative Learning groups are composed of two to five students that are grouped

together to work toward a common goal. The teacher may select the group, the students may

select the group, or the group may be selected for a specific interest in the same topic.

Cooperative learning creates a classroom in which "student achievement, self-esteem,

responsibility, high-level thinking, and favorable attitudes towards school increase dramatically,"

(Bellanca & Fogarty, 1991, p. 2). Through cooperative learning, personal and social

responsibility can be developed. Research has proven that cooperative learning can be an

effective method for teaching social skills (Costa, Bellanca, & Fogarty, 1992). Students who are

given opportunities to work in cooperative learning groups are more likely to develop positive

peer relationships. Students also display an increase in positive social behaviors. Researchers,

including Brophy (1983) and Gottfredson (1986) as cited in Cotton (1997), have found that the use of cooperative learning in the classroom can increase student task engagement and familiarize the students with the benefits of working together, which reduces the incidence of misbehavior.

Teachers can use cooperative learning to teach social skills, reduce stress and conflict, develop higher order thinking skills, problem solve, and develop responsibility. Students can be intrinsically motivated to engage cooperatively in learning activities when those activities focus on problems the students feel a need to solve (Cangelosi, 1997). Students can also work together in practice groups when they review, drill, and provide one another with feedback (Cangelosi, 1997). "Cooperative learning is a vehicle through which personal and social responsibility can be developed and reinforced," (Costa, Bellanca, & Forgery, 1992, p. 218). Cooperative learning helps students realize that their actions affect others as well as themselves. The social skills they acquire through cooperative learning makes them "better prepared for future, academic, social, and occupational endeavors," (Costa, Bellanca, & Fogarty, 1992, p. 218).

After researching and reviewing a wide variety of possible solution strategies, the researchers decided to implement an action research program which includes the following strategies: open class meetings, direct instruction of social skills, and journal reflections, while-supporting the philosophy of cooperative learning. The researchers concluded that these strategies would be most effective in meeting the goal of the program, which is to decrease the frequency of disruptive classroom behaviors.

Project Objective

As a result of an increased emphasis on social skills instruction, weekly class meetings, and student self-reflection opportunities during the period of August 2000 to December 2000, the

kindergarten, first grade, third grade, and fifth grade students from the targeted classes will

decrease the frequency of off-task behaviors, as measured by researcher-developed Teacher

Social Skills Surveys (Appendix A), Student Behavior Observation Checklists (Appendix B),

Student Social Skills Surveys (Appendix C), and reviews of students' journal reflections.

Process Statements

In order to accomplish the project objective, the following processes will be

implemented:

1. Students will actively participate in social skills practice.

2. Students will be given the opportunity to discuss topics related to social skills during

weekly class meetings.

3. Students will reflect in a personal journal on a variety of issues related to social skills.

4. Researcher will provide a variety of social skills instruction.

Action Plan

Below is a compiled list of lesson plans that will be implemented in each researcher's classroom

in hopes to improve students' social skills.

Symbols:	References for Lesson Plans
No asterisk	Researchers' developed: Frydendall, P., LeWald, K., Walls, J., Zarring, B.
*	Lessons adapted from: Hall, A., Holder, B., Matthews, E., McDowell, M., Pyne, L., Walker, S., Welch, R., White, K. (1998). Character education: ideas and activities for the classroom. Greensboro, NC: Carson-Dellosa Publishing Company, Inc.
**	Lessons adapted from: Wilson, C. (1993). Room 14: a social language program. East Moline, IL: LinguiSystems, Inc.
***	Lessons adapted from: Classroom conflict resolution training for grades 3-6 (Rev. ed.). (1995) San Francisco, CA: The Community Board Program, Inc. (reference: Drew, N.)
****	Lessons adapted from: Second Steps, (1992) Seattle, WA: Committee for Children

Week One and Two: Responsibility

• Send home parent consent letters (Appendix D)

• Administer Student Social Skills Survey (Appendix C)

• Administer Teacher Social Skills Survey (Appendix A)

• Form social skills base groups (Lucky Charms)

• Administer Student Behavior Observation Checklist (Appendix B)

1. Room Walk

Objective: Learn important ways to be responsible at school.

Procedure: Whole-group discussion to generate ways to be responsible.

2. Class Rules

Objective: Students will generate rules that they feel are safe and fair in a classroom setting.

Procedure: Whole-group lesson. Students brainstorm rules for classroom. Rules are listed,

voted upon, and discussed.

- Class Meeting and journaling

3. School Responsibility *

Objective: To learn about the responsibilities of various school staff members.

Procedure: Students will speak to staff members; learn about their responsibilities and

consequences if the job is not done on time; students will create a class book.

4. Responsibility Flower *

Objective: To be dependable and accountable at home.

Procedure: Discuss responsibilities students have at home. Students make a responsibility

flower indicating each of their home responsibilities on a petal. Compare and contrast school and home responsibilities for students.

- Class meeting and journaling

Week Three: Listening

1. Communicating

Objective: Demonstrate appropriate noise levels when speaking to others. Students will compare ways to communicate and discover the importance of good communication skills.

Procedure: Class discussion: "What is communication?"

Students practice communicating in a variety of ways and then decide what makes a good communicator.

2. Being a good listener **

Objective: To use appropriate body language to show one is listening.

Procedure: Teacher reads story about Bonnie's Dad to whole class. Students role play examples and non-examples of listening skills in cooperative groups, such as: eye contact, being still, nodding one's head, thinking about what the speaker is saying, and asking questions.

3. Robbery Report ***

Objective: To compare and contrast what one remembers when one is actively listening versus passively listening.

Procedure: Teacher reads a detailed description of a robbery that has taken place describing what the robber looked like. Students are asked to raise hand and retell teacher the details he/she remembers. Then teacher asks students to pay attention very closely as he/she reads the report once more. Students are asked to draw a picture of the robber the second time around in detail to create a wanted poster. Students write down details of robber below picture.

- Class Meeting and journaling time

Week Four and Five: Respect

1. Golden Rule *

Objective: Learning that respect is treating others the way you would like to be treated.

Procedure: Whole group lesson. Discuss, "What does the Golden Rule mean?" Students

brainstorm in cooperative groups the way they would like to be treated in school and at recess.

Share brainstorms. Have students write, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,"

on a sheet of paper. Next, have each child carefully squeeze a thin line of glue around the quote.

Then shake gold glitter on glue. This makes a great bulletin board.

2. Manners = Respect *

Objective: Learning to be considerate of other people's feelings.

Procedure: As a whole-class activity, ask students what they think good manners are. Have

students brainstorm good manners words that they can use. Give each student a situation and

have him/her role-play his/her scene using good manners.

- Class meeting and journaling

3. Recycle for Respect *

Objective: Recognizing the value of property and the environment

Procedure: Students brainstorm how people disrespect and respect the environment. Teacher

writes down comments. Students list items that can be recycled. Then, allow the students to

make "recycled art", such as a plant pot from an old milk carton. Provide potting soil and small

rooted plant for the students to plants.

- Class meeting and journaling

Week Six: Empathy Training

1. Introduction to empathy ****

Objective: To introduce the students to what empathy is through the ability to name various emotions using physical and verbal clues.

Procedure: Teacher shows class a picture of a child and asks the class to answer questions about how the child is feeling. Next, class role-plays a game about pretend feelings. Using your voice, face, and body teacher should show students how you feel about something. Students should watch and guess how teacher is feeling. Next have students' role play situations and how one might feel in that situation.

2. Accepting differences ****

Objective: The students will be able to identify the similarities and differences of various cultures and people.

Procedure: Teacher reads a story to the class about a child who moves to the United States from another country. This student looks and acts differently than other students at the school. Have a class discussion on how "Ahn" is alike and how he is different from the other kids in school. Discuss teasing in school, and why it is wrong. Have students' journal about a time that they teased or were teased by others, and how it made them feel afterward. Activity: Learn about the culture in your town. Study a different culture from another place on the map.

- Class meeting and journaling

Week Seven: Introduction to Conflict Management

1. Encouraging others, using "I-Messages" ***

Objective: The students will be able to communicate their feelings using "I-Messages". They will also be able to distinguish better ways to communicate their feelings.

Procedure: Teacher tells class a story about two students who have a typical argument during class. Class discusses why the students reacted poorly, and how it probably made the students feel. In cooperative groups, students work on using "I messages" instead of "You messages". Give students time to practice and share.

2. Conflicting Feelings

Objective: Students will be able to identify conflicting feelings and explain the reason for their feelings.

Procedure: Teacher reads a story about a child that has two different feelings about a situation. Class discusses how child feels about his situation, and how he can communicate in a positive manner to the other child in the story.

Students will be given other scenarios about conflicting feelings; students need to decide and agree what those conflicting feelings are.

- Class meeting and journaling

Week Eight: Conflict Management

3. Identifying the problem ***

Objective: To develop skills in problem definition.

Procedure: Explain to class that before they can solve a conflict, they need to understand what the problem is. Read students a story about a child with a problem. Ask students to identify what the problem is, and how the child feels. Explain that some problems will be fairly simple and others will be more complicated. It's important to know what the problem is for each person, so a good resolution can be reached.

2. What Might Happen Next? ***

Objective: To see how different resolutions to a conflict may have different consequences.

Procedure: Read "What Might Happen Next?" to your students. Read the first solution. Ask for a volunteer to say what he/she thinks might happen next if this solutions were tried. Then ask for other opinions. Repeat this same procedure for each solution by asking a child to anticipate the consequences of a solution and its effectiveness.

- Class meeting and journaling

Week Nine: Resolving Conflicts

1. Resolve the Conflict ***

Objective: To demonstrate a complete conflict resolution process.

Procedure: Explain to students that they have learned steps to solving problems and now they are going to put all those steps together.

Step One:

Each person follows ground rules (classroom rules)

Step Two:

Taking turns, each person tells his/her side of the story using I-Messages.

(how he/she feels, what he/she wants)

Step Three

Each person restates what the problem is for the other person

Step Four

Both people suggest possible solutions

Step Five

Agree on a resolution

Put students into pairs. Give each group a conflict picture. Let them solve the problem by acting it out and following the steps. Change pictures and let kids practice using the steps several times.

- Class meeting and journaling

Week Ten and Eleven: Fairness

1.Fair and Square *

Objective: Students will be able to define what fairness means using a ruler

Procedure: In a whole group, discuss the term "fair and square". Talk with your students about the attributes of a square and point out that all four sides of a square are equal. Using rulers and pencils, have students work on drawing several squares that are different sizes. Afterward, talk about why squares might represent fairness and have each child write a sentence and draw a picture about something that is "fair and square". This can be done individually or as a group.

2. Story time

Objective: Students understand that fairness means equal; students use conflict management skills to create stories about fairness; reinforce writing skills.

Procedure: Give students story titles that have to do with using sharing skills. Let each child pick a story title. Have students write stories to go along with the chosen titles and then share the stories with the class.

- Class meeting and journaling

3. Our fair share!

Objective: Students will be able to recognize the rights of others and offer fair solutions to a given problem.

Procedure: Teacher reads a story to the class about a conflict at recess. The way to solve the problem is by sharing. Students discuss what the problem is, and what the characters are feeling.

Activity: Give the students something to be shared that is not equally divided yet, or not cut up. Ask the students to come up with a fair solution to sharing the item in their cooperative groups. Share outcomes from each group. Have a class vote on decision.

- Class meeting and journaling time.

Week Twelve: Honesty

1. Totem Poles of Honesty *

Objective: Students will be able to define honesty, and each will share a time when he/she was honest.

Procedure: Explain that in Native American cultures, honesty is stressed in daily living. Many believe that honesty helps create harmony in the tribe. A Native American totem pole contains carvings representing a community or tribe. Create class totem poles that depict the classroom community's pride in being honest. Give each child an oatmeal canister or can and construction paper. On one side, child draws his/her face. On the other side, have the child write a poem or a time when he/she was honest and how it made them feel. Attach canisters together in 4or 5 and put on display.

2. Signs of Honesty *

Objective: Students will be able to tell the difference between an honest and a dishonest act.

Procedures: Have students cut out honest and dishonest cards. Attach to craft sticks. Discuss the words honest and dishonest with the whole group. Tell the students several short honest and dishonest scenarios. Have children hold up the correct card after each scenario is read. Take time to discuss after the children have indicated their view of each situation. Ask the children

how the dishonest situations could be turned into honest ones. Have kids role-play a dishonest

situation in the cooperative group. Then have them make the situation an honest one.

- Class meeting and journaling

Week Thirteen: Self-Discipline

1. Role Playing

Objective: Students will understand that self-discipline means making good choices. They will

come up with strategies to be in charge of their own behavior.

Procedure: Students work in cooperative groups. Teacher hands out self-discipline situation

cards to each group. As each group acts out its situation, the rest of the class tells ways the

characters could show more self-discipline. The suggestions for improvement can be recorded

on large chart paper. Continue to display the suggestions so you can refer to them as you

encourage self-discipline daily in your classroom.

2. Simon Says

Objective: To practice staying in control.

Procedure: Play the game "Simon Says" with your class. Students are to obey only the

commands that are preceded by the words Simon Says. Continue to play until only one student

is left. Have students discuss how they had to use self-discipline to stay in control of their

listening, movement, etc.

3. Lilly's Mail *

Objective: Students will be able to come up with alternative goods habits for impatience and

temper tantrums.

Procedure: Read the story Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse by Kevin Henkes to your class. Tell

students you would like for each of them to give Lilly some advice by writing her a letter. Tell

students to include ways that Lilly can improve her behavior, things not to do again, how people

might feel when she acts as she does, and a compliment for something she did well. Have

students put letters in envelopes, and then let each student pick a letter to read to the class.

- Class meeting and journaling

<u>Week Fourteen: Catch up week for the researchers</u>

<u>Week Fifteen</u>

Wrap up social skills lessons.

Administer Student Behavior Observation Checklist (Appendix B)

CHAPTER 4

Historical Description of Intervention

The action research project entitled Decreasing Disruptive Behaviors through Social Skills Instruction was implemented in August 2000 and came to its conclusion in March of 2001. The objective of the study was to decrease the frequency of off-task behaviors exhibited by students in the targeted kindergarten, first grade, third grade and fifth grade classes. This was accomplished through the implementation of three processes: first, students were actively engaged in social skills practice, second, students were given the opportunity to discuss topics related to social skill instruction during weekly class meetings and finally, students were given ample time to reflect on a variety of issues related to social skills in their journals.

The researchers began their efforts to decrease disruptive behaviors of the students in their classrooms with direct instruction of social skills. As evidenced by the teacher surveys it was clear that the students at each site were lacking in the social skills necessary for them to be successful in the classroom. The social skills that were emphasized by the researchers were respect, responsibility, active listening and conflict management. During the time period from September 2000, when the implementation began, and March 2001, there were a number of observations made by the researchers regarding the action plan.

When reflecting upon the direct teaching of social skills the researchers found that the students were responsive and engaged throughout most of the lessons. The frequency of the lessons however, had to be modified. Originally, the researchers had planned on teaching two lessons per week. This proved to be very time consuming and had to be modified to only one lesson per week. This also explains why the study went longer than was initially anticipated.

Social skill instruction that took place in the kindergarten, first, and third grade classes was more well received than the instruction that was presented in the fifth grade class. The researcher in the fifth grade class from School A stated, "My students have come to me this year with many problems, they already have well established methods for dealing with problems in social situations." Although students were unenthusiastic about the idea of learning social skills, overall awareness of the targeted social skills did increase.

The second component of the action plan was a weekly class meeting. The researchers found that the class meetings were more time consuming than they had originally expected. Response by the students was mixed depending on the grade level.

The first and third grade classes had a wonderful experience with class meetings. The comments by the researchers and students alike relating to class meetings were very positive. Students commented and reflected on their feelings about class meetings. A student in the third grade class wrote in her journal, "We help solve each others' problems in class meetings!" The researcher from the first grade class at School C, reflected in her journal, "My students really enjoy and look forward to class meetings each week. It is really helping to develop a strong sense of community in my class."

In the kindergarten and fifth grade classes from School A, the meetings were more challenging to conduct. In the kindergarten class the researcher stated, "In the beginning, because of their age it was difficult for students to listen and discuss a specific topic without being distracted by unrelated thoughts and ideas." However, by the end of the research period the kindergarten students were better able to participate in class meetings.

In the fifth grade classroom at School A, the class meetings were not as successful due to the nature of the relationships that this particular group of students had established with each

other in previous years. It was nearly impossible for a majority of the students in the fifth grade class to listen and respect each other's comments. Documented in the researchers journal was the following statement, "Today was a disaster! They just wouldn't listen to each other, put-downs were constant among the students." The researcher changed the frequency of the class meetings to bi-weekly. This was done in an effort to allow students to develop and practice the social skills that they were lacking during the two weeks between the meetings. The researcher limited the discussions in the class meetings and intervened often to prevent students from acting inappropriately. Frequently meetings were cut short when students refused to cooperate. By the end of the research period the students' behaviors towards each other and their relationships had only slightly changed. Although the relationships have not significantly improved the students' awareness has increased. The researcher has frequently observed students pointing out inappropriate behavior to each other, which shows behavioral improvement.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

Student Social Skills Survey

The post survey of the researcher created Student Social Skills Survey (Appendix C), was given to the students in the targeted classrooms as the final component of the action research plan. The post survey results (Figures 10 and 11) showed that there were many areas in which there was marked growth and improvement. However, there were areas in which behavior did not improve. The researchers observed that the students were not consistent in the evaluations when answering questions relating to themselves and peers.

The researchers noticed that there were significant areas of improvement when comparing the pre and post survey. When students first answered the statement, *students in our class encourage and help each other*, only 28% responded always. On the post survey the

numbers increased to 38% of students who agree that peers in the class encourage and help each other. The number of students who chose *sometimes* as a response for the same statement increased significantly. On the pre-survey, 58% of the students answered *sometimes*. While on the post-survey, 71% of the students chose *sometimes*.

In addition to the improvement in the students' perceptions of their peers encouraging and helping others, students also indicated an increase in the instances of sharing in the classroom. For example, on the pre-survey, only 7% of the students felt that sharing *always* took place in the classroom. After the intervention 14% of students felt that sharing *always* takes place in the classroom. The response for *sometimes* increased from 16% on the pre-survey to 43% on the post-survey. Even more encouraging is the decrease in the number of students who responded that students in the class *never* share. At the time of the pre-survey, 77% of students responded that students in the class *never* share. There was a decrease of 43% of students indicating that their peers *never* share.

The Student Social Skills Survey (Appendix C) also asked students to respond to statements regarding their own behavior. On this assessment, there were also positive changes made in the students' perception of their own behavior. It was noticed that the number of students who choose *always* decreased. This could be attributed to a greater self-awareness. For example, 80% of the students initially responded that they *always* wait their turn, while only 73% of the students reported *always* waiting their turn on the post-survey. Only 18% said they *sometimes* raised their hands.

Another area of improvement on the Student Social Skills Survey (Appendix C) was in the use of words such as, please and thank you. The number of students who initially responded

that they *sometimes* say please and thank you was 29%. This increased to 43% after the implementation of the intervention.

During the analysis of the pre and post Student Social Skills Survey (Appendix C) in Figures 10 and 11, the researchers made another interesting observation. When evaluating the responses for statements regarding the behaviors of the students in their class to their own behaviors there was a discrepancy in students' perceptions. For example, the students were asked to respond to a statement regarding whether students raise their hands before talking, only 28% of the students reported that their classmates *always* raise their hand before talking. However, 73% of the students' responded that they *always* wait their turn when someone is talking. The researchers concluded that students perceive their own behavior as being better than that of their peers.

The researchers can also state that some students may not have clearly comprehended several key social skills vocabulary words included on the Student Social Skills Survey (Appendix C). This is evidenced by the significant discrepancy between the responses on the pre Student Social Skills Survey (Figures 8 and 9), and the pre Student Behavior Observation Checklist (Figures 4, 5, 6, and 7). Many of the student responses seemed to indicate that behavior problems did not exist in their classroom. For example, 80% of students reported that they *always* wait their turn. However, according to the Student Behavior Observation Checklist (Figures 4, 5, 6 and 7), all the researchers reported a high frequency of interruptions during a thirty-minute time period. In the four classrooms there were a total of 70 interruptions recorded during the thirty-minute time period.

	Always		Sometimes		Never	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
1. Students always raise their hands before talking.	38%	28%	58%	71%	4%	1%
2. Students in our class use inside voices.	35%	26%	58%	70%	7%	4%
3. Students in our class are good at taking turns.	62%	43%	36%	43%	2%	14%
4. Students in our class encourage and help each other.	42%	53%	49%	40%	9%	7%
5. Student in our class are careful with materials	80%	57%	18%	39%	2%	4%
6. Students in our class put materials away when they are done.	62%	41%	35%	50%	3%	9%
7. Students are respectful of adults.	70%	48%	25%	47%	5%	5%
8. Students are respectful of other students.	45%	37%	51%	55%	4%	8%
9. Students are able to solve conflicts by talking about, ignoring, or walking away.	42%	28%	40%	48%	18%	24%
10. Students get into fights in the classroom and/or playground.	5%	18%	39%	51%	56%	31%
11. Students in our class share.	7%	14%	16%	43%	76%	43%
12. Students in our class are bossy.	9%	22%	20%	40%	77%	38%
13. Students in our class scare others.	11%	11%	20%	25%	69%	64%

Figure 10. Results of the Student Social Skills Survey. September, 2000 and March, 2001.

	Always		Sometimes		Never	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
1. When someone is talking, I wait my turn.	80%	73%	18%	26%	2%	1%
2. I use a quiet voice when working in the classroom.	71%	66%	25%	33%	4%	1%
3. I take turns and share materials.	80%	79%	20%	21%	0%	0%
4. I encourage and help others.	60%	65%	38%	31%	2%	4%
5. I put materials back where they belong.	85%	77%	13%	19%	2%	4%
6. I use the words "please" and "thank you" with my friends and adults.	65%	57%	29%	43%	6%	0%
7. When I have a problem with another student, I talk to them about it.	42%	35%	47%	50%	11%	15%
8. If I can't solve a conflict with the person, I walk away or talk to the teacher.	49%	44%	40%	47%	11%	9%
9. I know the difference between tattling and telling the teacher something important.	69%	76%	27%	24%	4%	0%
10. During independent work, I get my assignments finished.	55%	51%	42%	49%	3%	0%
11. When I finish my assignments, I know what I should do.	69%	78%	25%	22%	6%	0%
12. During free time, I choose appropriate activities.	84%	75%	16%	23%	0%	2%
13. I feel comfortable sharing my ideas in the classroom.	49%	38%	47%	45%	4%	17%
14. I feel safe in my classroom.	76%	75%	20%	21%	4%	4%
15. I have friends in my classroom.	73%	88%	25%	9%	2%	3%

Figure 11. Results of the Student Social Skills Survey. September, 2000 and March, 2001.

Student Behavior Observation Checklist

The Student Behavior Observation Checklist (Appendix B) was used twice in each of the targeted classrooms. Once before the action plan began and then again at the end of the study. There were many significant improvements observed between the pre and post Student Observation Checklist (Appendix B), as shown in Figures 12, 13, 14, and 15.

In the kindergarten classroom, the most dramatic decrease occurred in not listening and interrupting others. Prior to the intervention, not listening occurred 22 times in a thirty -minute period, and interrupting others occurred 26 times in that same time period. These numbers decreased to 5 and 9 instances respectively. The kindergarten class decreased in the occurrence of inappropriate language, talking, and inappropriate noise level. The behaviors that did not improve were inappropriate touching and inappropriate use of materials.

In the first grade class similar results were observed. Not listening decreased from 12 to 10 occurrences in a thirty-minute period. In addition, there was a decrease in the instances of inappropriate behaviors such as: interrupting others, inappropriate language, inappropriate touching, and inappropriate use of materials. The frequencies of inappropriate noise levels increased from 5 occurrences in a thirty-minute period to 11 occurrences.

The behaviors of students in the third grade classroom improved in all areas except inappropriate noise level. The most significant behavioral improvements were observed in the categories of interrupting others and inappropriate touching.

The fifth grade classroom had significant improvements in several areas. The researcher observed a dramatic decrease in the area of interrupting others. Likewise, inappropriate noise levels were reduced by 80%. There was also a significant improvement in appropriate use of materials in the fifth grade classroom. One area in which the fifth grade classroom did not

improve was inappropriate touching. The initial observation indicated that inappropriate touching took place three times in a 30-minute period. Despite the social skills lessons conducted in the classroom, at the end of the study the researcher observed inappropriate touching ten times in the 30- minute period. The researcher from the fifth grade class at School A has stated that students have had difficulty transferring social skills to their relationships with classmates who are not their friends. Overall, the intervention plan had a positive effect on the majority of the students in the fifth grade classroom.

Pre/Post - Kindergarten
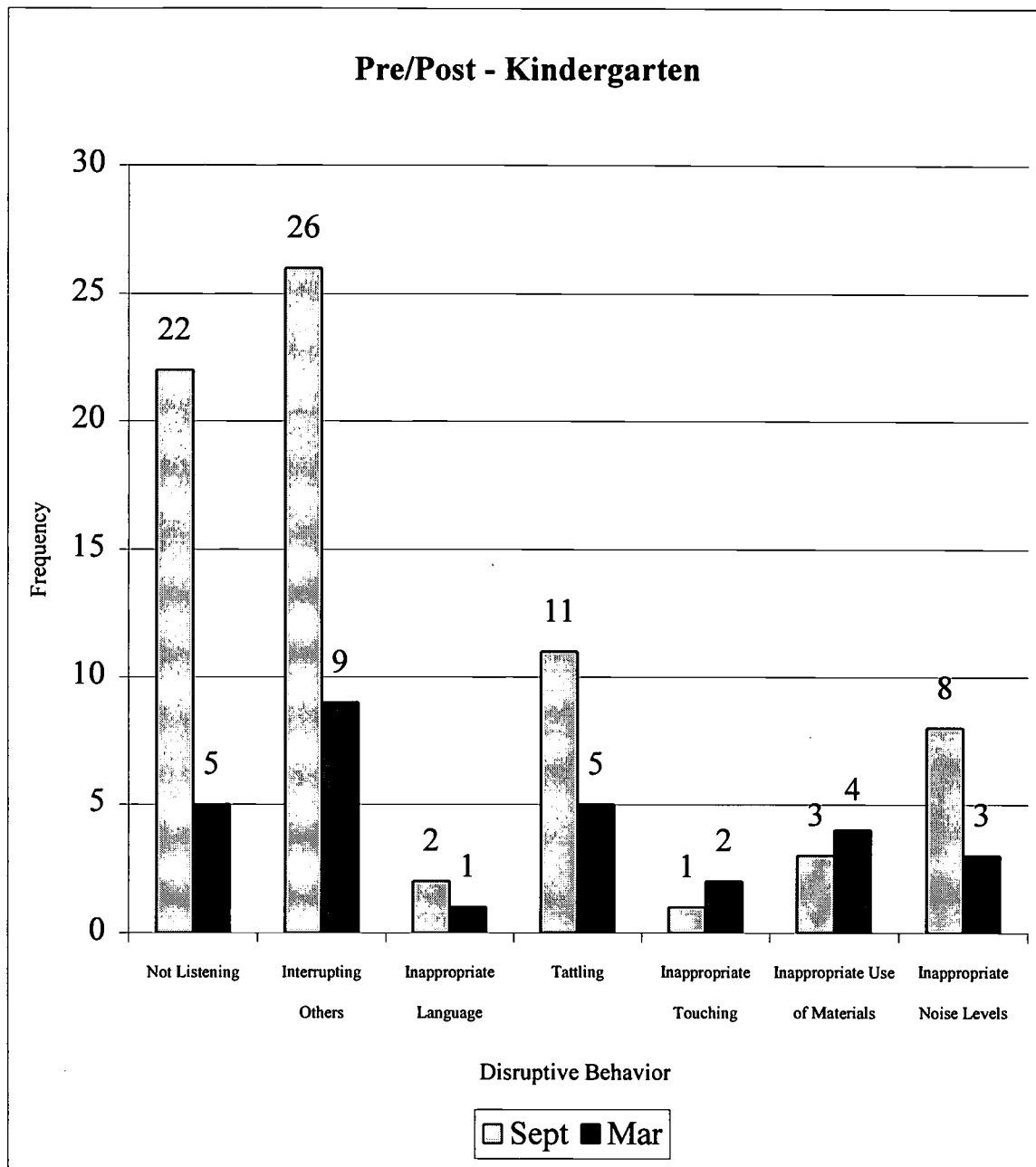
Figure 12. Frequency of specified behaviors occurring in a kindergarten classroom during a thirty-minute period. September, 2000 and March, 2001.

Pre/Post - 1st Grade
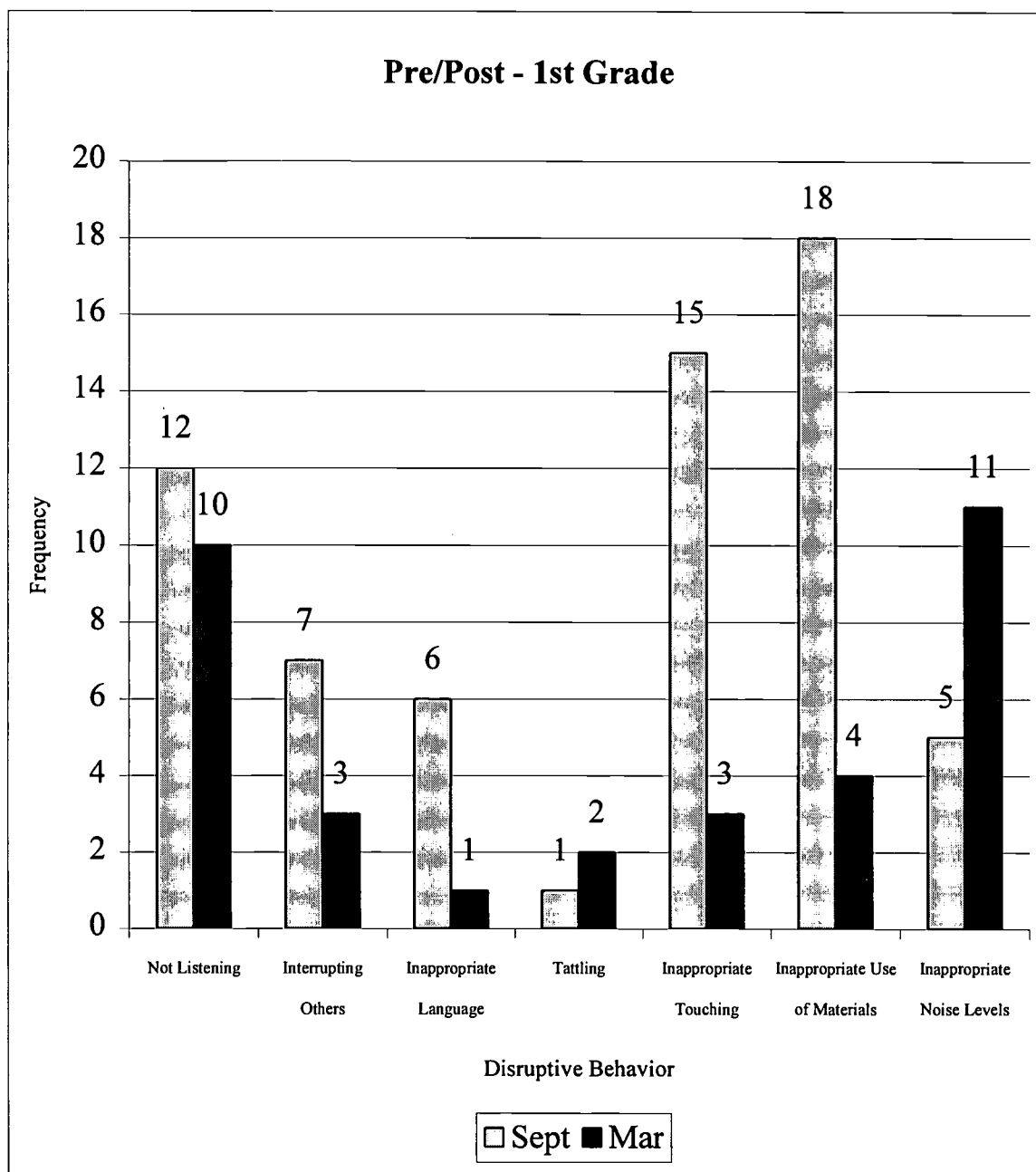
Figure 13. Frequency of specified behaviors occurring in a first grade classroom during a thirty-minute period. September, 2000 and March, 2001.

Pre/Post - 3rd Grade
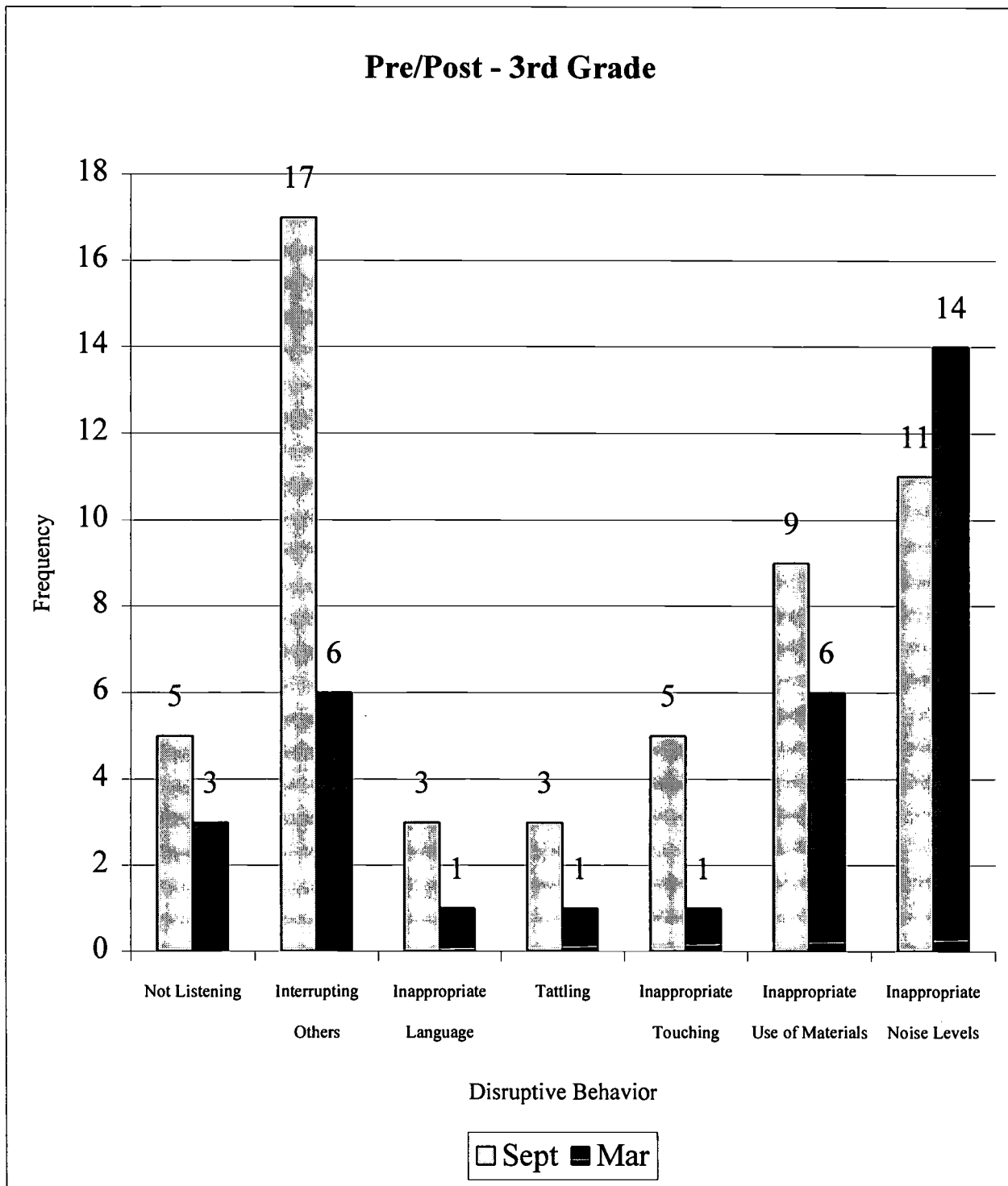
Figure 14. Frequency of specified behaviors occurring in a third grade classroom during a thirty-minute period. September, 2000 and March, 2001.

Pre/Post - 5th Grade
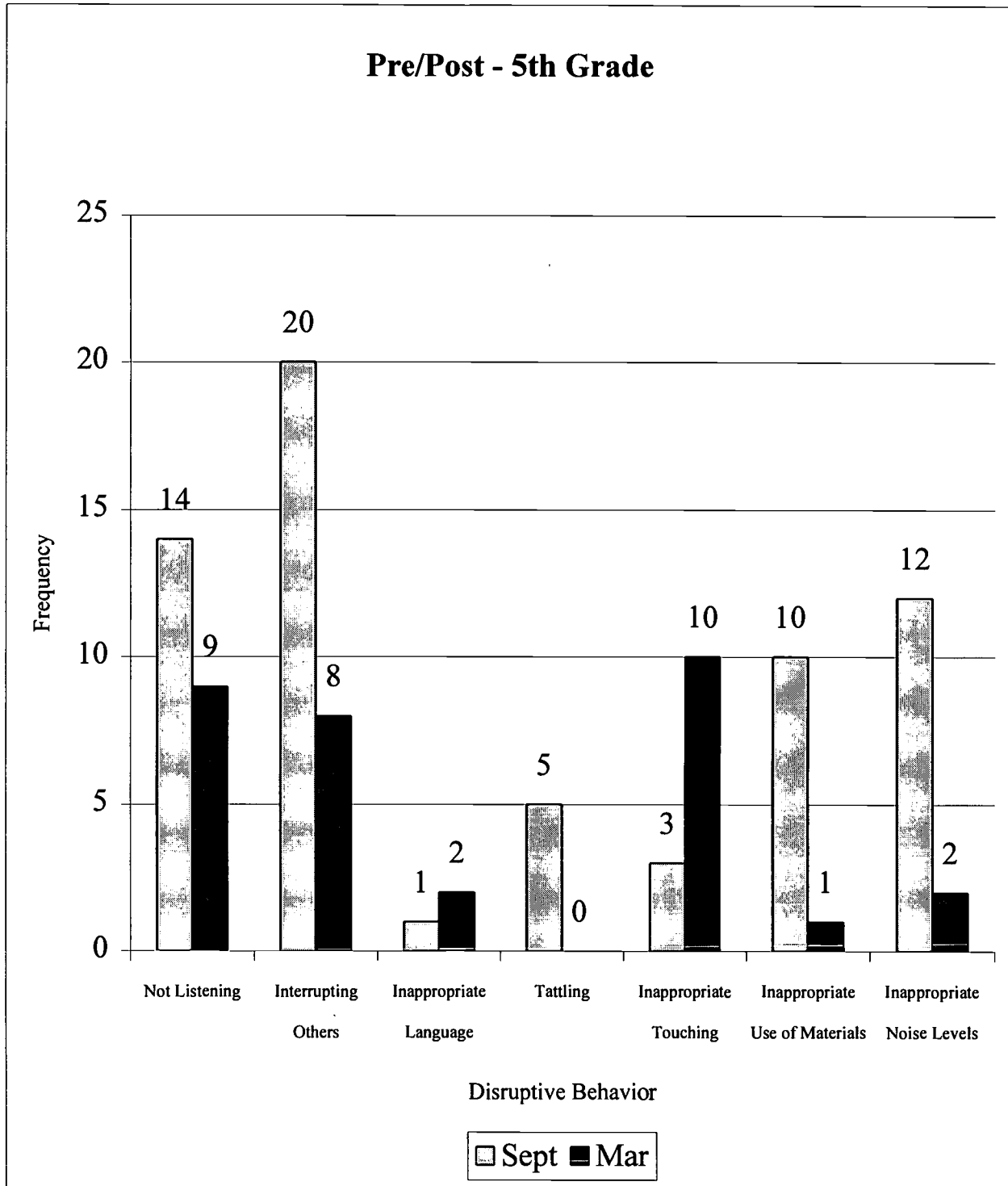
Figure 15. Frequency of specified behaviors occurring in a fifth grade classroom during a thirty-minute period. September, 2000 and March, 2001.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Upon reviewing the data collected from the Student Behavior Observation Checklists (Appendix B) and Student Social Skills Surveys (Appendix C), the researchers arrived at the following conclusions. In all of the targeted classrooms, according to the Student Behavior Observation Checklist (Appendix B) results (Figures 12,13,14, and 15) instances of not listening and interrupting others were reduced after the intervention was implemented. In addition, there was a decrease of inappropriate language use by at least 50% in all the targeted classrooms except for the fifth grade classroom (Figures 12,13,14, and 15). In the kindergarten classroom, there was a significant decrease in the amount of tattling, but the instances of inappropriate touching and inappropriate use of materials increased (Figure 12). In the first grade classroom (Figure 13), there was a dramatic increase of inappropriate noise levels. The number of instances of inappropriate touching during a 30-minute period increased significantly in the fifth grade classroom (Figure 15). The Student Social Skills Survey (Appendix C) results revealed an increase for all grade levels in the area of encouraging and helping others as well as in the area of sharing (Figure 8). The percentage of students, who perceive their classmates as *always* respecting adults, dramatically decreased from 70% in September to 40% in March (Figure 10). The researchers came to an interesting conclusion after evaluating and comparing the pre and post Student Social Skills Surveys (Figures 10 and 11). Students perceive themselves as exhibiting a frequent use of positive social skills. In contrast, students feel their peers' use of social skills is less frequent then their own (Figures 10 and 11).

The researchers realize that children vary in social behavior for a variety of reasons. They agree that students who exhibit severe behavior problems or have chaotic, dysfunctional family lives, are less influenced by social skills instruction then students who have less stressful

lives. It is important for teachers to be aware of these particular students and pursue further interventions and services for these children. In addition, the researchers concluded, that at the fifth grade level, the students are less influenced by social skills instruction because their disruptive behaviors have been accepted and reinforced for a longer period of time than the other students involved in the intervention.

The researchers concluded that the Student Social Skills Survey (Appendix C) was too lengthy and difficult for students to respond to with confidence. This was especially true for the targeted kindergarten and first grade students because of their inability to read and process each survey statement. In addition, although the response choices were thoroughly explained, some of the students had difficulty categorizing their opinions into *always, sometimes, or never* responses. To help eliminate some of the confusion, the researchers recommend a broader range of choices, represented by face symbols as opposed to words.

The researchers recommend that the selected interventions be implemented and adapted in their respective schools in an effort to improve the school climates. This should begin at the kindergarten level and continue on up through the grades. The researchers believe in the importance of having a common language regarding social skills among teachers and students throughout the grade levels at each school. However, this cannot be accomplished without staff development regarding the implementation of a social skills program into the existing curriculum

The researchers learned that the needs of some students are beyond what the classroom teacher can address. Some students need more than social skills instruction, practice and reflection in the classroom. The results of the intervention were not as positive as the researchers anticipated. However, the researchers believe that because of the intervention, the students'

awareness of appropriate and inappropriate behaviors was increased. The researchers hope that the students will use this awareness to help guide future behaviors.

Upon completion of the action research project, the researchers learned to place great value on teaching social skills in the classroom. The researchers intend to share their findings with colleagues and administration in hopes of improving the overall climate in each targeted school. The researchers are aware of the ever increasing amount of influential societal factors today's children are faced with, such as: violent television programs and video games, peer pressure, increasing divorce rate, single-parent and/or dual income families, exposure to inappropriate language, and increasing violence in schools. All four researchers plan to continue to teach social skills, organize regular class meetings, and use cooperative groups in an effort to improve the educational climate of their classrooms, and to help children bridge these skills to their everyday life.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Teacher Social Skills Survey

Directions: Circle the number under the initials which applies. (SA= strongly agree; A= agree; U= undecided; SD= strongly disagree).

Part A

		SA	A	U	D	SD
1	Social skills should be taught and practiced in the home.	5	4	3	2	1
2	Social skills should be taught and practiced in the classroom.	5	4	3	2	1
3	Lack of social skills creates a negative classroom climate.	5	4	3	2	1
4	Off-task behaviors interfere with the child's learning.	5	4	3	2	1
5	Off-task behaviors interfere with other students' learning.	5	4	3	2	1
6	Students are able to work in cooperative groups.	5	4	3	2	1
7	Students demonstrate polite manners.	5	4	3	2	1
8	Students are respectful of adult authority	5	4	3	2	1

Appendix A Continued

The following behaviors are observed in my classroom...

Directions: Circle the number which applies to your classroom.
5 = once an hour; 4 = once a day; 3 = once a week;
2 = once a month; 1 = never.

Part B

		5	4	3	2	1
1	Being wild and/or silly	5	4	3	2	1
2	Not keeping hands to him/herself	5	4	3	2	1
3	Not listening	5	4	3	2	1
4	Talking out of turn	5	4	3	2	1
5	Showing aggressive behavior—pushing, hitting, kicking, etc.	5	4	3	2	1
6	Name calling	5	4	3	2	1
7	Tattling	5	4	3	2	1
8	Lying	5	4	3	2	1

Thank you! ☺

Appendix A Continued

Teacher Survey – Short Answer Section

Please answer the questions with a brief comment/description. You can write on the back if you run out of room. Thanks! ☺

Part C

1. Do you actively teach social skills in your classroom? _____
_____

2. If you do teach social skills, what model/program do you use? _____
_____

3. Have you created your own model/program for teaching social skills and if so, what do you do?_____
_____
_____

4. Does social skill instruction take place on a regular basis in your classroom? Please indicate how often. _____
_____

5. In what ways do you allow time for students to <u>respond</u> to instruction of social skills and how?
_____
_____

6. In what ways do you allow time for students to <u>reflect</u> to instruction of social skills and how?
_____
_____

7. What amount of time is provided to practice social skills instruction and how? (i.e.: modeling, role playing)_____
_____

8. How do students have a voice in establishing expectations for classroom behavior?
_____
_____

9. How do your children have a sense of ownership in your classroom?_____
_____

10. If you were only able to teach <u>ONE</u> social skill, which one would you choose to teach and why? _____
_____

Thank you!☺

Appendix B

Student Behavior Observation Checklist Date:	Not Listening (not paying attention)	Interrupting others/teacher (blurting out, not raising hand)	Inappropriate Language (put-downs, swearing, name-calling)	Tattling	Inappropriate Touching (aggressiveness, invading personal space)	Inappropriate use of materials (not sharing, not cleaning up, writing on property)	Inappropriate noise level

Appendix C

STUDENT SURVEY

Please circle the star that best matches how you feel about the statement.

★ = Always ★ = Most of ★ = Never
the time

1. Students always raise their hands before talking.	★	★	★
2. Students in our class use inside voices.	★	★	★
3. Students in our class are good at taking turns.	★	★	★
4. Students in our class encourage and help each other.	★	★	★
5. Students in our class are careful with materials.	★	★	★
6. Students in our class put materials away when they are done.	★	★	★

Appendix C Continued

7. Students are respectful of adults.	★	★	★
8. Students are respectful of other students.	★	★	★
9. Students are able to solve conflicts by talking about it, ignoring, or walking away.	★	★	★
10. Students get into fights in the classroom and/or playground.	★	★	★
11. Students in our class don't share.	★	★	★
12. Students in our class are bossy.	★	★	★
13. Students in our class scare others.	★	★	★

Appendix C Continued

Statement	★	★	★
1. When someone is talking, I wait my turn.	★	★	★
2. I use a quiet voice when working in the classroom.	★	★	★
3. I take turns and share materials.	★	★	★
4. I encourage and help others.	★	★	★
5. I put materials back where they belong.	★	★	★
6. I use the words "please" and "thank you" with my friends and adults.	★	★	★
7. When I have a problem with another student, I talk to them about it.	★	★	★
8. If I can't solve a conflict by talking with the person, I walk away way or talk to the teacher.	★	★	★

Appendix C Continued

9. I know the difference between tattling and telling the teacher some- thing important.	★	★	★
10. During independent work, I get my assignments finished.	★	★	★
11. When I finished my assignments, I know what I should do.	★	★	★
12. During free time I choose appropriate activities.	★	★	★
13. I feel comfortable sharing my ideas in the classroom.	★	★	★
14. I feel safe in my classroom.	★	★	★
15. I have friends in my classroom.	★	★	★

Appendix D

Parent Consent Letter

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your child is an important part of our classroom community. My goal is to make this year a positive, memorable experience for all. One way to accomplish this goal is by teaching and practicing positive social skills.

Currently, I am working toward completing a field-based Master's Program through Saint Xavier University. I am very excited about the coming year because I will be conducting a research project with an objective of improving students' behaviors through social skills instruction and class meetings.

The purpose of this intervention program is focused on teaching social skills such as: how to be a better listener, and how to resolve conflicts. By holding a weekly class meeting, students will be given the opportunity to share their problems and concerns, offer solutions, and have time for self-reflection. The social skills program will run first semester.

All students will have the benefit of participating in the program, however, in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies, I need your permission to collect journal entries and surveys from your child. Your child's identity and any information that I collect from your child will be kept confidential. The report of the project will not contain any identifying information.

Feel free to drop me a note or call 555-5195 if you have any questions about this study.

Thank you!

Informed Consent for Student Participation

• Please send this form back to school with your child as soon as possible.

I, the parent/legal guardian of the minor named below, acknowledge that the investigator has explained to me the need for this research, identified the risks involved, and offered to answer any questions I may have about the nature of my child's participation. I freely and voluntarily consent to my child's participation in the assessments associated with this study. I understand all information gathered during the assessments will be completely confidential (or anonymous). I also understand that I may keep a copy of this consent form for my own information.

_____
Name of Minor Participant

_____
Signature of Parent/Legal Guardian   _____

                                        Date

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Signature:

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