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AUTHOR Owca, Sally; Pawlak, Emmie; Pronobis, Melanie

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ABSTRACT

This action research project implemented and evaluated a program for improving listening skills in order to improve academic achievement. The targeted population consisted of sixth- and eighth-grade students of three upper/middle class communities located near a large Midwestern city. The problem of poor listening skills was observed when students did not follow written or oral directions, especially in the case of homework assignments, cooperative learning activities, and during science and life skills labs. Analysis of probable causes revealed that when students were supposed to be listening, they were often daydreaming about other topics, distracted by other activities, impatient with the speaker, faking that they were listening, or were close-minded about what they were hearing. All of these situations caused the listener to be ineffective. A review of solution strategies resulted in the selection of an intervention that consisted of direct teaching of listening skills that were practiced before directions were given, such as: wait for quiet, no fidgeting, and focus by using eye contact. After 10 weeks, results of the program were assessed by means of a student survey of listening skills and teacher data collection of the number of times directions needed to be repeated for students. The listening skills survey results did not reflect students' perceptions of improved listening skills. However, teacher data collection did show a decrease in the number of times a teacher had to repeat directions. While students did not see an improvement within themselves, the data showed otherwise. The results seem to indicate that when students are quiet, not fidgeting, and focused, they receive directions more effectively, causing a reduction in the number of times those directions need to be repeated by teachers. (The listening skills survey and data collection sheet are appended. Contains 45 references.) (Author/HTH)

IMPROVING STUDENT ACADEMIC SUCCESS THROUGH THE PROMOTION OF LISTENING SKILLS

Sally Owca
Emmie Pawlak
Melanie Pronobis

An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the

School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

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ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for improving listening skills in order to improve academic achievement. The targeted population consisted of sixth and eighth grade students of three-upper/middle class communities, located near a large Midwestern city. The problem of poor listening skills was observed when students did not follow written or oral directions, especially in the case of homework assignments, cooperative learning activities and during science and life skills labs.

Analysis of probable causes revealed that when students were supposed to be listening, they were often daydreaming about other topics, distracted by other activities, impatient with the speaker, faking that they were listening or were close-minded about what they were hearing. All of these situations caused a listener that was ineffective.

A review of solution strategies resulted in the selection of an intervention that consisted of direct teaching of listening skills that were practiced before giving directions, such as wait for quiet, no fidgeting, and focus by using eye contact.

Results of the program were analyzed by a student survey of listening skills and teacher data collection of the number of times directions needed to be repeated for students. The findings were as follows. The listening skills survey results did not reflect students' perception of improved listening skills. However, teacher data collection did show a decrease in the number of times a teacher had to repeat directions. While students did not see an improvement within themselves, the data showed otherwise. The results seem to indicate that when students are quiet, not fidgeting and focused that directions are received more effectively causing a reduction in the number of times those directions need to be repeated by teachers.

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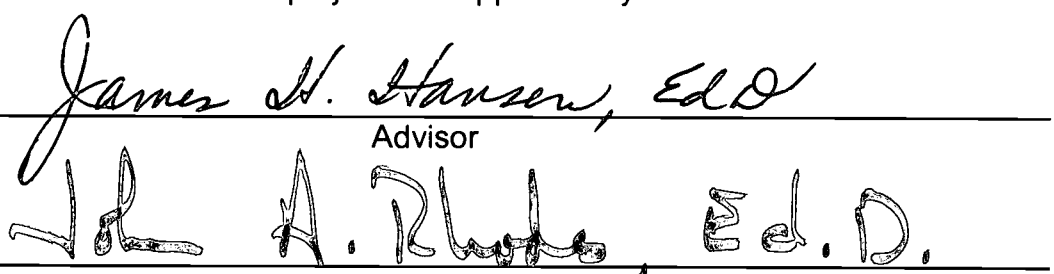

Advisor

Advisor

Dean, School of Education

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

The listening skills of students directly relate to their academic achievement. With that in mind, the targeted sixth and eighth grade students exhibit poor listening skills that interfere with their academic success. Evidence for the existence of the problem includes anecdotal records that document discipline referrals to the administration and teacher observation of students not following oral and written directions. More specifically, these observed behaviors are seen when homework assignments are turned in incomplete or incorrect, during labs where there are specific directions to follow and when cooperative learning activities take place within the classroom.

Immediate Problem Context

This action research was conducted in three suburban communities, located near a large Midwestern city. The three settings will be described individually as Site A, Site B and Site C. Site A, Site B and Site C belong to three different school districts.

Site A

The school setting of these sixth and eighth grade students is in a community unit school district with a population of 14,484. The middle school that is targeted has a population of 921. Within this middle school, 82.8% of the students are Caucasian, while 7.5% are Hispanic, 4.9% are Asian-Pacific Islander, 4.5% are African-American, 0.2% are Multi-Racial and 0.1% are Native American. The economic status of the majority of student families is middle class, however 9.2% of them are low-income. There are no Limited-English-Proficient students. These students exhibit an attendance rate of 96.2%, a mobility rate of 3.4% and a chronic truancy rate of 0.4% (Illinois State School Report Card, 2000).

The number of staff in the school totals 101, with 85% of them female and 15% male. The ethnic backgrounds of the staff are as follows: 96% Caucasian, 2% Hispanic, 1% African-American, 1% Asian-Pacific Islander and 0% Native American. This staff has an average of 13.3 years teaching experience. Just over 56% of teachers have Master's degree or beyond and 43.5% have a Bachelor's degree. The average teacher salary is $31,300 with beginning teachers starting at $29,575 (Illinois State School Report Card, 2000).

The school itself was opened in the Fall of 1969. In 1982 the district closed the building due to a decline in enrollment. While the building's closing lasted nine years, its space was leased out to community groups, private organizations and was used as a special education facility. Once the school reopened, its enrollment continued to increase until in 1997 when an addition was put on the building that included 10 academic classrooms and an aerobics/wrestling room. The enrollment has continued to grow. In

2001, another addition provided the school with 10 more classrooms, added Physical Education areas, increased cafeteria space and renovation to the office that provides better building security.

Within the middle school, the pupil to staff ratio is 14.2:1 while the class size averages 27.6. This school offers its students a number of alternative classroom opportunities, in addition to core classes, such as band orchestra, practical technology, art and life skills. The building houses the middle school ESL program within the district. Also, a reading program is in place for struggling readers. One of the special features of this school is that all students are part of a team. Each team of students has the same teachers for its core classes and sees different teachers for non-academic classes. The teachers within a team all have a common plan time and a team meeting time. During team meeting times teachers have the opportunity to cooperatively plan units, communicate about upcoming events, organize activities, and most importantly, discuss any student issues that arise.

Site B

The school at Site B is in the midst of a lot of flux. After an extensive review of the middle school, many changes were instituted this year. The school is made up of approximately 250 sixth graders, 190 seventh graders and 240 eighth graders. The schedule was recently changed to include two days scheduled in a block format where the students have four classes 77 minutes long, with a 45 minute seminar period and three days of regularly scheduled, 41 minute class periods. Also, the grading philosophy has been changed to allow grades to reflect how much a student has learned, not how much homework a student has turned in at the correct time. This has created a new report card

as well. The district has also moved to a trimester system instead of quarters. Based on the 2000-2001 Illinois School Report Card, there is an average of 25.8 children in each sixth grade class and 23.5 students in each eighth grade class. In the district, approximately 55 % of the teachers have master's degrees and the average teaching experience is approximately 15 years. The average teacher salary is $55,752. There is approximately 27% male and 58% female teachers at this school. The racial makeup of the students mirror that of the community with 90.5 % reporting a Caucasian background, 0.2 % African-American, 3.7 % Hispanic-American, and 4.6 % Asian-American. There are no low-income students or students with limited-English proficiency attending this school. There is a chronic truancy rate of 0.3% and a mobility rate of 8.8%.

Standardized test scores at this school are among the best in the state. On the 2000-2001 Illinois Scholastic Achievement Test (ISAT), only 8 % of the students were below standards in science and 16 % were below standards in social science. In reading, 15 % of the eighth grade students were below standards in writing, 16 % were below state standards and 18 % below state standards in math (Illinois State School Report Card, 2001).

Site C

Site C is a three year-old school, located within a residential section of its unit district. It also houses students in sixth through eighth grade. There is a total population of 1,077 students at Site C. The distribution of racial/ethnic groups is: 74.8% Caucasian, 8.5% African-American, 5.2% Hispanic, 11.2% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.2% Native American. The student body has a low-income enrollment of 1.6%. Just under 3% of the student body is limited-English proficient. There is no chronic truancy rate at Site C.

The mobility rate of students is 12.4%. Class size average at Site C is 28 students. The attendance rate of students is 95.3%. Instructional expenditure per student is $3,815 (Illinois State School Report Card, 2001).

The school faculty of Site C is of the following background: 97.3% Caucasian, 1.4% African-American, 0.4% Hispanic, 0.9% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.1% Native American. The teachers at this school have an average teaching experience of 8.5 years; 56.1% are teachers that hold a bachelor's degree and 43.9% have a master's degree or more. Of the teachers at Site C, 19.6% are male and 80.4% are female. The average teacher's salary is currently $41,608, while the average administrators salaries average $94,363 (Illinois State School Report Card, 2001).

Like Site A, one of the special features of Site C is that it is a middle school where all students are also on a team. Within the sixth grade there are four teams. The team that participated in this study is composed of approximately 80-90 students. These students have the same three teachers for their core classes and then see three different teachers for non-academic classes. As with the Site A school, the teachers within a team all have a common plan time and a team meeting time. During team meeting times core teachers have the opportunity to cooperatively plan units, communicate about upcoming events, organize activities, and most importantly, discuss any student issues that arise. Identified gifted students are enrolled in Project Arrow, one of the four sixth grade teams within the school that consists only of those gifted students. This school offers its students a number of alternative classroom opportunities in addition to their core classes, such as: band, orchestra, chorus, practical technology, art and life skills. The school houses an ESL program and a Cross-Categorical program, which is an alternative

classroom setting for students with severe disabilities. A Strategic Reading program is offered for identified students to work on improving necessary reading skills in a small group setting. Site C offers an accelerated math class for those students identified with high math scores. Site C is an inclusion school. Inclusion students receive help from a special education teacher and an instructional assistant while participating in the traditional classroom.

The Surrounding Community

Site A

This school district is a unit district consisting of one early childhood center, 13 elementary, four middle schools and two high schools. It is a high performing school district with average American College Testing composite scores of 24.2. The racial/ethnic background of the students is as follows: 85.3% Caucasian, 4.3% Afro-American, 5.2% Hispanic, 5.1% Asian /Pacific Islander, 0.1% Native American and the total enrollment in the district is 14,484 students. The district experiences high mobility rates. About 12% of the district's school population can be identified as low income students (8.5%), or students for whom English is a second language (3.6%). The in classroom staff is composed of 77% female while 23% is male. The faculty is 98.4% Caucasian, with the remaining staff being comprised of Afro-American, 0.8%, Hispanic, 0.4%, and .04%, Asian/PacificIslander. The average teaching experience is 13.3 years and 56.4% of the teachers have a master's degree and beyond. Salaries for teachers average $50,733 and the average administrator's salary is $75,672 (Illinois State School Report Card, 2000).

During the past ten years, the school board and district administration have been unable to decide upon a strategic plan to solve the continuing overcrowding issues in the district. The inability to implement a plan has resulted in failed referendums since the district has been unable to convince the community of the problem and its solution. After great effort, a successful referendum was passed that provided funds to solve the districts elementary and middle school enrollment capacity issue. An additional referendum to address the high school over crowding problem is in the planning. As a short-term solution to the over crowding problem, both high schools are adding several mobile classrooms as a temporarily solution.

Students who attend the school come from five different communities. They will be identified as Community A, Community B, Community C, Community D, and Community E. Three communities represent 95.8% of the total enrollment with community A contributing 49.30%, community B contributing 28%, and community C contributing 18.5% to the student population. Communities D and E send 2.5% and 1.7% respectively of the students to the targeted school.

Community A

The population of the community in which the school is located is 56,350 with projected increases to 58,242 by 2005. The racial makeup of the community is as follows: Caucasian, 91.5%, Afro-American, 2.7%, Hispanic, 2.0%, and Other, 3.8%. Homes have a median value of $225,000 and households have a median income of $96,701. The median age is 35.8 years with almost half (49.4%) of the population having earned at least a Bachelors degree. About 70.3% of the residents are employed, 1.7% are unemployed, and 28.8% are not in the work force. Occupations mirror the communities'

educational achievement. The communities occupations include: managerial/ professional, 44.9%, administrative support, 16.1%, sales, 14.6%, service, 8.5%, craft/repair, 5.7%, technicians, 4.3%, helpers and laborers, 2.2%, factory, 2.0%, transportation, 1.2%, and agriculture, 0.5% (Details a, 1999).

The school is located in an upper/middle class community, which is the county seat and includes the county's buildings and facilities. The town, founded 165 years ago (Chamber of Commerce, 2001), is 12 square miles and is 35 miles west of a large Midwestern city (Details a, 1999). The downtown area is undergoing a redevelopment where new residential properties are being built and tax increment financing is being made available to lure commercial and retail partners into the revitalized downtown area. Located in the southern part of the city, one will find an outdoor shopping mall drawing people from a wide area (Sharos, 1999). The city has two metro commuter rail stations which run into the metropolitan area, a bus system, and a local cab company The town boasts almost 40 churches representing nearly all denominations and includes a Christian college (Harriman, 1994).

Dedication to family life is evident throughout the town. The library was rated one of the top 10 in the nation (Chamber of Commerce, 2001). The park district, with more than 800 acres of land and 47 parks throughout the city has won special awards (Meyers Communication Group, 2000). It offers 750 programs, including summer programs, sports teams, crafts, athletic training, senior citizen's activities, seasonal events, art classes (Harriman, 1994), and even hosts a once a month Friday night teen program at some of the middle schools. Noted for its low crime rate, this municipality is considered to be a wonderful community in which to live. The police sponsor a drug

awareness program in the elementary and middle schools and can even be seen patrolling the nature trails on bikes.

Community B

The second community that contributes 28% of the students to the targeted school is considerably smaller, with 8,720 inhabitants. The demographic statistics are similar to those of the first community with median home values and median household income of $227,000 and $106,580, respectively (Details b, 1999). Ethnic composition, educational achievement, employment statistics, and occupational types are similar to the first community.

Community C

The third community, with a population of 38,074, represents 18.5% of the schools enrollment. The total median home value and income trail communities A and B by 25% and 23% respectively. Educational achievement, as measured by people with college degrees, is 30% less than that of either community A or B. The students who attend the targeted school differ from the community as a whole. The majority of the students from this community are residents of low-income housing located on the border between community A and community B (Details c, 1999).

Communities D and E

The students who attend the school are primarily students for whom English is a second language. Similar to community C, those who attend the targeted school (90%), are from low-income families (Details d, 1999; Details e, 1999).

Site B

The community that feeds into Site B is a rather wealthy suburb of a major Midwestern city. There are close to 43,000 residents of this suburb. This district has one early childhood center, eight elementary schools, three middle schools and one high school, currently undergoing extensive renovations. This district is also a high performing district with an average ACT composite of 23.5. The district has an annual budget of almost $60 million with an average expenditure of $8,571 per pupil, higher than the state average. In this district, there is an active Parent-Teacher Association as well as a not-for-profit organization that provides supplemental funding for projects that enrich the classroom. Approximately 90.5 % of the people in the community are Caucasian, 0.9 % is African-American, 4 % are Hispanic and 3.7 % are Asian. The total enrollment of the district is 6,891. The district experiences a mobility rate of 9%, almost half the state average. A majority (68.2 %) of the households in the community earn more than $50, 000 while only 2.5 % are considered to be in poverty. The average household income is near $70,000. Many of the people in the community are considered to hold professional jobs, 47.4 %, while another 31.6 % are in sales. Another 20.9 % are in education and/or social services. Higher education also seems to be a highly prized aspect of the community, with 91.2 % having finished high school, 27.9 % having a bachelor's degree and 17.2 % having a graduate degree. Sixty-two percent are married, 22 % are single, 0.8 % separated, 7.6 % are widowed and 6.4 % are divorced (Pulse Points, 2001).

The community itself is undergoing revitalization both in its downtown area and all along it's residential streets. The downtown area has been attracting many new

business and restaurants to as well as renovating public spaces such as a courtyard with a fountain and building a new library. There is also a small, liberal arts college in town that contributes an art museum as well as several other cultural arts opportunities for residents. While many of the homes in the suburb were built after World War 2, there are many houses that are either being torn down or having additions built. This is increasing the housing value as well as the average size of the houses in the area.

Site C

Site C is located in a western suburban community. There are over 15 elementary schools, four middle schools and four high schools in the district. A total of 22,608 students attend the district schools with a total faculty of 1,515. The racial/ethnic distribution of the district faculty is similar to that of Site C.

The school is located in one of the largest growing western suburbs. This community has managed to maintain its historical landmarks and old parts of town while building many new developments. The community has grown into a very popular place to raise children.

The town originated more than 170 years ago and has grown into a community of 130,000 residents. The median family income in Site C is $86,000. Residential housing values average $200,716. Site C has many attractive aspects for families. It offers an excellent library system and strong school systems. Besides the numerous park facilities offering fitness classes for all ages, many youth activities and field trips for senior citizens, there are several hiking trails, golf courses and forest preserves. Many residents use the metropolitan rail system, which has two different station locations in Site C. Stores, fitness centers, hospitals and many cultural events are even more reasons people

come to live in this community. All of these positive aspects of this community are reasons why Site C has over 130,000 residents (Pulse Points, 2001).

National Context of the Problem

What is a listening skill? Why is it important to teachers and students? Why is it important in the world at large? Listening is something that someone does, actively, instead of something that happens to a person. Hearing someone talk involves just the acquisition of sound while actually listening to a person speaking involves assimilating the information the person is transmitting into something meaningful for the listener. It is not something that happens, it is something that is done (Petress, 1999). When a student is not attending to the directions being given, often, the student has difficulty in completing the assigned task. Unfortunately, the lack of listening skills that leads to someone inappropriately following directions has implications not only at the local, educational level, but also at a national and industrial level.

It seems that all kinds of leaders are having trouble giving directions and instructions to the people they were hired to manage or instruct (Klein G., 2000). There are reports out of the military that leaders are unable to command their subordinates. There are reports out of industry that managers are having difficulties communicating the full scope of a task to an employee. The result of this is many mis-starts, where a company needs to go back to the beginning of a project because of a miscommunication at the beginning of a project. At the Army War College, a timed-task was given to several groups that were to compete for the quickest completion. A lot of teams started the wrong way and had to go back and restart, even though there was a high motivation to complete the task correctly (Klein K., 2000). There are also reports out of most levels of

schooling that teachers are having difficulty getting student's attention. Listening skills are a necessary part of the repertoire students need to have to succeed in today's classrooms (Thompson & Gradgenett, 1999).

If one goal of education is to create a diverse and competent workforce, then the type of skill set that includes following directions becomes a lot more important (Anspaugh, 1998). More and more corporations are insisting that workers are able to complete a task with critical thinking, proper follow through and reliability. This makes the skills of following directions important to those who are to hire the people who are currently students but will eventually be entering the workforce (Anspaugh, 1998). As one teacher noted, "Just one incorrect or missing step can affect the outcome of an activity and add a greater significance to the words 'follow the directions'". This is true both in eighth grade family and consumer sciences activities and in projects to be completed for a supervisor at work.

It is extremely important to develop good listening skills, which, in turn, allow for the better following of directions. Good listening skills are important to teachers who deal with students and to anyone who needs to communicate with "peers, subordinates and clients" (Mulvany, 1998). Good listening skills are also a good predictor of future success in school. Students without these listening skills can be at a greater risk of dropping out as well (Thompson & Gradgenett, 1999).

> "Although the importance of providing instruction in learning skills and social skills has been documented, and the strategies for teaching them have been reported, the problem of children lacking the skills persists. Almost 20 years ago, teachers cited the lack of prerequisite learning skills (including social skills) as the

> main reason for poor early school performance (as cited in Cartledge & Milburn, 1978). Similarly, a Carnegie Foundation (1992) survey of 7,000 kindergarten teachers reported that teachers estimated that 35% of the nation's children are not prepared to enter school. The survey suggests a gap between research and practice" (Brigman, Lane & Switzer, 1999).

Research has shown that 60-75% of oral communication is ineffective as it is "quickly forgotten, ignored or misunderstood" (Brigman, Lane & Switzer, 1999). This skill is one that seems to be able to be taught in the classroom in conjunction with any classes' curriculum but it is also a skill that seems to be rarely given a lot of time or assessment.

Fortunately, most listening skills can be taught in any classroom, regardless of the age of the students. There are many strategies that can be used for teaching listening skills. Teachers can slow down their rate of speech. This allows the listener to process what is being said so that the directions or information can be assimilated into the listener's schema of what he or she already knows and understands (Thompson & Gradgenett, 1999). Teachers can also demonstrate, discuss and teach some of the appropriate skills that make up good listening skills.

One of the skills that teachers can teach that make up good listening skills is the skill of attending. When students are attending to the task at hand, they have no distractions in front of them; they are quiet and focused on what someone is saying. To show that a listener is attending, the person can often nod his or her head at the appropriate time. When the speaker is finished, it is appropriate that the listener has a question or two to ask, to be sure that he or she has indeed understood what was the speaker's message. If the listener is certain that he or she does not have any questions, he

or she should rephrase the statement the speaker just made, not only to show that the listener was actually listening but also to check his or her understanding of the topic (Mulvany, 1998). Listeners and speakers need to understand that good listening does not mean sitting quietly and looking at the speaker. Good listening skills are interactive; they include responding to and interacting with the speaker quite frequently.

These skills are neither taught in the classroom nor always modeled at home (Thompson & Gradgenett, 1999). This would suggest that teachers should include instruction in listening skills in their lesson plans. These skills can be taught from teacher to student and from student to student. Some suggest that these skills can be taught in a dialogue setting among students with little direction from the teacher, other than recognizing and praising someone who is demonstrating good listening skills. This dialogue setting, among peers would naturally reinforce good listening skills, especially if the topic is of the students choosing. Of course, this strategy would probably be most efficient with older students with whom peer pressure and social hierarchy have been firmly ensconced (Thompson & Gradgenett, 1999).

Listening skills can be taught, and it seems that they must be taught in order to properly prepare students to be efficient in the world of work.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

In order to document the students' general attitudes towards listening and listening behaviors, a survey was administered. This survey asked the students to rate statements about listening according to how true the statement was for him or her. Site A had 72% of respondents reporting that they only sometimes or never ignore distractions when the teacher is talking. This site also 17% reported "always true," to question one (Appendix A), the statement: "I stay awake or alert in class" (See Table 1).

Table 1

Site A Pretest Survey Results

Question	Always true	Almost always true	Sometimes true	Never true
1	17	56	28	0
2	22	33	44	0
3	0	44	50	6
4	50	28	22	0
5	17	33	33	17
6	28	56	17	0
7	0	39	28	28
8	6	17	33	39
9	11	33	39	11
10	6	17	39	33
11	28	28	39	0
12	22	33	17	28
13	72	22	6	0
14	44	56	0	0
15	44	50	6	0
16	33	61	6	0
17	56	44	0	0
18	50	39	11	0
19	44	44	11	0

The class at Site B reported that 5% are always keeping eye contact with the teacher, (survey question two). Sixty-one percent report that they sometimes or never ignore distractions such as loud noises, activity in the hall or late arriving students (survey question ten). Additionally, only 18% reported that they always stay awake and alert during class (survey question one). See Table 2.

Table 2

Site B Pretest Survey Results

Question	Always true	Almost always true	Sometimes true	Never true
1	18	54	28	0
2	5	60	35	0
3	11	49	38	0
4	30	45	25	0
5	21	32	42	5
6	42	34	18	5
7	19	31	40	11
8	7	27	43	23
9	5	25	54	16
10	12	28	47	14
11	14	31	38	17
12	9	13	58	20
13	27	41	25	7
14	33	53	14	0
15	35	43	23	0
16	36	47	15	2
17	30	47	22	0
18	24	51	25	0
19	33	48	16	2
20	27	55	19	0

At Site C, only 35% responded that it was "always true" that they stayed awake in class (survey question one). Also at this site, only 9% reported that they always gave the teacher eye contact. Twenty-six percent of this group also reported that they were always able to ignore distractions during class (See Table 3).

Table 3

Site C Pretest Survey Results

Question	Always true	Almost always true	Sometimes true	Never true
1	35	57	9	0
2	9	70	22	0
3	22	52	26	0
4	43	38	9	0
5	30	52	17	0
6	64	36	0	0
7	48	30	17	9
8	29	33	33	5
9	44	30	17	9
10	26	65	4	0
11	30	57	13	0
12	22	35	43	0
13	61	30	9	0
14	43	52	4	0
15	52	48	4	4
16	55	41	5	0
17	52	35	9	0
18	57	35	9	0
19	65	30	4	0

These results indicate that there seems to be many students at each of the sites that are having difficulty paying attention during class. A majority of students at all sites reported that they are having difficulty with some of the critical skills that comprise good listening. There also seems to be many students that have a challenge keeping focused on a lesson and not daydreaming during class. These skills: ignoring distractions, staying awake and alert during class, and maintaining eye contact, are reported by the survey as being lacking by the sixth and eighth grade students questioned.

There are some discrepancies among the different sites. For example, at Site A (See Table 1), there are no students who responded it was "always true" that they did not daydream in class (survey question seven), while at Sites B and C (See Tables 2 and 3.), 42% and 48% respectively responded always true. This may have something to do with

subject matter at the three different sites. Sites B and C are considered academic classes while Site A is a unified arts class where the students do receive a grade but it does not get figured into their grade point average. With question sixteen, "I do not interrupt the teacher when she/he is presenting information to the class," there is a discrepancy between Site C (See Table 3.) (55% reporting "always true") when compared with Site A and B (See Tables 1 and 2.) (33% and 36% reporting "always true" respectively). This may be due to a difference in grade level, where Site A and B are eighth grade classrooms and Site C is a sixth grade classroom. The difference in maturity level may play a part in the willingness to be seen actually listening in class.

Teacher's observations at Site A found that students were not able to follow directions as a result of poor listening skills. For example, students asked questions about procedures during lab situations that had been explained to the class less than five minutes earlier. Students' not being able to follow directions was a problem in the classroom of the researchers, but other colleagues complained that students in their classes were unable to complete assignments accurately unless the teacher repeated some of the directions to them. Also at Site A there has been a large influx of students who do not speak English.

The local population at Site B has had some flux in the current year that could affect the students' abilities to pay attention in class. Site B has instituted a block schedule two days a week. These longer class periods can affect the students' ability to pay attention because of the longer time they are expected to pay attention and the longer time the student's actually have to stay in their seats, from 45 minutes a period to 78 minutes a period. Also in Site B, the students have recently been distributed into two

separate, smaller teams per grade level, comprising approximately one hundred to one hundred twenty students from larger, grade level teams of approximately two hundred thirty students. Because the students are on smaller teams, with all of the same teachers, students can be more closely monitored for problems with paying attention. Several teachers have reported that they are having a difficult time keeping the students engaged in the topic during class. At Site B, observations have found several examples of students and their need for instruction in listening skills. Teachers have also reported having to repeat directions four and five times during an activity for all of the students to be able to be engaged in the learning experience.

Probable Causes

The literature suggests there are several underlying causes for a lack of listening skills at all levels for various reasons. There can be a lack of learning of the specific skills that make someone a good listener. Learning about how to listen does not happen without practice and proper modeling. An infant needs to have proper models for listening; they need to have someone listening to them as well as to other people (Klein, K., 2000). A baby age twelve to sixteen months has his or her "caretaker as their favorite toy" (D'Arcangelo, 2000). These children also do a lot of modeling and pretending to be like their parent. If the parent is modeling good listening to another adult, there is a better chance that the child will follow that modeling and have the skills that the parent modeled (D'Arcangelo, 2000). There is also a suggestion that the amount of time a mother spends with her child will impact the child's development, including the development of listening skills (Waldfogel, Han & Brooks-Gunn, 2002). If the mother is employed full-time, out of the house, especially for the first year of a baby's life, studies

have shown a decrease in several tests that measure listening, among other cognitive behaviors. The study suggests that there is not such a great impact in the second and third year of life for the baby. The first year seems to be critical to developing appropriate listening skills. Fifty-six percent of married mothers with a child under one are employed while 59% of unmarried mother with a child under one are employed (Waldfogel, Han & Brooks-Gunn, 2002) suggesting that there is a growing percentage of children developing with a caretaker, instead of a parent.

The literature also suggests that the over-stimulation of students outside of the classroom, with the students ever-increasing schedules outside of school and the increased availability of video and computer games, decreases their ability to stay focused on the task at hand, especially when the task is auditory. Recent studies of television watching by children have included measures of the time children spend playing video games. In 1967, the average sixth-grader watched 2.8 hours of television per day. Data from 1983 indicated that sixth graders watched 4.7 hours of television per day, and spent some additional time playing video games (Cesarone, 1994).

There may also be cultural experiences and expectations that get in the way of listening. If a cultural practice is not to look at the speaker while he or she is talking, there is a "neurolinguistic" programming that does not happen (Clark, 1999). This programming, starting in infancy, provides people with a pattern of what they should do when they are listening. However, when this pattern does not include making eye contact with the speaker, it is more difficult to focus on the speaker's message, especially if the dominant culture expects eye contact and includes nonverbal messages during speaking (Clark, 1999).

Another discrepancy in learning skills is the possibility that there was stress during the early period of development of listening skills (Sacarin, 1999). These factors can be psychological stress as well as sensory-motor deprivation and even over-stimulation. This over-stimulation does not allow the infant brain as well as the student brain to adequately develop the skills needed to become a good listener.

Among students of all ages, there are still several personal barriers to effective communication. One is the nature of the middle school student, with their preoccupation with self and their own development. As a middle school student matures, there is more of a conscious awareness of the world around him or her, allowing them to be able to better practice active listening. Students seem to develop more when classroom talk has teacher support and guidance. Classroom talk includes listening in the classroom. In a classroom environment where there is a lot of teacher talk and a lot of student listening, there is less classroom talk and less guidance. This can prove problematic for a middle school student trying to develop listening skills (Anders & Pritchard, 1993).

When a student is pre-occupied with him or herself (as most middle school students are wont to be because of their particular phase of psychological development), this student is unable to listen to the message of the speaker (Thompson & Gradgenett, 1999). If a listener sees himself or herself as the center of the universe, the messages other people are trying to send become secondary in importance to the messages they want to send or to the listener's own thoughts. Putting oneself first in the mind is a detriment to accepting and processing someone else's message (Hyslop & Tone, 1988).

There can be a lot of over-stimulation in a classroom of any age. This may happen for a moment or for several moments strung together. By the time the student

realizes he or she was not paying attention to the speaker's message, the student has missed a large, possibly crucial part of the task at hand. When a listener is distracted, there is not a lot of chance that they will hear the message the speaker is sending (Wood, 2001). There is natural tendency to be unable to tune out loud visual or auditory signals that interfere with the message the speaker is sending.

This missing of the message is also apparent when one looks at listening and thinking speeds. An average person can process approximately 400 words per minute, while the average person speaks at a rate of 125 words per minutes. If a listener is not adequately engaged in the topic, he or she will have plenty of "mental time" to drift off while someone is speaking (Lee & Hatesohl, 1999). Another possible reason for inattentive listening has to do with the actual message the speaker is sending. If the speaker is giving an inadequate message, one that is long and vague and without point for the listener, the listener's brain disengages from the message being sent. When these messages are directions the listener is to follow, while the listener may attempt to be listening, the speaker has sent such a convoluted message that it is almost impossible for the listener to comply.

These listening skills are also generally not considered part of the standard school curriculum and are not regularly formally assessed through standardized tests. Without a national push for listening skills testing, there will be only sporadic teaching, according to each individual teacher (Jalango, 1995). There may be many things a student (or a person) is doing when he or she should actually be listening. Many times when someone is not actually listening, the person is rehearsing what he or she is about to say in response to what the speaker is saying. Another common reaction to someone's speaking

might be an attempt on the part of the listener to be actively judging what the person is saying, instead of processing the entire message and then making a determination about it. Also, if the listener does not believe in the veracity of the speaker or the speaker's message, the whole of the communication may not be accomplished. Some students fall into "intellectual despair" (Evan, 1999) when listening. This occurs when the message the speaker is sending is when the message the speaker is trying to get across is beyond the comprehension of the student, the student may appear to be listening and is actually listening but is unable to connect the speaker's message to anything the listener knows or has had experience.

There are other times when someone is appearing to listen, without actually paying attention and without actually listening. This may be the most common reason why students are not paying attention. Students have all been taught what listening "looks" like, hands folded or taking notes, with eyes on the speaker. Though the students know what listening actually looks like and can probably practice the steps of what it looks like, they may not be engaged with the message the speaker is sending and therefore, not actually listening. The teacher may have not explained his or her standards of listening to the class. When the teacher or someone else is speaking, the student needs to be able to not just show that they are listening physically, but they also need to be able to respond to the speaker's message. When the teacher is sure that all of the students can make appropriate responses, he or she is sure that all of the students were listening. The teacher needs to be sure that the students also know that the appropriate response is an expectation (Brent & Anderson, 1994). This part of listening is often the most lacking in

students of all ages and the one that is the most crucial to succeeding in life (Petress, 1999).

There are many reasons that people are found not listening in a situation in which they really should be paying attention. People who are not listening appropriately may be thinking of something else or they may be preparing for what they are to respond to the speaker. They may also be unable or unwilling to process the speaker's message. Someone who is not actually listening may be fixated on a particular part of the speaker's message and this pre-occupation keeps him or her from hearing the whole message (Thompson & Gradgenett, 1999). There may also be pre-existing biases that filter out the intended message from the speaker. The listener is only paying attention to what he or she wants to hear and does not hear the entire message. The listener may not be instructed in what it actually means to be listening or they may be allowing themselves to drift off from the speaker's message and not stay fully engaged.

There are many possible causes to a lack of listening skills. If a child has all of the proper neural components to listening, he or she still has to be trained to actively listen and form an appropriate response to a speaker's message. Further research can pinpoint which manner of teaching listening skills will be most effective.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

The search for an approach to improve listening skills has turned up several strategies, all similar in nature. The significant difference in these strategies is the perspective the researcher takes. These different perspectives fall into two major categories. The first approaches improving listening skills in terms of the teacher and what he/she can do to improve the listening skills of students. The second approach is in terms of the student and what specifically students can do to improve their listening skills. Each approach will be discussed.

Improving listening skills in terms of what the teacher can do has turned up research where many common traits are found. Those include some of the following strategies that teachers should use: provide a good listening environment, give clear directions and model good listening. Overall, the big picture that this approach acknowledges is the thought that listening skills need to be taught to students because we as educators can not assume that listening skills will be taught at home.

Research suggests that teachers need to provide a good listening environment if effective listening is to be maximized. Thompson and Gradgenett (1999) stated "good

listening is encouraged by putting the mind in a 'ready to listen mode'" (p.3). Distractions such as background noises should be removed so that students can focus on listening (Miller, 2000; Jalongo, 1995). If distractions are present, they can interfere with the ability to hear, which in turn affects the ability to listen (Public Management, 1997; Matheson, Moon & Winiecki, 2000). Also, students should be prepared to listen (Engraffia, Graff, Jezuit & Schall, 1999). That could mean sitting in a comfortable position and/or having the necessary tools ready (Thompson & Gradgenett, 1999). Students who are not sitting properly can be distracted by their physical discomfort. This discomfort may cause poor concentration while someone is talking (Public Management, 1997; Brent & Anderson, 1993). If students are in the right environment for listening, they will not be distracted and can approach listening with a clear mind, which is a vital step in the listening process (Messmer, 1998; Funk & Funk, 1989).

While teaching listening skills, teachers need to give clear directions. Miller (2000) suggested that directions be easy to understand. If directions are confusing or complicated, students will tune them out and wait for a simpler explanation (Jalongo, 1995). As a teacher, directions should be well thought out and any confusing parts should be clarified for students. Furthermore, teachers might consider using a visual aid to accompany directions. This strategy can help students gain information by addressing the learning styles of both the visual and auditory learners (Church, 2000). Thompson and Gradgenett (1999) stated that this approach is "a realistic start in getting slow learners to focus on what the teacher is saying" (p.4). Teachers should also repeat or rephrase directions for students (Miller, 2000). Thompson and Gradgenett (1999) commented on the strategy of repeating information by saying that "educators severely

strain the disadvantaged student's listening abilities when they state, 'listen closely, I will only say this once'" because "even the best students may require certain information to be repeated or redefined" (p.3). To add to this, Jalongo (1995) stated that the process of repeating or rephrasing can also be used by students. Teachers can call on students to repeat or rephrase the directions back to them.

Once teachers have established a good listening environment and given clear directions, another key component for teaching good listening skills is the teacher's modeling of good listening for students. One of the best ways to teach is by example, therefore, it is important that when teachers teach children to listen, that they be good listeners themselves. Jalongo (1995) agreed and added "students' attentive, involved listening depends considerably upon teacher behavior"(p.3). He noted modeling good listening habits as one of those behaviors. One suggestion for teachers to accomplish this is by spending time listening to what individual students have to say and talking about their thoughts and ideas (Miller, 2000). This technique makes students feel valued and cared for. Once students feel they are cared for by a teacher, they will care more about what that teacher has to say. Also, class discussions are a great opportunity for teachers to model good listening, and for students to learn, listen and value other's contributions (Engraffia, Graff, Jezuit & Schall, 1999).

Other strategies include: slow down the message and allow time to process information, encourage the listener to keep an open mind while listening, reward good listening and be aware of potential barriers within students that may get in the way of listening. The strategy of encouraging the listener to keep an open mind while listening supports the existence of the problem stated earlier, that some students tune out the

speaker or stop listening altogether. Teachers need to teach students how not to over-react to trigger words or phrases because attention can be lost when the focus for the student turns to the negative consequences of the word or phrase. The focus of this strategy encourages listeners to listen to the complete message before making judgments.

A combined approach to improving listening skills would contain both teacher-led as well as student-led strategies. This approach is well rounded in that both the teacher and the student share the responsibilities of improving listening skills. The component that is teacher-led has already been discussed. The student-led component highlights student strategies of: blocking out distractions, asking clarifying questions, practicing paraphrasing and using self-discipline techniques before responding.

The approach that focuses only on student strategies contains three common components. Each of these strategies provides useful benefits to the student. First, students give their undivided attention to the speaker. The first vital step of effective listening is preparing yourself mentally and physically (Mulvany, 1998). Public Management (1997) commented that "attentiveness accomplishes two things: it helps you concentrate more fully on what the speaker is saying, and it sends a nonverbal message to the speaker that what he or she has to say is very important to you" (p.3). Eye contact is a must. In particular, Cousins (2000) stated that eye contact encourages the speaker and makes him/her feel the listener cares. Edwards (1991) added that watching the speaker allows the listener to focus on the verbal message and to observe any nonverbal cues that the speaker may display. The presence of non-verbal clues that show the listener is attentive would be good body language, lack of fidgeting, appropriate head nods and not interrupting the speaker (Petress, 1999; Mulvany, 1998). It is suggested that the listener

wait three seconds before responding to make sure the speaker is finished. Messmer (1998) stated that the listener should become comfortable with the few seconds of silence that may occur when the speaker pauses mid-thought. If the listener immediately responds at the first pause of the speaker, the speaker may not have the opportunity to complete their thought or make the point they were trying to make. The use of head nods and "uh-huhs" can make the speaker feel more comfortable.

Second, effective listening skills involve the listener responding to the speaker. The following forms of responding have been noted: asking questions, rephrasing what the speaker said, sharing your own personal experience, and offering feedback. Asking questions is a way to elicit more information from the speaker or to clarify the information (Cousins, 2000; Messmer, 1998). These questions should be direct, yet open-ended (Mulvany, 1998). They are especially effective when trying to draw out a shy speaker. Teachers should also make sure that the question is appropriate and relevant.

Rephrasing is a technique that ensures the speaker that you have understood what was said. It also gives the speaker the opportunity to clarify any information the listener may have misunderstood (Public Management, 1997). Mulvaney (1998) commented that too often when people listen, "people often hear what they want to hear instead of what is being said" (p.2). Another comment he made is a great argument for the use of rephrasing with students. Mulvaney (1998) said, "Retention is improved by as much as 25 percent when you repeat what you have heard, you have a better chance of remembering the points being made" (p.2).

Listeners can respond to a speaker by sharing their own experiences or offering feedback to the speaker. This feedback should be honest, timely, clear, respectful and relevant to what the speaker said (Petress, 1999). Typically remarks should be short to prevent the listener from taking over the conversation (Mulvany, 1998). When responses are in the form of sharing, the listener is showing the speaker empathy. This response works well because in some situations the speaker is not looking for a suggestion or solution. They may just want the listener to listen. In this case, this response acknowledges that the listener has heard the speaker's message (Mulvany, 1998).

And third, pay close attention to the speaker. The listener should be paying attention to inferences, facts or judgments the speaker is making (Petress, 1999). In addition, the listener should also be looking for non-verbal clues the speaker gives. A good listener should not only be listening to what the speaker is saying, but also how he/she is saying it. An example of this might be a speaker saying "I'm fine" in a listless, melancholy way (Mulvaney, 1998). A good listener can detect tone, vocabulary, sentence structure and voice quality dimensions in a speaker (Petress, 1999). When the listener detects any changes in these communication behaviors, he/she should seek verification or reasons for the behavior. Cousins (2000) specifically said the listener should be listening for the feelings of the speaker. He stated, "An individual's words often do not tell the whole story. The real message can only be understood if the underlying feelings are brought out into the open" (p.2).

At some point during the instruction of listening skills, the teacher should model non-verbal cues. This is important so that students can see how non-verbal cues can vary the meaning of the message being communicated (Leverentz & Garman, 1987). Once

students are introduced to how nonverbal clues affect the meaning of a message, they will be more likely to identify them while they are listening. Also effectively identifying these nonverbal clues can lead to more accurate decoding of communicated messages.

Project Objective and Processes

As a result of teaching listening skills from 9/29/02 to 11/08/02, the 8th grade students in Life Skills, Science, and 6th grade Social Studies will be able to follow directions more closely by 10%, as determined by teacher observation. In order to accomplish the objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. A pre- and post-listening skills survey will be administered to the students.
2. Pre-intervention teacher observations of students following directions will be performed.
3. Listening skills will be taught to the students. During the teaching of listening skills, teacher observation of students following directions will be performed.
4. Post-intervention teacher observations of students following directions will be performed.
5. A post-intervention survey will be administered to the students.

Project Action Plan

WHEN	STRATEGY	PARTICIPANTS	WHY
• 1st Day	• Administer Listening Skills Survey	• Students in Life Skills, Science and Social Studies	• To increase awareness
• Weeks 1-2	• Teacher observations of student's following directions 3 times per week	• Students in Life Skills, Science and Social Studies	• To establish a baseline
• Weeks 3-8 • Week 5-6	• Implement listening skills strategy • Teacher observations of student's following directions 3 times per week	• Students in Life Skills, Science and Social Studies	• To increase student's listening ability • To determine changes from the baseline
• Weeks 9-10	• Teacher observations of student's following directions	• Students in Life Skills, Science and Social Studies	• To determine changes from the baseline
• Last Day	• Administer Listening Skills Survey	• Students in Life Skills, Science and Social Studies	• To determine growth and achievement

Methods of Assessment

To assess the effects of the interventions, teacher observation and pre-and post testing assessment methods will be used. During the observations, the researchers will record how many times it is necessary to repeat directions to the students. This will be done three times per week for two weeks periodically throughout a ten-week period. In addition, pre- and post-listening skills surveys will be administered to the students once parental permission is obtained.

The testing tool is a modified version of the Listening Skills Survey found at the Elmhurst Learning Center (2002) (See Appendix A). Students will be asked to complete the survey prior to learning the listening skills strategies. The students will be administered the survey a second time after the listening skills strategies are taught to the class. Scores obtained on both sets of surveys will be used to determine the effectiveness of the listening strategies presented.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this action research project was to increase the ability of students to follow directions by 10 % during the period of 9/29/02 to 11/08/02. The targeted students were enrolled in 8th grade Life Skills, Science, and 6th grade Social Studies, totaling a number of 67.

A letter seeking permission for the students to participate in the study was sent home to the parents before the onset of the project. After obtaining parent signatures of consent, a pre-listening skills survey (See Appendix A), which was developed over the summer of 2002, was administered to the students in September 2002 on the first day of the first week of the study. At site A, 18 students were present in class and filled out the survey, at site B 26 students were present and completed the survey and 26 students at site C were present and completed the survey. Seventy surveys were returned from the 70 targeted students.

During the first and second week, the teachers observed the student's following directions on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. The researchers recorded the instances on a Data Collection sheet (See Appendix B).

Next, the intervention of teaching listening skills strategies to the students during weeks three thru eight were taught daily for the first five minutes of class in lecture form. Three

listening skills strategies were taught before directions were given by the teacher to the students. First, in order to provide an acceptable environment conducive to listening, the teacher would wait for the students to be quiet. Next, the students were asked to sit in a comfortable position, face the teacher and abstain from any other activities such as reading, writing, or fidgeting. Finally the students were asked to focus on the teacher and establish eye contact while directions were being given. For two of the six weeks during the intervention, specifically weeks five and six, the researchers again recorded the instances of the number of times it was necessary to repeat directions on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday on the Data Collection sheet. The last recording on the Data Collection sheet occurred after the completion of the intervention, during weeks nine and ten, on Monday, Wednesday and Friday of each week.

On the last day of week ten, the post-listening skills survey was administered to the students. At site A, 17 students were present in class and filled out the survey. This student number is 1 less than the amount that took the pre-listening skills survey because 1 student withdrew from the class during week 8 of the study. At site B 26 students were present and completed the survey and 23 students at site C were present and completed the survey. Sixty-six surveys were returned from the 66 targeted students. There was a smaller amount of surveys given because of a decrease in class size due to students moving out of the class.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to assess the effects of listening skills on students' attitudes towards listening and ultimately their listening behaviors, tallies were made of the number of times directions needed to be repeated as well as a pre-intervention survey and post-intervention survey. These data were aggregated by site and are presented in Table 4, Table 5 and Table 6.

Table 4- Site A tally of direction repetitions

Week number	Number of direction repetitions throughout weeks
Weeks 1 and 2	103
Weeks 5 and 6	97 (94% of initial)
Weeks 9 and 10	81 (79% of initial)

Table 5- Site B tally of direction repetitions

Week number	Number of direction repetitions throughout weeks
Weeks 1 and 2	58
Weeks 5 and 6	55 (95% of initial)
Weeks 9 and 10	42 (72% of initial)

Table 6-Site C tally of direction repetitions

Week number	Number of direction repetitions throughout weeks
Weeks 1 and 2	27
Weeks 5 and 6	27 (100% of initial)
Weeks 9 and 10	17 (63% of initial)

All of the sites experienced a slight decrease in actual counts, though the numbers do not appear noteworthy. Also to be taken into account are the varieties of classroom activities that can influence how many times directions need to be repeated. There is quite a large difference among the different sites, but there are several factors that need to be taken into account. Site C is a sixth grade social studies class, Site B is an eighth grade science class and Site A is an eighth grade consumer science class. The difference in the activities and grade level can influence the amount of times a teacher needs to repeat directions. The individual style of the teacher can also influence the need for repeating directions to her students.

When looking at anecdotal journals, none of the teachers felt like the amount of times directions needed to be repeated was significantly decreased. While the changes are not drastic reductions in repeating directions, there was still a deduction. Again, particular teaching style

and age can account for the discrepancies between the different sites. There does seem to be a correlation among the teacher asking for quiet, focus and ceasing of fidgeting before giving directions and the directions actually being able to be carried out.

Also of note was the difference in the pre-intervention survey and post-intervention survey. These comparisons follow. Table 1, Chapter 2 is reproduced here.

Table 1

Site A Pre-Intervention Survey Results

Question	Always true	Almost always true	Sometimes true	Never true
1	17	56	28	0
2	22	33	44	0
3	0	44	50	6
4	50	28	22	0
5	17	33	33	17
6	28	56	17	0
7	0	39	28	28
8	6	17	33	39
9	11	33	39	17
10	6	17	39	33
11	28	28	39	0
12	22	33	17	28
13	72	22	6	0
14	44	56	0	0
15	44	50	6	0
16	33	61	6	0
17	56	44	0	0
18	50	39	7	0
19	44	44	11	0
20	35	40	22	3

Note: All numbers within tables are expressed as percents

Table 7

Site A Post-Intervention Survey Results

Question	Always true	Almost always true	Sometimes true	Never true
1	35	59	6	0
2	18	41	41	0
3	18	29	53	0
4	53	35	12	0
5	35	29	18	18
6	56	24	24	0
7	0	35	53	12
8	12	35	24	29
9	29	18	24	29
10	12	29	41	18
11	18	35	47	0
12	18	12	18	53
13	53	18	12	18
14	53	24	18	0
15	41	35	24	0
16	47	18	35	0
17	41	41	18	0
18	29	29	29	12
19	35	35	24	6
20	35	35	29	0

Note: All numbers within tables are expressed as percents

It is interesting to note the differences between the two identical surveys, given to the identical students. On the whole, there are large differences between the percentages of students who reported that the questions were "always true" in the first survey compared to students who reported the questions were "almost always true" or "sometimes true." This can be attributed to many things. The pre-survey was given in the very beginning of the school year, when most students have the opinion that they are going to do well in the coming year. The students also know what they should do in order to do well. By the time the post survey was given, at least ten weeks had passed and students were over the beginning of the year "honeymoon." Reality had

set in. It is difficult to determine if their changing results were because of the intervention or because of the students settling into their regular routines and being more aware of what they actually do, instead of what they wished they did on a consistent basis. A much larger contingent of students reported in the post-intervention survey that it is "sometimes true" or "never true" that they do not day dream in class (question 7), compared with the pre-intervention survey (56% in the pre-intervention survey, compared to 65% in the post-intervention survey). Are the students more cognizant of their failings to stay on-task because of grades they have received or because of awareness of good listening behavior because of the intervention? A smaller portion of the students are consistently copying down information from the board (question 13) with 72% reporting that was "always true" in the pre-intervention survey and only 53% reporting that to be "always true" in the post-intervention survey. There were similar occurrences at the other sites, as can be seen in Table 2, reproduced from Chapter 2 and in Table 8.

Table 2

Site B Pre-Intervention Survey Results

Question	Always true	Almost always true	Sometimes true	Never true
1	18	54	28	0
2	5	60	35	0
3	11	49	38	0
4	30	45	25	0
5	21	32	42	5
6	42	34	18	3
7	19	31	40	11
8	7	27	43	23
9	5	25	54	16
10	12	28	47	14
11	14	34	38	19
12	9	13	58	20
13	27	41	25	7
14	33	53	17	0
15	35	43	23	0
16	36	47	15	2
17	30	47	22	0
18	24	51	25	0
19	33	48	16	2
20	27	55	19	0

Note: All numbers within tables are expressed as percents

Table 8

Site B Post-Intervention Survey Results

Question	Always true	Almost always true	Sometimes true	Never true
1	13	63	21	4
2	8	36	52	4
3	0	33	54	13
4	14	48	39	4
5	5	52	24	19
6	22	52	17	9
7	17	25	46	13
8	8	20	36	36
9	8	17	63	13
10	5	27	55	17
11	19	33	33	15
12	29	9	41	18
13	22	30	30	7
14	22	39	35	4
15	26	43	13	18
16	32	47	21	0
17	25	42	29	4
18	24	48	28	0
19	26	43	32	0
20	25	42	29	4

Note: All numbers within tables are expressed as percents

This site had some of the same changes in data between the pre-intervention survey and the post-intervention survey. There were less students who reported that they keep more eye contact with the teacher (question 2), from 36% who felt it was "almost always true" for them. This number fell from 60%. In the post-intervention survey, 52% reported it was "sometimes true" for them to keep eye contact. Since this seems to stand in direct opposition to what the tallies of direction repetition would seem to indicate, it may be that the students ideas about eye contact and the lie were unrealistic at the beginning of the year and their second reporting might be a bit more in line with what they are actually doing on a regular basis. There's also the dip in

the students who are concentrating on the material when they are looking at the teacher (question 14). Thirty-nine percent reported that that was "almost always true" for them on the post-intervention survey while 53% reported it so for them on the pre-intervention survey. It seems the students have found what listening skills look like and can give the appearance of using them, without actually doing so. Or it could be a case of the students not reporting as often as it actually is true in the pre-intervention survey. This can also be seen in Table 3, reproduced from Chapter 2 and from Table 9 below.

Table 3

Site C Pre-Intervention Survey Results

Questions	Always true	Almost always true	Sometimes true	Never true
1	35	57	9	0
2	9	70	22	0
3	22	52	26	0
4	43	38	9	0
5	30	52	17	0
6	64	36	0	0
7	48	30	17	9
8	29	33	33	5
9	44	30	17	9
10	26	65	4	0
11	30	57	13	0
12	22	35	43	0
13	61	30	9	0
14	43	52	4	0
15	52	48	4	4
16	55	41	5	0
17	54	35	9	0
18	57	35	9	0
19	65	30	4	0
20	35	35	24	6

Note: All numbers within tables are expressed as percents

Table 9

Site C Post-Intervention Survey Results

Question	Always true	Almost always true	Sometimes true	Never
1	37	50	17	0
2	5	73	23	0
3	18	32	45	5
4	41	23	32	5
5	18	27	45	9
6	50	37	17	0
7	18	50	32	0
8	27	17	50	17
9	23	18	50	9
10	18	45	37	0
11	27	37	27	5
12	5	27	45	23
13	59	32	5	5
14	50	32	18	0
15	50	41	9	0
16	27	50	23	0
17	41	45	9	0
18	41	37	23	0
19	45	45	5	0
20	37	41	23	0

Note: All numbers within tables are expressed as percents

It is interesting to note there are not differences between the first two sites and this one. It would be expected, considering the nature of the ages and developmental states of the different sites. This is the sixth grade site while the first two are eighth grade sites. There are fundamental differences between sixth graders and eighth graders, as sixth graders mature tremendously during their first year of middle school and eighth graders become more and more interested not in finishing this last year of middle school but starting the next one in high school. It seems to show that the listening habits of students decrease during the year, at least in middle school level. For example, in the pre-intervention survey, 52% reported that it was "almost

always true" that they were interested in the subject matter being taught (a critical component to practicing good listening skills) (question 3), while only 39% report that in the post-intervention survey. Also, now only 5% report that it is "always true" that they write down questions the teacher gives in class (question 12) down from 22% on the pre-intervention survey. Sixty-seven percent of the students reported that it was "sometimes true" or "never true" that they did not daydream during class (question 7) on the post-intervention survey, while 38% reported to be in the same categories on the pre-intervention survey.

The data suggests several different things that seem to be at odds with each other. The first measurement suggests that the students did in fact need the directions repeated less frequently after the intervention of asking the students to focus, stop fidgeting and be quiet before directions were given. However, this practice did not seem to spill over into their daily or their classroom listening behaviors. It would seem that one would influence the other, but this data does not suggest that.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the presentation and analysis of the data collected on repeating directions, students needed a slight decrease in the number of times directions were given before they were able to follow those directions. When students were asked to follow three steps before receiving directions; stop fidgeting, focus with eye contact and be quiet, directions were received by students more effectively in that there was a decrease in the number of times those directions needed to be given by the teacher. In contrast, based on the presentation and analysis of the data collected from the pre and post intervention surveys, students did not feel that their listening skills had improved.

The timing of the pre-intervention survey is thought to be due to the discrepancies in the pre and post intervention survey results. The pre survey was administered at a time before students were used to the new school year and teacher. The high results in the pre survey might be attributed to the student's desire to do well that year or their unrealistic expectations of themselves. If this implementation were to be repeated, the researchers recommend the survey be given in the middle of the year instead of the beginning. Administering the survey later would allow students to become more aware of their daily listening habits and accurately reflect those results on their survey. It is believed that the post survey results are the more accurate results of the participating students. Based on teacher opinion, it is not believed that the listening skills of the students actually decreased. Instead, the listening skills most likely stayed the same, while the student's awareness of their listening habits heightened.

It is believed that when students are required to prepare themselves for directions by focusing, not fidgeting and being quiet, that they are exhibiting good listening skills and therefore can receive the directions given in a more effective manner. That effective manner seems to reduce the number of times those directions need to be repeated for students. Many teachers are on a time constraint and feel the pressure to fit numerous activities into a small amount of time, so they give directions immediately before students have readied themselves, and in return are faced with repeating those directions several times. This repeating of directions causes more time to be spent on explaining the directions that need to be followed. The researchers' recommendation is that teachers need to be more patient and, stop and wait for students to get ready to receive their directions. If this is done, the extra time spent repeating directions can be lessened. Also, the teacher frustration caused by the repetition of directions will be decreased because there will be less repetition.

Recommendations that teachers continuously reinforce these three listening steps before directions are given may cause students to develop a habit of performing these listening procedures. If that occurs, it is expected that directions given outside of school will be received more effectively also and that the need for repetition of directions in all aspects of life will decrease.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Improving Student Academic Success Through The Promotion Of Listening Skills

LISTENING SKILLS SURVEY

Read each statement and decide how that statement describes you. Put a check in the appropriate column.

Statement	Always True	Almost Always True	Sometimes True	Never True
1. I stay awake and alert in class.				
2. I maintain eye contact with the teacher.				
3. I am interested in the subject being taught.				
4. I understand the teacher's questions or ask if I do not understand.				
5. I try to summarize the information given in class.				
6. I have a reason for listening while the teacher is presenting a lesson.				
7. I do not daydream during class.				
8. I try to predict what will come next when the teacher is talking.				
9. I take notes regularly.				
10. I ignore distractions such as loud noises, activity in the hall or late arriving students.				
11. I try to figure out the teacher's purpose for the lesson.				
12. I write down questions the teacher gives during class.				
13. I copy down information from the chalkboard or overhead.				
14. When looking at the teacher, I am concentrating on the information being presented.				
15. If I don't understand the information being presented, I still pay attention to what the teacher is saying.				
16. I do not interrupt the teacher when she is presenting information to the class.				
17. I sit facing the teacher when she is talking.				
18. I do not distract others while the teacher is presenting information.				
19. When the teacher asks a question to the class, I respond either verbally or by nodding.				
20. I want to learn what the teacher is presenting.				

Appendix B
Improving Student Academic Success Through The Promotion Of Listening Skills

DATA COLLECTION

Date	Number of times it is necessary to repeat directions

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