

INCREASING STUDENT PARTICIPATION AND ADVOCACY OF PRIMARY STUDENTS
THROUGH ROLE PLAY, TEACHER MODELING, AND DIRECT INSTRUCTION OF
COMMUNICATION SKILLS

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An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

Saint Xavier University & Pearson Achievement Solutions, Inc.
Field-Based Master's Program

Chicago, Illinois

December, 2007

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
CHAPTER 1: PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT	1
General Statement of the Problem	1
Immediate Context of the Problem	1
Local Context of the Problem	10
National Context of the Problem	13
CHAPTER 2: PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION	14
Evidence of the Problem	14
Probable Causes	25
CHAPTER 3: THE SOLUTION STRATEGY	33
Review of the Literature	33
Project Objective and Processing Statements	48
Project Action Plan	48
Methods of Assessment	52
CHAPTER 4: PROJECT RESULTS	54
Historical Description of the Intervention	54
Presentation and Analysis of Results	68
Conclusions and Recommendations	80
REFERENCES	84
APPENDICES	87
Appendix A: Parent Survey.....	87
Appendix B: Teacher Observation Checklist	88

Appendix C: Student Questionnaire: Site A.....	89
Appendix D: Student Questionnaire: Site B.....	95
Appendix E: Parent Letter: Introduction to Communication Lab.....	101
Appendix F: Parent Letter: Observation.....	102
Appendix G: Parent Letter: Body Language.....	103
Appendix H: Parent Letter: Listening.....	104
Appendix I: Parent Letter: Turn Taking.....	105
Appendix J: Parent Letter: The Way.....	106
Appendix K: Parent Letter: Praise.....	107
Appendix L: Parent Letter: Constructive Criticism.....	108
Appendix M: Parent Letter: Success/Failure.....	109

ABSTRACT

Advocacy among primary students and lack of classroom participation was the identified problem area for this action research project report. There were 19 student participants in an afternoon kindergarten at Site A, and 20 student participants in a first grade classroom at Site B. The research team consisted of three teacher researchers. Two of the researchers were classroom teachers (Sites A & B), and the third was an itinerant teacher. The post data collection occurred April 30, 2007 to May 11, 2007.

The goal of the research was to improve students' participation and advocacy and to document the impact of role play, teacher modeling, and direct instruction of communication skills. The three tools used were a parent survey, teacher observation checklist, and student questionnaire. In the classroom setting, the researchers identified that students were interrupting, inappropriately interacting with peers, inadequately advocating for themselves, and displaying off-task behaviors. Parents indicated strained and unsuccessful communication in their home environments.

The interventions used to improve communication and advocacy among primary students were role play, teacher modeling, and direct instruction of communication skills. A specific communication skill was introduced in both classrooms each week for ten weeks (Dodge, 1991). That skill was then reinforced throughout the week through teacher modeling and role play opportunities. Parent letters were sent home each week informing the parents of the skill that was introduced and strategies that they could apply to encourage the use of that skill in the home environment.

The completion of this project clearly supported the implementation of role play, teacher modeling, and direct instruction of communication skills. The results of this study indicated that students became better advocates for themselves, participated more willingly, and improved their communication skills in the school and home environments.

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

The kindergartners of Site A, the first graders of Site B, and the students with a hearing impairment at Site C exhibited the inability to communicate effectively in the classroom. The challenging behaviors that hindered communication were interrupting, failure to convey one's needs, and express themselves appropriately. These behaviors appeared to negatively impact teacher instruction and student's self-esteem. Evidence of these behaviors was documented through a parent survey, student survey, and teacher observation checklist.

Immediate Context of the Problem

There were three teacher researchers that contributed to this action research project. One teacher taught kindergarten at Site A, one teacher taught first grade at Site B, and the third teacher taught students with a hearing impairment (Site C). Detailed information at each site can be seen in the subsections below: Site A, Site B, and Site C. Unless noted, the following information was retrieved from the *Illinois School Report Card, 2005*.

Site A

The kindergarten through sixth grade elementary building at Site A had a primarily Caucasian student body according to the information shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Racial/Ethnic Background by Percentage

	<u>Caucasian</u>	<u>Hispanic</u>	<u>Asian</u>	<u>African American</u>	<u>Multi racial /Ethnic</u>	<u>Native American</u>
School	72.6	12.9	7.6	4.2	2.5	0.3
District	77.5	11.6	4.5	4.4	1.5	0.6
State	56.7	18.3	3.7	20.3	0.7	0.2

The low-income rates for Site A were 8.5% compared to 40% for the state. “Low-income students come from families receiving public aid: live in institutions for neglected or delinquent children; are supported in foster homes with public funds; or are eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches” as stated in the *Illinois School Report Card, 2005*. Of the student body, 6.4% were Limited-English-Proficient (LEP) students compared to 6.6% for the state. These students were eligible for transitional bilingual programs. The mobility rate was 3.5% for the school, 8.6% for the district, and 16.1% for the state. The school attendance rate was 95.8% compared to 94.9% for the district and 93.9% for the state. According to the Building Secretary (personal communication August 18, 2006), the total enrollment of students was 667, 339 males and 327 females, and the average class size was 21 students.

Based on full-time equivalents, the school had 47 teachers for the 2005-06 school year. The teaching staff was 98.2% Caucasian. The average number of years of teaching experience at site A was 9 compared to 13.6 for the state. Although all teachers had a bachelor’s degree, 55% of the teachers had earned a master’s degree or above. The average kindergarten class size was 25 students, with 1:25 teacher to student ratio. Financially, the average salary for a teacher for the district was \$40,397, compared to \$55,558 for the state.

The Site A classroom had a self-contained curriculum and focused on the core areas of math, reading, science, social science, and language arts. Students attended specials on a weekly basis: physical education, music, art, and computers. Students who qualified received additional services in early literacy, English as a Second Language, and Transitional Program of Instruction (TPI). Kindergarten reading instruction was taught for 75 minutes per day. Direct instruction of mathematics was 30 minutes per day. Science, social science, and language arts were integrated throughout the day. The curriculum was implemented based on the state standards and

performance descriptors that were developed for the district. For the academic year 2004-2005, 80.6% of the students met or exceeded the Illinois Learning Standards according to the Illinois State Achievement Test.

Site A had a principal, lead teacher, one full-time secretary, health clerk, two part-time nurses, and technology support. One custodian was available during the day for general maintenance responsibilities while a night custodian was responsible for any nighttime activities and routines. A private company employed cafeteria staff, which hired their own staff for the kitchen and cafeteria duties.

The faculty and staff consisted of 47 certified teachers and 18 non-certified staff members. Included in the 47 certified teachers: three reading specialists; one English as a Second Language teacher; two TPI teachers; a physical education, art, music, and computer teacher; and a rotating library facilitator. There were two full-time kindergarten teachers at this site teaching a half-day program. Aides were placed in the classrooms based on criteria of students with Individualized Education Programs. Special Education served kindergarten through sixth grade with two learning resource teachers, one school psychologist, one social worker, one full-time speech therapist and two consultant speech therapists, and one occupational therapist. Other necessary services are contracted through a special education cooperative. These services included; hearing and vision itinerant teachers, physical therapists and intervention specialists. Band was offered during the school day for a specified fee to fifth and sixth grades only. Before and after school intramural programs were offered to fifth and sixth graders for an additional fee.

Site A had a strong parent volunteer program. A majority of the classroom teachers recruited parents at the beginning of the school year to assist in the preparation of materials and activities, copying, serving as guest speakers, and helping in the classroom. Volunteers painted

murals in the hallways to improve the aesthetic appeal of the hallways, made backdrops for music and talent show programs, and formed a beautification team for the outside grounds. The district Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) was prominent as well. Through various successful fundraising events, the PTO purchased classroom materials, mobile computer labs for each building, and supported numerous assemblies for the children's learning. The continual character development was a goal for Site A through character-based themes presented by students during monthly assemblies and weekly certificates for unique student achievements. Morning announcements and school news was shared by sixth graders with the student body on classroom televisions.

The research school of Site A was built in 1999 to accommodate the rapidly growing community. There are four elementary buildings and one middle school in the district. Site A was centrally located within the district that educated approximately 3,300 students. The research school was a single-story brick building sectioned into three wings. Each wing contained eight classrooms, housing two grade levels that center around the library resource area. Each hallway contained numerous large bulletin boards for student work and themes to be displayed. Colorfully painted murals supported a positive learning environment. Site A had two playgrounds, a baseball field, a soccer field and a paved area with basketball hoops. A large shed near the playground housed play equipment for use at recess. Each classroom at Site A, had a telephone with an outside line and voicemail; a television with cable, video recorder, computer monitor capabilities, and interschool video; and two computers with Internet accessibility. All staff and district information pertaining to meetings, agendas and announcements were conducted through email. School attendance and report cards were completed on the classroom computer. There was one computer laboratory with 30 computers, an additional tech area with 12

computers and one mobile computer laboratory with 30 laptops available for teacher and student use.

Site B

The kindergarten through sixth grade elementary building at Site B had a primarily Caucasian student body according to the information shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Racial/Ethnic Background by Percentage

	<u>Caucasian</u>	<u>Hispanic</u>	<u>Asian</u>	<u>African American</u>	<u>Multi racial /Ethnic</u>	<u>Native American</u>
School	81.6	9.8	2.5	2.8	1.8	1.5
District	77.5	11.6	4.5	4.4	1.5	0.6
State	56.7	18.3	3.7	20.3	0.7	0.2

The low-income rate for Site B was 9.5% compared to 40% for the state. “Low-income students come from families receiving public aid; live in institutions for neglected or delinquent children; are supported in foster homes with public funds; or are eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches” as stated in the *Illinois School Report Card, 2005*. Of the student body, 1.9% were LEP students compared to 6.6% for the state. These students were eligible for transitional bilingual programs. The mobility rate was 3.0% for the school, 8.6% for the district, and 16.1% for the state. The school attendance rate was 95.2% compared to 94.9% for the district and 93.9% for the state. The total enrollment of students was 674, with 351 males and 323 females. The average class size was 22 (Building Secretary, personal communication, August 18, 2006).

Based on full-time equivalents, the school had 42 teachers for the 2005-06 school year, 2 males and 40 females. The teaching staff was 98.2% Caucasian. At site B, the average number of years of teaching experience was 11 compared to 13.6 for the state. Although all teachers had a

bachelor's degree, 52% of the teachers had earned master's degree or above. The average first grade class size was 23 students, with 1:23 teacher to student ratio. Financially, the average salary for a teacher in the district was \$40,397, compared to \$55,558 for the state.

The Site B classroom had a self-contained curriculum and focused on the core areas of math, reading, science, social science and language arts. Students attended specials on a weekly basis: physical education, music, art, and computers. Students who qualified received additional services in early literacy, English as a Second Language, and TPI . First grade reading instruction was taught for 115 minutes per day. Direct instruction of mathematics was 60 minutes per day. Science, social science, and language arts were integrated throughout the day. The curriculum was implemented based on the state standards and performance descriptors that were developed for the district. For the academic year 2004-2005, 78.3% of the students met or exceeded the Illinois Learning Standards according to the Illinois State Achievement Test.

Site B had a principal, lead teacher, full-time secretary, health clerk, part-time nurse, and technology support. One custodian was available during the day for general maintenance responsibilities while a night custodian was responsible for any nighttime activities and routines. A private company employed cafeteria staff, which hired their own staff for the kitchen and cafeteria duties. The faculty and staff consisted of 42 certified teachers and 23 non-certified staff members. Included in the 42 certified teachers were two reading specialists, who also instructed TPI students; a physical education, art, music, and computer teacher; and a district rotating library facilitator. There were three first grades, and two first/second grade multi-age classrooms at this site. Aides were placed in the classrooms based on criteria of students with Individualized Education Program. Special educators serviced kindergarten through sixth grade students with three learning resource teachers. Site B also had a school psychologist, a full and part- time

speech therapist, a social worker, and an occupational therapist that serviced the district. Other necessary services were contracted through a special education cooperative. Those services included hearing and vision itinerant teachers, physical therapists or intervention specialists.

The school was unique in that it housed a kindergarten through second grade cross-categorical classroom. Students in this class had a regular education homeroom in which they attended science, social science and specials classes. The school also had a fantastic PTO that volunteered in the classrooms and around the school. They also raised much-needed funds after several referendums had failed. Intramural sports, art club, and bell choir were offered after school for a fee. Teachers were paid with a stipend for these activities. Band was offered for a fee for fifth and sixth graders.

The research school of Site B was built in 1957. It was the third oldest of the five schools in the district. There was a small parking lot in the front, which led to the grassy area where the flagpole stood surrounded by a garden. After entering through the office, the first hallway has three second and three third grade classrooms. The main hallway had two kindergartens, three first grades, two multi-age, and one cross categorical classroom. Art, special education resource, speech rooms and the cafeteria were also in this hallway. Around the corner were the music and computer rooms, and the library with a computer laboratory and the gymnasium. The next two hallways had two reading resource rooms, and four fourth, fifth, and sixth grade classrooms. Each of the classrooms had two computers, which had Internet access. There are two computer laboratories, which also had access to the Internet. The school had one mobile computer laboratory. At the rear of the building was a blacktopped area for basketball, hopscotch, and four square. This was connected to a wood chipped area with playground equipment, which was surrounded by a grassy area for children to play.

Site C

Site C was a program in which one of the teacher researchers taught. The Program Principal (personal communication, June 23, 2006) provided the information included in the following section. The hearing itinerant program was comprised of students residing in 36 school districts. The students were from a wide area, therefore, the demographics tended to be quite diverse. There were 371 students in the hearing itinerant program. An average caseload per teacher was 20 students. The majority of the students were mainstreamed into their home schools. A minority of the hearing impaired students had multiple disabilities and was in a resource program. The students ranged in age from three to 21 years old. The students' degree of hearing loss varied from normal to profound (completely deaf). Depending on the student's specific hearing loss, he may have utilized a specific assistive listening device. The number and type of assistive listening devices used by students in the hearing itinerant program were 141 hearing aids, 17 cochlear implants, and 14 sound fields. Due to some students' limited ability to send and receive oral messages, some students needed an alternative mode of communication. There were six students who used sign language interpreters, and two students had cued speech transliterators.

The hearing itinerant program employed 15 full-time and three part-time teachers and one lead teacher. All of the teachers were female and Caucasian.

The students in the hearing itinerant program received a varied amount and type of support services. The delivery model ranged from consult (minimal student contact) to direct service. Direct services may have included regularly scheduled one-on-one services independent from the classroom, or regularly scheduled services that were rendered within the classroom setting in collaboration with the classroom teacher. The delivery model used was dependant upon

what goals were being implemented. Itinerant services were most frequently rendered within the students' home school, but may have been provided in special education classrooms outside the students' home district. An Individualized Educational Program was developed for each student in the program.

Since the hearing teacher traveled from building to building, the physical environment for instruction varied. Services were rendered in classrooms, confessionals, hallways, libraries, offices, closets, specials' classrooms, and conference rooms. The teacher's materials were typically stored in the trunk of her vehicle.

The students from Site C all resided within the same school district. The statistical information from this district was obtained from the *Illinois School Report Card, 2005*. The district's enrollment among five buildings was approximately 3,300 students. The ethnic background of the students in this district is quite diverse, and is represented in Table 3.

Table 3

Racial/Ethnic Background by Percentage

	<u>Caucasian</u>	<u>Hispanic</u>	<u>Asian</u>	<u>African American</u>	<u>Multi racial /Ethnic</u>	<u>Native American</u>
District	77.5	11.6	4.5	4.4	1.5	0.6
State	56.7	18.3	3.7	20.3	0.7	0.2

Low-income families represent 11.1% of the student population. "Low-income students come from families receiving public aid: live in institutions for neglected or delinquent children; are supported in foster homes with public funds, or are eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches" as stated in the *Illinois School Report Card, 2005*. Students that received LEP services represented 5.2% of the district. The district experienced some enrollment fluctuation with the

mobility rate at 8.6%. The district's attendance rate was above the state average, at 94.9%. The district's truancy rate was 0.2%.

Site C had one principal who supervised three programs that served students that were deaf or hard of hearing. There were two secretaries that functioned from a central location for the various hearing impaired programs. There were eight audiologists available to all of the hearing teachers. The audiologists conducted testing and recommended, programmed, repaired, and maintained assistive listening devices for the students. Due to the communication needs of students with a hearing loss, a psychologist experienced in issues related to hearing impairments was available to perform testing when necessary.

Local Context of the Problem

The research schools were situated within one district in northeastern Illinois. They were located in Lake County, north of the Chicago metropolitan area. Each school was located in a residential area with relatively few businesses.

The total population in 2000 was 5,864 with an estimated population of 8,296 for the year 2004. Males accounted for 49.8% of the population and females accounted for 50.2% of the population. The median age in 2000 was 33 years. The age distribution was 32.1% under the age of 18, and 37.8% between the ages of 25 and 44. This particular age group explained the rapid growth within the schools. The median household income was \$65,078, with the median house value being \$207,200 (city-data.com, n.d.). Residents below the poverty level represented 3.7% of the population. Site A had experienced recent growth due to availability of land. This had invited the development of new luxurious subdivisions. Site B was located in an established area with little opportunity for growth. The area's ethnicity resembled that of the research school in

that Caucasian was the primary ethnicity. More information regarding ethnicity was described below in Table 4.

Table 4

Racial/Ethnic Background of Local Context by Percentage

<u>Caucasian</u>	<u>Hispanic</u>	<u>African American</u>	<u>Multiracial</u>	<u>Other race</u>
91	3.1	2.5	1.9	0.9

High school graduates, age 25 and older, represented 93.1% of the population, while 36.9% of the population had attained a bachelor's degree or higher, and 9.7% had a graduate or professional degree.

There were 2,052 households in the research school area. The average household size was 2.81 people with an average family size of 3.20. The employment opportunities within the research community were 21.7% manufacturing, 15.4% educational, health, and social services, and 11.4% retail trade. The unemployment rate for this area was 3.9% (city-data.com, n.d.). The crime rate in the research area showed a slight increase of 1.3% from 2003-2004. In 2003, 157 total crimes were documented, and in 2004, 159 crimes were documented (Crime in Illinois, 2004).

This research community had a rich history and was known as an affluent tourist town in the 1800's. Passenger trains became an integral part of this village's history in 1886. Farming and ice cutting were primary industries in the area in the late 1800s. The town was incorporated on February 21, 1901. Mansions that were erected in the 1800s by wealthy families still contribute to the character and charm of the community. The population of the village multiplied more than six-fold from the years 1960 to the year 2000 (Site X, Illinois – <http://www.SiteX>).

org/history_SiteX.html). Along with its growth, the village had experienced many improvements including businesses, forest preserves, and schools. This family-oriented community provided several opportunities for recreation and entertainment: shopping, boating, theme parks, and popular eating establishments.

The district being researched believed that students should be life-time learners. The mission statement, as found on the district website stated, “Our mission is to instill in all students the knowledge and skills necessary to thrive as life-long learners and responsible citizens. Confident and cooperative, prepared to meet the challenges of the future.” (School Board website). The school district consisted of four kindergarten through sixth grade buildings, and one middle school. The students educated in this district would attend one of four area high schools. The district employed one superintendent that supervised all of the district buildings. The instructional expenditure per student was \$4,026 compared to the state’s per student expenditure of \$5,216. The tax base from 2002 was \$2.99 per \$100 (*Illinois School Report Card*, 2005, p. 1). The two most recent attempts at an educational fund referendum failed. The failure of the referendum resulted in the restructuring and elimination of programs. There were computer labs in every building each had approximately 25 computers. All classrooms had two computers available for teacher and student use. A mobile computer lab was recently purchased for each building. All computers had Internet accessibility, and students in all grades received technology instruction. Televisions were mounted in each classroom for additional technology instruction, educational learning, and school communications.

After reviewing demographics of our area, we do not feel as though the statistics have a link to our identified problem or will have a predominant effect on our action research project. In this research district, the children were provided with a positive educational environment that

had a goal to develop independent, confident life-long learners. Students' ability to communicate effectively with their peers, teachers, and other adults is important in their social and academic achievement. To advocate ideas, emotions, and actions in an appropriate manner is a skill that leads to building self-esteem and confidence in every day life. The goal is to develop and enhance these communication skills through direct instruction and other intervention strategies.

National Context of the Problem

The development of oral language skills among children was critical to their academic and social success (Butler & Stevens, 1997). Children needed appropriate social behaviors and language skills to effectively communicate with peers and adults (Timber, Olswang, & Coggins, 2005). A student's motivation to learn was affected by the learning environment and the support for participation conducted during classroom instruction (Turner & Patrick, 2004). Children needed to learn independence and responsibilities for themselves, and for their behaviors. This independence included directing their own activities, remaining focused, making wise decisions, and completing tasks (McCay & Keyes, 2001/2002).

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Evidence of the Problem

The identified problem area for this research project was the lack of classroom participation and advocacy among primary students. The purpose of this research was to improve students' participation and advocacy and document the impact of role play, teacher modeling, and direct instruction of communication skills. There were 19 student participants in an afternoon kindergarten at Site A, and 20 student participants in a first grade classroom at Site B. The research team consisted of three teacher researchers. Two of the researchers were classroom teachers (Sites A & B), and the third was an itinerant teacher. The initial data collection occurred January 25, 2007 to February 16, 2007. The three tools used were a parent survey, teacher observation checklist, and student questionnaire.

Parent Survey

A parent survey (Appendix A) was used to establish incidence of students' behaviors within the home setting. Each survey contained questions requiring parents to indicate the child's communication style and behaviors beyond the school setting. Parents of 19 afternoon kindergarten students and 23 first grade students received the survey in a folder placed in their child's backpack on January 25, 2007. The parents were given one week to complete the survey and return it in an envelope that was labeled with the teacher's name. The envelopes were placed, by the children, in a basket in a designated area. Thirty-nine of the 42 parent surveys were completed for a return rate of 93%. The survey consisted of five questions which required a circled response. Four of the questions had 4 to 12 behavioral choices from which the parent

could choose. One question included a yes or no response, and there was an additional area for an open-ended response.

According to Figure 1, given 12 personality attributes from which to choose, 82% (n= 124) of the responses were behaviors that would compliment advocacy: talkative, independent, friendly, outgoing, assertive, and patient. Alternatively, 18% (n= 27) of the responses indicated behaviors that do not exhibit advocacy: passive, quiet, shy, anxious, and reserved.

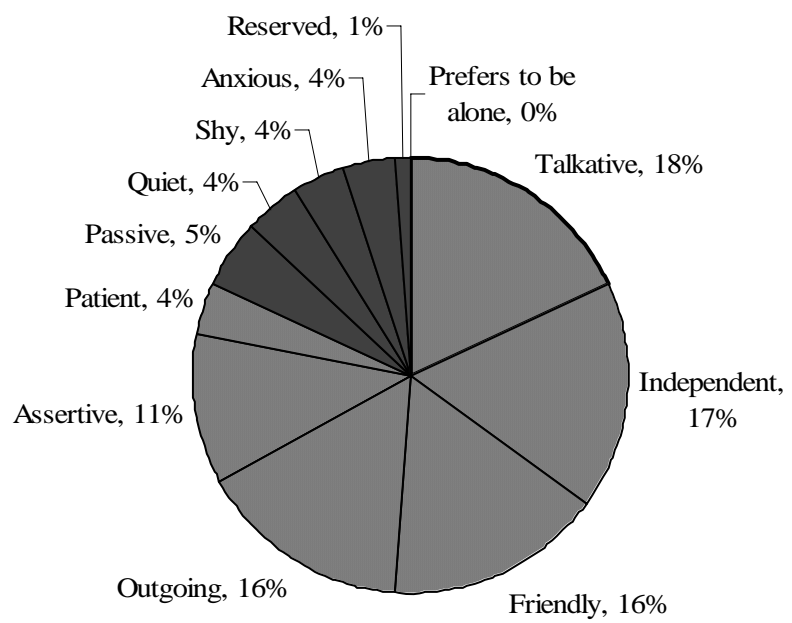


Figure 1: Parent Survey (n=151)

Figure 2, 3, and 4 each represent one of three questions that offered four behavioral choices on the parent survey. The first prompt required the parent to choose which word best described their child’s communication style when needing assistance: passive, whines/begs, communicates appropriately, or demanding. The second and third prompts required the parent to choose which word best described their child’s behavior during unstructured and structured activities. The options for each of these two prompts were: relaxed, assertive/confident, anxious, or reserved/shy. All circled descriptors were used in collapsing the data.

Figure 2 indicates that children exhibited inappropriate conduct 49% (n=19) of the time based on parents’ responses. These behaviors included being demanding 27% (n=11), whining 18% (n=7), and passive 4% (n=2).

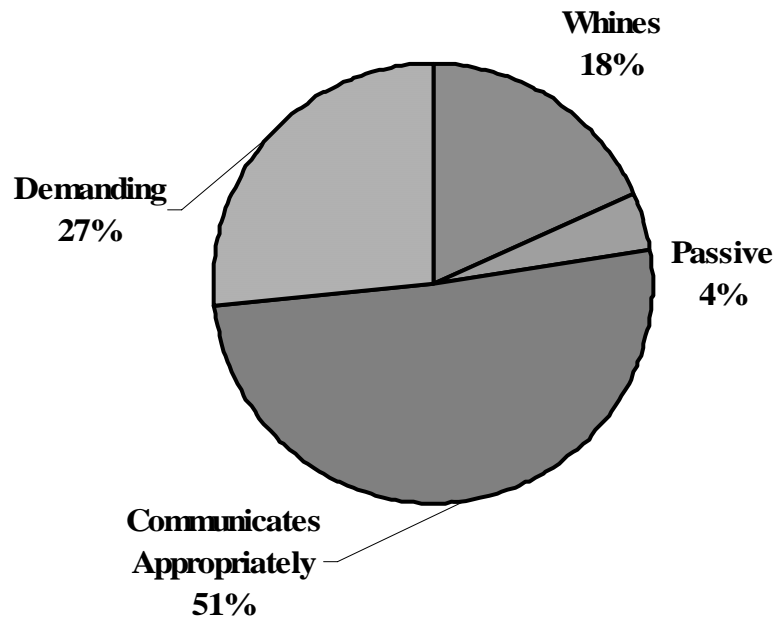


Figure 2: Communicates When Needs Assistance (n=39)

As indicated in Figure 3, only 9% (n= 4) of the parent responses indicated a lack of advocacy and communication skills. Ninety-one percent (n=39) of the responses indicated assertive and relaxed behaviors in unstructured activities.

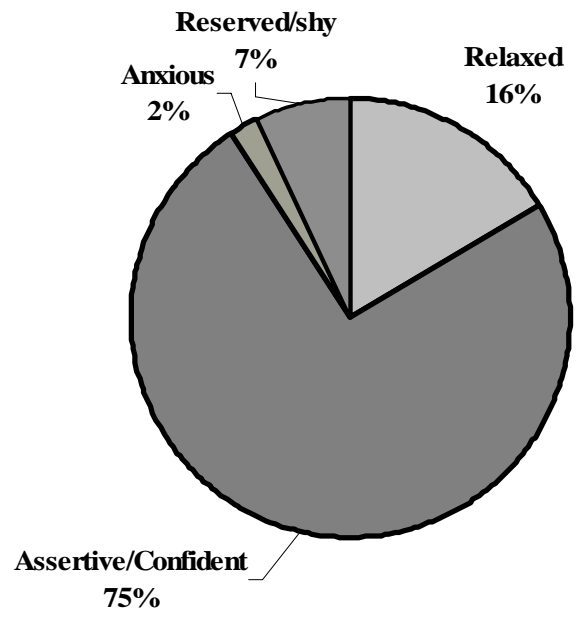


Figure 3: Unstructured Activities (n=43)

Figure 4 shows that 85% of parents (n= 33) felt their children had exhibited pro-social communication skills in structured activities. Fifteen percent (n= 6) reported their child demonstrated behavioral characteristics that were non-conducive to self-advocacy.

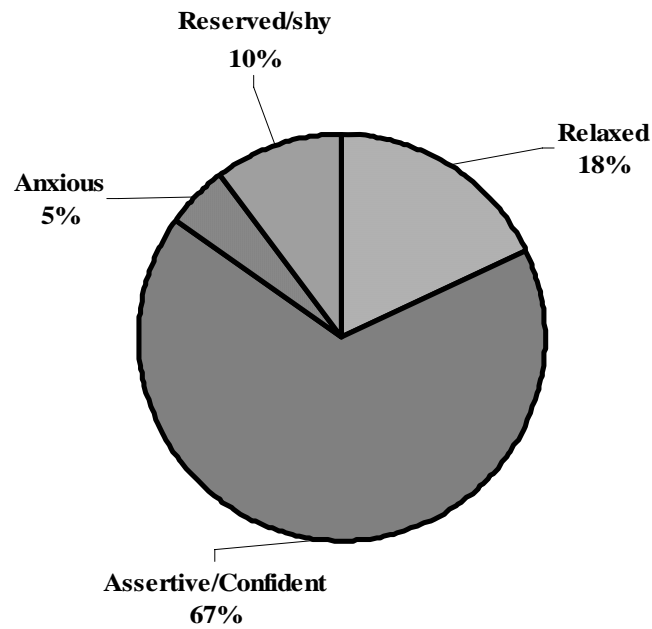


Figure 4: Structured Activities (n=39)

The fourth prompt required the parent to respond either yes, or no to whether or not their child initiates conversation about his/her experiences/feelings. In Figure 5, 76% (n= 30) of parents indicated that their child initiated conversation about their feelings and experiences. Twenty-four percent (n=9) of parents indicated that their child does not initiate conversations.

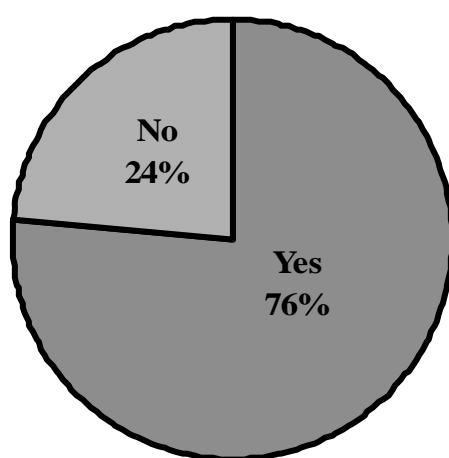


Figure 5: Initiation of Conversation about Feelings (n=39)

It should be noted that the parents were given an opportunity on the parent survey to make additional comments. This section of the questionnaire was simply labeled “Comments” and no prompt was provided. In general, the responses in this portion of the survey indicated that their children behaved differently in various social situations. For example, one parent indicated that the student was mainly appropriate, but is frequently demanding and whiney at home. The same parent stated that the student’s behavior at home differs greatly from the behaviors that the student displays outside the home. Another parent stated that her child is typically talkative and friendly, but that the child’s behaviors change depending on the environment. This parent expressed that it was difficult to describe her child a specific way because of the frequent

changes in behavior. Several parents stated that their child has displayed many of the behavior attributes that were provided at one time or another.

Teacher Observation Checklist

The three teacher researchers utilized an observation checklist (Appendix B) to document students' behaviors in the areas of advocacy, participation, and socialization. The recording of information using this tool occurred February 5, 2007 to February 16, 2007. The checklist was not student specific. This tool allowed researchers to tally six specific behaviors as they were observed. The behaviors were hand raising, inappropriate or lack of peer interaction, off-task behaviors, bodily needs not being met, not having appropriate materials, and classroom outbursts. There was a column designated for documenting the date of the observation. Another column identified the type of environment in which the students were observed. The environment was noted so that possible tendencies of behavioral changes in various settings were identified. All students were observed during whole group instruction, small group activities, and center time.

Figure 6 represents behaviors recorded by the teacher which totaled 370 minutes of observation. Of the 314 observed behaviors, 81 (26%) instances of hand-raising occurred. The remaining 233 (74%) behaviors demonstrated lack of classroom participation and advocacy. Off task behaviors totaling 105 (33%) represented the largest incidence of lack of student participation in the classroom. Seventy six (24%) classroom outbursts and 34 (11%) inappropriate peer interaction showed evidence of unsuitable behavior. Sixteen (5%) occurrences of not being prepared for a classroom activity and 2 (1%) events of bodily needs not being met indicated a lack of self advocacy.

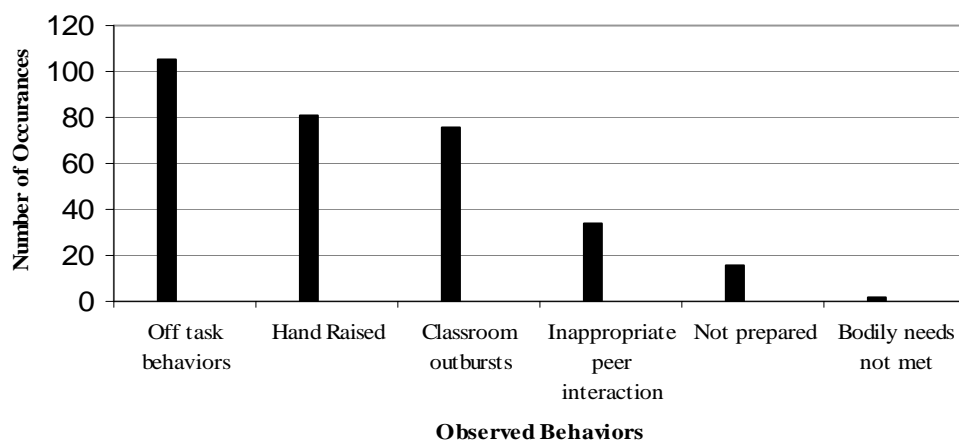


Figure 6: Teacher Observation (n=314)

Figure 7 represents 220 minutes of teacher observation time during whole group instruction. Of 196 observed behaviors, 62 (32%) instances of hand-raising occurred. The remaining 134 behaviors demonstrated lack of classroom participation and advocacy. Forty-three classroom outbursts (22%) and 57 (29%) off-task behaviors showed evidence of students' inattentiveness.

Figure 7 represents 45 minutes of teacher observation time during small group activities. Of 66 observed behaviors, 19 (29%) instances of hand-raising occurred. The remaining 47 (71%) behaviors demonstrated lack of classroom participation and advocacy. Seventeen classroom outbursts (26%) and 22 (33%) off-task behaviors showed evidence of students' inappropriate behavior.

Figure 7 represents 105 minutes of teacher observation time during centers. There were 52 noted observed behaviors. All of the documented behaviors 52 (100%) demonstrated inappropriate participation and lack of advocacy skills. It is noteworthy that both classroom researchers had established rules to discourage hand-raising during centers.

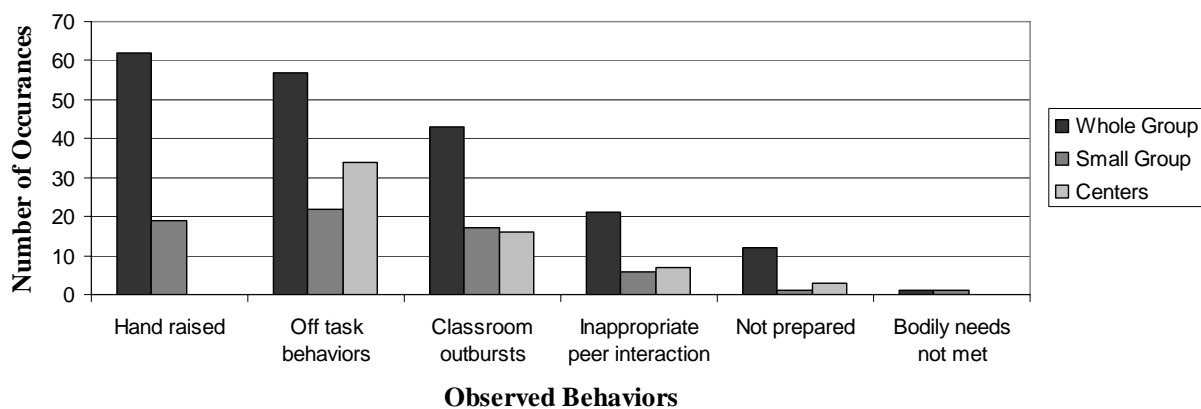
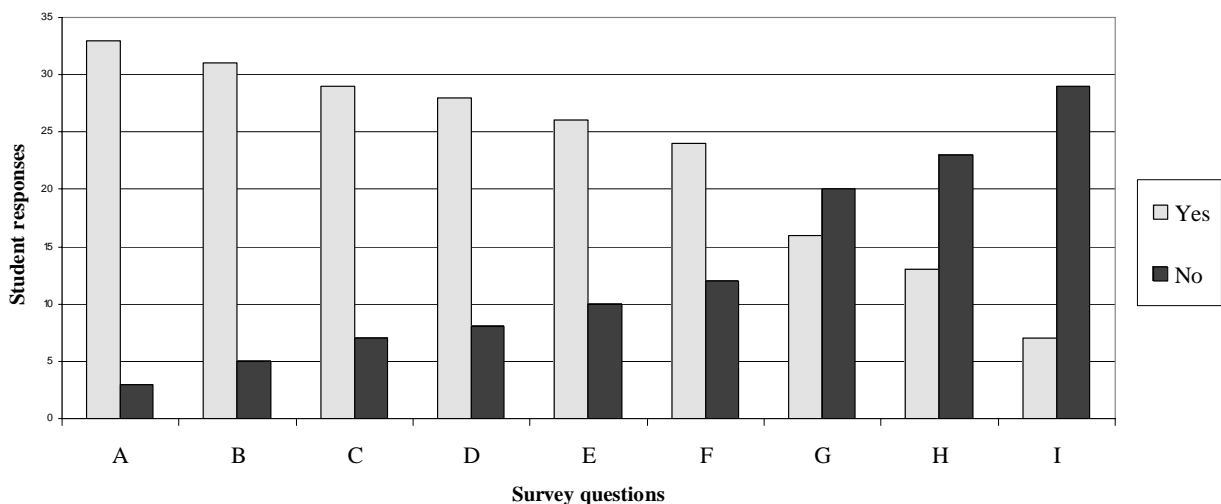


Figure 7: Teacher Observation/Whole Group (n=196), Small Group (n=66), Centers (n=52)

Student Questionnaire

A student questionnaire (Appendices C and D) was used to establish students' feelings about classroom participation and peer interaction. Thirty-six of the forty-two (86%) students participated in this assessment. The omission of six questionnaires was due to four absences and two students without consent to participate. Each questionnaire was made into a small booklet. Each page of the booklet contained one question that required the circling of a yes or no response by the student. There were ten questions on the questionnaire. To provide neutrality, the third teacher researcher administered the questionnaire in each classroom. This was done to reduce the students' tendency to respond in a manner that they may perceive as pleasing to the classroom teacher. The kindergarten students were dispersed throughout the classroom to encourage privacy. The first grade students used folders to make "offices" around themselves for privacy. The booklets were completed anonymously and placed in a designated basket. The questionnaire was administered on February 5, 2007.

According to Figure 8, 26 or more of the students (72%) responded yes to activities that involved student driven experiences and social interaction with peers. It is noteworthy that 16 students (44%) enjoyed sharing their ideas at group time and 20 students (56%) did not feel comfortable sharing in the group setting.



- A = I like to play with my friends
- B = My teacher is happy
- C = I like to raise my hand
- D = I like telling about the sharing bag/journal
- E = I like to do work with a partner or a friend
- F = I like to work by myself
- G = I like to tell my ideas at group time
- H = I like to tell my ideas only to a grown up
- I = I like to play by myself

Figure 8: Student Survey (n=324)

Reflection

Upon reviewing the data, we discovered there was evidence supporting the need for increased self-advocacy and participation in the classroom and in the home setting. The results of the parent survey indicated a need for improved communication strategies in the home environment. This was evident concerning students' ability to initiate conversations with, or expressing feelings to their parent (Figure 5). Based on the data, in unstructured and structured

activities children were reported to be confident (Figure 3), relaxed, and assertive (Figure 4). Conversely, we noted that nearly half of the children were not communicating appropriately when they were seeking assistance (Figure 2).

In the classroom environment, we found that there was a need for improvement in the areas of classroom participation and advocacy. Classroom outbursts and off-task behaviors (Figure 7) were the most obvious inappropriate actions that need to be addressed. These behaviors included lack of hand-raising to volunteer, interrupting, talkative behaviors during instruction or the sharing of ideas, and inattentiveness. Most of the negative behaviors occurred during whole group instruction (Figure 7).

Students felt happy and generally liked to play and work with their friends at school (Figure 8). However, we would like to see children increase their desire to tell their ideas at group time (Figure 8).

As indicated in the literature, student participation is impacted by the role of the teacher and the students' level of comfort within the classroom setting. Direct instruction of communication skills can encourage a child's willingness to self-advocate. The literature and data supports the need for developing students' confidence to participate and communicate effectively.

Probable Causes

A child's ability to communicate effectively contributes to his success within social and academic situations. The development of appropriate communication skills will enhance his educational experience and prepare him for real-life interactions. Many researchers have shared the impact that communication skills have on educators and students. Communication skills can

affect a student's ability to socialize, problem solve, self-advocate, build self-esteem, and participate in classroom activities.

Students express themselves ineffectively if they are not confident (Novick, 1998) and may feel vulnerable when taking risks (Lapan, Kardash, & Turner, 2002). Many successful students tend to think that they are successful because of their own efforts and abilities. Whereas unsuccessful students tend to think that they cannot do anything to impact their performance and blame their failures on their inabilities. They attribute their successes to luck or easy work and do not typically give themselves credit (Kozminsky & Kozminsky, 2003). When students feel defeated and discouraged, they may give up and begin to display their inadequacies or seek negative attention (Lapan et al., 2002). Often students who lack self-esteem or confidence are unable to advocate for themselves (Schnapp & Olsen, 2003).

Considering all of the choices and challenges that students encounter, they need to know how to stand up for themselves (Hess, 1997). Students should be aware of their individual strengths and weaknesses and know how to self-advocate (Obenchain & Abernathy, 2003; Kling, 2000). The lack of students' self-awareness and self-identity contributes to their inability to self-advocate (Kling, 2000; Pocock et al., 2002). Frequently, students are unable to defend themselves when peers make remarks that are hurtful. Students do not know how to respond to such criticism (Pearl, 2004). The lack of appropriate assertiveness hinders students' ability to satisfy their needs, function in society, establish relationships, and avoid becoming the victim of bullying or teasing (McCay & Keyes, 2001/2002).

Many students lack necessary problem solving skills (Clark, 2003; Hess, 1997; McCay & Keyes, 2001/2002). Students need to learn to agree to disagree and to do so without alienating themselves or others (McCay & Keyes, 2001/2002). The ability to negotiate and problem solve

may be impacted by the students' cognitive abilities. The level of cognitive functioning may also affect the students' social competency (Jalongo, 2006).

Social competence is a universal concern of parents and families. Social competency is the demonstration of one's abilities, behaviors, and responses toward others in order to build positive relationships (Jalongo, 2006). Obtaining these skills and having friends that can support and reduce the child's risk of being victimized. Social competence also encourages positive interactions from others (Hoglund & Leadbeater, 2004). Social withdrawal and social anxiety may impede the development of social competency (Adalbjarnardottir, 1995).

Children between the ages of six and eight are at a critical period in their lives for the development of social skills (McCay & Keyes, 2001/2002). A child's social skills can be impacted both inside and outside of the school setting. The development of these skills will affect the child's social successes now and later in life (Utay & Utay, 2005).

Some students have the knowledge to use the appropriate social skills, but lack the confidence to apply them. Others lack the understanding and the confidence to apply the skills that have been introduced (Utay & Utay, 2005). Frequently children display inappropriate behaviors due to their lack of social skills. An unsure child will often make funny noises or push other students (Lacinda-Gifford, 2001). When bullying and teasing occurs, students desire adult intervention (McCay & Keyes, 2001/2002). When students lack social support, they need to develop their ability to communicate appropriately in social situations so they may increase their confidence with their peers (Harriott, 2004). Certain behaviors that children display, such as timidity, could be misinterpreted by others as arrogance, self-centeredness, or having low self esteem (Brophy, 1996; Cohen, 2005).

Teaching students with socialization problems often requires extra time, patience, and energy (Brophy, 1996). Because of the increasing diversity in population, students need to know how to establish positive relationships with others despite their differences (Lapan et al, 2002; Phillips, 2003). Intergroup tensions and antisocial behaviors frequently exist within a classroom (Clark, 2003). In order to reduce group tensions, students need to know how to be empathetic (Clark, 2003; McCay & Keyes, 2001/2002; Phillips, 2003). A relationship exists between a student's ability to distinguish and make conclusions from the thoughts, feelings, and wishes of others when resolving conflicts in social interactions (Adalbjarnardottir, 1995). If a student has experienced repeated failures, or has been mistreated or rejected by others, he may experience social anxiety (Brophy, 1996). Although it may be frustrating and time consuming for a teacher to address social problems, it is essential to a student's development (Brophy, 1996). For instance, students need to learn to apply forethought prior to acting (Lapan et al, 2002). Students need opportunities to join into group situations and share. Teaching the students how to appropriately initiate and terminate interactions will reinforce the development of these concepts (Greenspan, 2000). Without these skills, students may make poor choices, and need to accept and manage the consequences of their behavior (McCay & Keyes, 2001/2002). Social appropriateness and acceptance by peers is associated with positive attitudes toward school and can be a predictor of social adjustment throughout life (Jalongo, 2006).

The learning environment itself can contribute to a student's feeling of safety, therefore impacting their willingness or ability to participate (Turner & Patrick, 2004). One of the attributes affecting classroom environments is the vast cultural and individual differences of the students (Harriott, 2004; Lacinda-Gifford, 2001; McCay & Keyes, 2001/2002). A noisy and busy classroom can be challenging for some students, and they may seek a quiet place to access their

thoughts, feelings, and perceptions (Trienweller, 2006). Quiet students are frequently overlooked and may even be rewarded because they are not a disruption. These same students, however, may be perceived as less capable and may not be called upon by the classroom teacher. This lack of participation may contribute to a child's self-evaluation and continued quietness (Holbrook, 1987; Lacinda-Gifford, 2001; Schmeck & Lockhart, 1983). Although some children have the desire and ability to participate, their motivation is frequently hindered by feelings of anxiety, fear of judgment, or embarrassment (Cohen, 2005; Holbrook, 1987). Strategies that these students may apply are daydreaming or withdrawal, which impacts their willingness to participate in class (Glazer, 1993; Lacinda-Gifford, 2001). All students benefit from learning in a safe, relaxed, and supportive environment (Obenchain & Abernathy, 2003). When a sense of community and trust is established within a classroom, students are more secure to express themselves openly and to allow their abilities, feelings, and opinions to be exposed (Obenchain & Abernathy, 2003; Seefeldt & Prohett, 2004). Since some students lack the knowledge of how to initiate a conversation, they may be fearful interrupting or upsetting the teacher. A student's reluctance to volunteer information in class may be due to the need for more time to process their thoughts or the fear of being asked to elaborate on their ideas. Some students may not ask questions because they are afraid the teacher may assume that they have not completed their homework or have not been paying attention (Townsend, 1998). Participation needs to be learned. This skill may be introduced by opportunities to volunteer, answer questions when called upon, and share ideas, needs and thoughts with others (Turner & Patrick, 2004). In the absence of a trusting, safe, and respectful environment, student participation and achievement will be impacted.

There are challenges in the classroom that negatively impact the academic and social environment. Children are apt to imitate adult behaviors; therefore, teachers need to be aware of their response to various situations (Glazer, 1993; McCay & Keyes, 2001/2002). When classroom management issues arise, positive interactions between the teachers and students diminish (Clark, 2003). Frequently, too much focus is on the subject being taught, and not on the child (Phillips, 2003). As teachers attempt to best utilize valuable instructional time, children are rarely given the opportunity to develop their own solution to problems, and a “quick fix” is provided by the teacher (McCay & Keyes, 2001/2002). Student participation is frequently an issue in the classroom and during instructional time. When seeking volunteers, teachers are not always aware of students’ responses. For example, incorrect responses may demonstrate a lack of understanding or simply a lack of effort (Turner & Patrick, 2004). Teachers tend to overlook reserved students and focus on the students who maintain the discussion. The teacher is unaware of whether these reserved students are unprepared, uninterested, or underachieving. It requires more time and energy on behalf of the teacher to encourage reserved students to participate (Townsend, 1998).

Children need appropriate social behaviors and language skills to effectively communicate with peers and adults (Timler, Olswang, & Coggins, 2005). Lack of experience with social language may contribute to classroom progress. Language is a social instrument (Jalongo, 2006). A child’s ability to communicate orally in an effective and appropriate manner can impact his self-image (Butler & Stevens, 1997). Poor communication skills may be associated with challenging interactions and behaviors that can lead to rejection by peers (Timler et al., 2005). Some children have a limited ability to develop social, cognitive, and language skills that are necessary for effective communication (Adams, 2005). Successful communicators

have a firm knowledge of language and its usage, an understanding of the social world, and how these two concepts impact one another (Mathinos, 1988; Timler, 2003). Some students enter school having experienced limited conversational opportunities at home. If students are not provided with these opportunities, this can negatively impact peer communication interactions (Brophy, 1996).

Children need to develop the ability to send and receive messages accurately in order to ensure their social and academic successes. Significant communication occurs in the context of doing things with others, such as in a classroom setting (Seefeldt & Prohett, 2004). A number of conventions are included in basic communication skills, such as eye contact, turn taking, body language, facial expression, and the ability to solve verbal conflicts (Jalongo, 2006; Seefeldt & Prohett, 2004). Children must learn to interpret nonverbal cues, voice inflection, and facial expressions in order to know when it is appropriate to speak (Seefeldt & Prohett, 2004). Frequently, reserved students are reluctant to make eye contact and speak too quietly (Cohen, 2005). Some children do not attend to facial expressions, leading them to misread important situational cues (Timler, 2003). The reading of facial expressions and tone of voice may reveal anger, frustration, fear, happiness, or other useful information (Seefeldt & Prohett, 2004). The inability to interpret these emotions may lead to conflict.

Students are often unaware of how or when to initiate thoughts or ideas, and are fearful of interrupting the teacher (Townsend, 1998). Children would benefit from taking time to listen, learning to negotiate, and considering others' words, wants and needs (Seefeldt & Prohett, 2004). They also need to develop the ability to agree to disagree without alienating others (McCay & Keyes, 2001/2002). It is important to realize that the social context can impact the language user's ability to send and receive messages (Mathinos, 1988).

Literature offers numerous strategies and methods for improving students' communication skills. The development of these skills will encourage classroom participation and a child's ability to self-advocate.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Review of the Literature

Concerning a student's participation and advocacy in the classroom, research supports the importance of the teacher's role, communication skills, and role-play opportunities. Research also suggests the significance of classroom environment, teacher modeling, and the social and emotional needs of the students.

The relationships that are established within the classroom will provide a platform from which students' learning will soar. The relationship a student has with the teacher is one of the best predictors of students' effort and engagement in learning (Stipek, 2006). The teacher's enthusiasm, interest, positive emotion and encouragement promote different attitudes towards students' achievement and willingness to participate (Turner & Patrick, 2004). Students need to view a teacher as someone who is genuinely concerned, invests time in them, and is interested in what is occurring in their lives; not a person who only gives assignments and tests (Phillips, 2003; Utay & Utay, 2005). Teachers who are respected, trusted, and cared for personally are inclined to support their students in the same manner (Stipek, 2006). Teachers can be a positive role model to the students by not only teaching academics, but taking the time to be a confidant (Novick, 1998). Students who have a secure relationship with their teacher tend to take more risks, display increased motivation to attempt challenging tasks, and are willing to ask for assistance when needed (Stipek, 2006). To engage and support a shy student, a teacher needs to initiate interaction, even through simple conversations. Patience, listening attentively, being sensitive to the interests and feelings of the student, and providing encouragement is also important (Cohen, 2005; Lacinda-Gifford, 2001). Teachers need to consistently demonstrate an

understanding and appreciation of individual and cultural differences within the classroom (McCay & Keyes, 2001/2002).

The teacher's role in the classroom will impact students' behaviors. The development of positive relationships between the teacher and students and between the students themselves will contribute to educational success (Clark, 2003). A student's adjustment to school may be affected by the teacher's supportive behaviors (Utay & Utay, 2005). A teacher should respond to misbehavior gently and with greater explanation than punishment. Students appreciate a teacher who provides constructive feedback, offers support, holds them accountable, and refuses to give up on them. It is advantageous for a teacher to take the time to communicate with the students about their learning and comprehension about what has been presented. Allowing students the opportunity to be involved in classroom decisions creates an atmosphere of care and trust. Taking the time to learn about students' interests and having conversations about their personal lives, can aid in their academic and social successes (Stipek, 2006). These interactions can increase a student's sense of self-worth and self-awareness (Utay & Utay, 2005). The teacher should take the time to make each child feel unique and valuable (Phillips, 2003). Children know teachers care about them when they are greeted as they enter the classroom, their emotional needs are addressed, and they are treated fairly (Stipek, 2006).

A priority of the teacher should be to attend to the social and emotional needs of the students (Clark, 2003). Teachers should provide direct instruction to children pertaining to social skills and the appropriate language to be utilized when interacting with other students (Bullock, 1993). Teacher feedback needs to be such that students can develop strategies from the teacher's comments. This helpful feedback may increase academic and social success. (Kozminsky & Kozminsky, 2003). When a teacher indicates the desired behavior or action, it aids the child in

self-assessing how the child should proceed (Glazer, 1993). Observing children in a variety of environments, such as field trips, center time, group projects, recess, or specials can provide further information about a child. Anecdotal notes are a method for organizing the information (Jalongo, 2006). Collecting this information provides another opportunity for feedback, and teacher insight.

Parents and teachers should function as a team when addressing behaviors of the student. Teachers and parents need to be aware of social behaviors and interaction patterns in the home and at school. Communicating with parents any observations about their child can provide consistency (Bullock, 1993). Ideally, parents and teachers should communicate when to praise, ignore, or focus attention on particular behaviors (McCay & Keyes, 2001/2002). Frequently, children will respond favorably to positive peer influence and teacher reinforcement. The teacher may reduce the use of individual rewards, and reward the preferred behaviors through group reinforcement (Obenchain & Abernathy, 2003). Some children respond to a desired reward to change the original behavior, and others change behavior due to the strengthened personal connection with the teacher, parent, or peer (Utay & Utay, 2005).

Teachers should be committed and understand the significance of strong communication skills and how it relates to overall student success (Butler & Stevens, 1997). It is the teacher's responsibility to recognize different interaction styles and to adapt the communication environment accordingly (Jalongo, 2006). A teacher's method of calling upon students: volunteer vs. non-volunteer, the frequency in which a specific student is called upon, and prompting for understanding can influence students' participation and achievement (Turner & Patrick, 2004). Standing in proximity or calling upon a student more frequently can increase engagement (Brophy, 1996). Learners benefit from class discussions and participation, even shy

students may use this time to formulate their thinking and expand their understanding of presented concepts. Teachers should utilize opportunities for small group discussions and the use of open-ended questions to promote a variety of responses from the students. The purpose and value of classroom discussions needs to be explained to the students. The teacher should realize that the incorporation of class discussion would require additional time in lesson presentation (Townsend, 1998).

A teacher's interaction with individual students should reflect an awareness of their unique needs. A child's stress and embarrassment can be minimized by the support of the teacher (Brophy, 1996). Allowing additional time may enable shy students to become more comfortable with new people, activities and situations (Bullock, 1993). Teachers need to recognize that a student's lack of participation may be due to the preoccupation of mentally processing concepts and information that has been presented (Townsend, 1998). The teacher can also assist with smooth transitions and consistency in classroom routines to help children remain on task (Trienweller, 2006).

Creating a warm, friendly, nurturing environment that students want to enter every day is a crucial role for the teacher (Clark, 2003; Holbrook, 1987; Lacinda-Gifford, 2001). Teachers need to provide an atmosphere for the students which encourages success for their efforts and achievements (Kozminsky & Kozminsky, 2003). A student's accomplishments can be fostered when the child has the freedom to learn in a setting that is caring and student oriented (Brophy, 1996; Phillips, 2003). The environment may reflect the different needs of the students. An introverted child appreciates a quiet and less stimulating setting. Bright colors, open space, and frequent sound changes may be appealing to others (Schmeck & Lockhart, 1983). A pro-social environment includes students who model caring and socially competent behaviors. This

provides children with a feeling of security and encourages the development of new social relationships (Hoglund & Leadbeater, 2004).

To further foster the social development of the students in the classroom, the teacher should create a sense of community (Obenchain & Abernathy, 2003). Classroom rules should reflect what is socially appropriate. It should be encouraged that all children are respected members of the classroom (Jalongo, 2006). Treating others with respect and working together to solve problems and other issues are components of a healthy classroom community (Phillips, 2003). The social dimensions of the classroom ought to be considered by the teacher in order for all individuals to feel accepted and be willing to participate (Stipek, 2006). Teachers can build upon the community concept through cooperative group work (Harriott, 2004). By creating a non-threatening atmosphere, students experience the benefits from playing and working together (Bullock, 1993). When the teacher assists in the development of these supportive social contexts, it promotes positive relationships with students (Stipek, 2006).

The environment the teacher creates impacts the student's ability to express oneself. Teachers need to construct a stimulating environment where expressing one's ideas is a priority of the day (Butler & Stevens, 1997). Simple accommodations in the classroom may nurture a student's willingness to participate. Allowing students to speak from their seats as opposed to the front of the classroom may reduce anxiety (Holbrook, 1987). Teachers may attain greater participation from students when allowing them to work with students they feel comfortable with, particularly in partner or small group work (Brophy, 1996; Holbrook, 1987).

The physical setting created by the teacher can influence a student's disposition. Bulletin boards displaying the students' accomplishments, such as character recognition, good deeds, or exceptional work are important in celebrating students' successes (Obenchain & Abernathy,

2003; Brophy, 1987). A quiet corner can provide some students with the opportunity to relax and regain composure prior to continuing on with other lessons (Trienweller, 2006). The “Comfort Corner” is a particular area where students may go, accompanied by a teacher and few other students in order to share feelings, thoughts, or ideas. The purpose of this area is to build the students’ self-esteem and trust with others (Novick, 1998).

Teachers need to be aware of their own attitudes that they are modeling (Kozminsky & Kozminsky, 2003). Although students informally view teachers as role models, teachers need to intentionally teach and model basic social skills. Teachers need to consistently demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of individual and cultural differences within the classroom. Through the modeling process teachers can also teach compromise, respect, kindness, and empathy (McCay & Keyes, 2001/2002). Seeking clarification and feedback, and ensuring acceptance of others can be modeled and taught (Clark, 2003). Teachers’ instructional behaviors and practices can influence the development of student’s work habits. This can be accomplished by how they encourage and support the students to participate in classroom activities (Turner & Patrick, 2004). To encourage the students to engage in social activities, teachers can model appropriate play interaction with peers (Greenspan, 2000; Jalongo, 2006). To further develop social competence between peers, teachers can model questioning strategies that would enable students to obtain information from each other effectively (Obenchain & Abernathy, 2003). Teachers should use their actions, words, gestures, and voice intonation appropriately in order to model respectful interactions (McCay & Keyes, 2001/2002). Teachers who engage students in dialogue positively, can increase their motivation in participation (Phillips, 2003). Based on the teacher’s language usage, students will be able to self-assess their actions and dictate their growth both socially and academically (Glazer, 1993).

Just as teacher modeling of good communication skills is important, so is the teacher's ability to encourage students and establish a relationship of trust in order to help them communicate effectively. When teachers are flexible, vulnerable, and honest with students, effective communication can be accomplished (Schnapp & Olsen, 2003). Children who are encouraged to take risks become confident in their ability to use language for a variety of purposes (Butler & Stevens, 1997). Students can be motivated to learn when teachers are confident and are available for support and friendship (Bullock, 1993; Kozminsky & Kozminsky, 2003). One strategy teachers can implement in order to help students feel good about themselves is to communicate with parents to discover what their child likes and dislikes. Teachers can then provide the students with activities that focus on their strengths and interests (Brophy, 1996; Bullock, 1993; Lacinda-Gifford, 2001). Similarly, a students' confidence can increase when they are informally questioned about topics in which they are knowledgeable (Holbrook, 1987). Students may have more success when they communicate matters with familiarity versus something more abstract (Mathinos, 1988).

Teachers can reinforce communication skills by assigning students to tasks that require communication (Brophy, 1996). When students positively communicate with each other, teachers should praise them (McCay & Keyes, 2001/2002). It is beneficial for students to be positively reinforced when they are acting assertively (Hess, 1997, McCay & Keyes, 2001/2002). Part of a teacher's role is to listen attentively to students and be willing to act upon some of their ideas (McCay & Keyes, 2001/2002). A teacher can also build confidence by encouraging a child to join a group and share their ideas. By placing students into groups, the more confident peers can help engage the reserved students (Brophy, 1996; Greenspan, 2000).

When students are allowed to document their thoughts prior to classroom discussions, they may be better prepared to participate (Townsend, 1998). To build self-confidence, students need to identify their own strengths and weaknesses through self-assessment (Glazer, 1993; Kling, 2000; Obenchain & Abernathy, 2003). Self-evaluation is important for students to learn management skills (McCay & Keyes, 2001/2002). Teachers can help students develop ways to monitor and evaluate their own performance and then make necessary changes (Lapan et al., 2002).

Students need to feel as though their input will be acknowledged and valued (Seefeldt & Prophett, 2004). Many successful students tend to think that they are successful because of their own efforts and abilities. Unsuccessful students tend to think that they cannot do anything to impact their performance and blame their failures on their inabilities. They attribute their successes to luck or easy work and do not typically give themselves credit (Kozminsky & Kozminsky, 2003).

In order to effectively encourage participation and advocacy within the classroom, the students' social and emotional needs should be addressed. Social development needs to be accepted as an integral part of educating the whole child (McCay & Keyes, 2001/2002). Teachers should realize that student effort and the use of proficient strategies would promote educational success (Kozminsky & Kozminsky, 2003). Academic and social success can also be achieved when children are taught to care about others (Phillips, 2003). Students should be encouraged to cooperate, collaborate, show care and respect, and perform simple acts of kindness to strengthen their social and emotional confidence (McCay & Keyes, 2001/2002). When students learn how to recognize and manage their emotions, form caring relationships and understand how others feel, they can be successful socially and academically (Hess, 1997).

Appropriate strategies will become more natural, when students learn and practice concrete ways to manage their emotions (Clark, 2003). An essential part of addressing the social and emotional needs of children is to treat them with respect (Utay & Utay, 2005). Children who feel they have been listened to are more willing to become active participants in the learning process (Phillips, 2003).

Children's individuality should be embraced in order to create a safe and enriching social environment. Teachers should be accepting of a child's basic temperament rather than attempting to change it (Bullock, 1993). Children should not be made to feel that being outgoing is better; they need to be accepted for who they are. When teachers respect and understand the student who feels the need to stand back, listen, and observe a situation before involving themselves, they are encouraging the student's self esteem (Bullock, 1993). Another alternative to enhance self-esteem is to have a trusted adult serve as a social coach or to pair a younger student with an older student mentor (Pocock et al., 2002; Utay & Utay, 2005). Praising and encouraging students is another way to address their social and emotional needs. Children of all ages respond best to direct praise. When given positive comments, students are encouraged to strive and persevere until they have accomplished a goal (Glazer, 1993). Just as students respond positively to praise, rewards are also encouraging. Rewards that are given for good behavior can encourage cooperation (Hoglund & Leadbeater, 2004).

It is important for children to be aware of their feelings for optimal emotional and social development. Students can connect with their feelings through art, music, writing, a worry box, using picture cards, or simply by talking about their emotions (Hess, 1997; Jalongo, 2006; Utay & Utay, 2005).

The quantity of time a child spends with the family is as important as the quality of the time they spend together (Utay & Utay, 2005). Parents can be a great support by being aware of the child's feelings and by showing empathy (Cohen, 2005). In order to assess a parent's perception of their child's social proficiency, a parent can be surveyed using a rating scale (Jalongo, 2006). The information received from this rating scale will assist the classroom teacher in addressing the social and emotional development of the students.

Teachers have the opportunity to teach children social skills and appropriate words to use when interacting with others (Bullock, 1993). Teaching these skills will encourage successful interactions between students. When students learn proper ways to handle their emotions and have opportunities to practice that skill, responding appropriately to others will become more natural (Clark, 2003). Encouraging genuine communication within the classroom may begin with allowing students to express their feelings through a safe avenue such as a simple survey. The classroom teacher may seek information about how the students feel about playing at recess, sharing a toy, or coming to school (Jalongo, 2006). Providing raw materials such as cardboard boxes, blocks, Lincoln Logs and dramatic play items will encourage students to work together, negotiate, share ideas, and solve problems (Seefeldt & Prophett, 2004). If there are students that are less sure of themselves, the teacher should support those students in taking social risks (Cohen, 2005). In order for students to attain positive communication skills, they should have opportunities to get to know one another better and to hear experienced speakers (Holbrook, 1987). Incorporating both individual and group activities within the classroom will encourage all students to be participants and not just spectators (Schnapp & Olsen, 2003).

Frequently students with stronger communication skills can be used as models for students that are less able. In order to encourage successful student interaction, the teacher may consider pairing shy students with students that are well liked and interact easily (Lacinda-Gifford, 2001). Pairing a student with another student that the child is familiar with allows both children to communicate effortlessly (Mathinos, 1988). Because of their confidence, socially competent students should be encouraged to initiate interactions with students that are less willing (McCay & Keyes, 2001/2002). When practicing social skills with the class, the chosen participants' level of acceptance by their peers and their willingness to participate should be considered (Turner & Patrick, 2004). Giving the students hypothetical situations in which to practice their communication skills will help them to learn how to verbalize their feelings (McCay & Keyes, 2001/2002). Many shy students would benefit from instruction in the areas of assertiveness and how to initiate a conversation (Brophy, 1996). Providing periodic small group settings will allow the inhibited students to interact more comfortably within the group (Bullock, 1993; Greenspan, 2000).

School is a useful platform in which communication skills can be learned, practiced, and improved upon. Some students have yet to learn the very basics in communicating, such as the ability to verbalize their feelings and how to summarize what they are saying (Lapan et al., 2002; McCay & Keyes, 2001/2002). All individuals need to be exposed to a wide range of potential communication situations. Given this exposure, students will learn the variation in language usage within different environments. Once the skills have been learned, students should have many opportunities to demonstrate their oral communication in contextually appropriate and varied manners (Butler & Stevens, 1997). The opportunity to apply newly learned communication skills is particularly important for socially withdrawn and anxious students

(Adalbjarnardottir, 1995). By allowing students to practice various interactions and negotiation skills in a safe environment, they will learn the flexibility in their own language (Butler & Stevens, 1997).

Successful communication will be increased when students become more aware of messages that are sent non-verbally or how messages are impacted by non-verbal markers. For example, non-verbal messages can convey encouragement (Glazer, 1993), but only if the student knows how to receive the non-verbal cues. Picture activities may help students identify facial expressions and their meanings (Timler, 2003). Even cartoon stories are a useful tool for studying and discovering nonverbal and verbal cues (Adams, 2005). The use of body language and how messages can be conveyed differently through the use of various movements should be discussed with students (Hess, 1997). Shy students may not be aware of the messages that they are sending through non-verbal markers. However, the shy student can be guided through talking more slowly and loudly, lifting his chest, pulling his shoulders back and down, and walking slower. These non-verbal markers send a message of confidence (Cohen, 2005). A simple example of a message that is sent through body language is when a child raises his hand to let the teacher know that he is interested in sharing. The teacher can model positive communication skills by acknowledging children's voice tone and facial expressions and responding appropriately (Seefeldt & Prohett, 2004). Listening is a skill that is often taken for granted, yet is frequently done very poorly. Listening involves considering others' feelings, summarizing and seeking clarification of what others are saying, and asking open-ended questions. The listener also needs to send and receive feedback and acknowledge others' responses (Clark, 2003). Active listening involves making eye contact, using head nods, leaning towards the speaker, and summarizing the speaker's comments (Obenchain & Abernathy, 2003). Observation skills are an

integral part of effective communication. Children should be taught how to observe the communication skills others use. They need to know how to enter and exit a conversation, be aware of the turn taking that occurs, and know not to monopolize conversations (Utay & Utay, 2005).

To encourage the development of self-advocacy, drama and role-plays can be used in the classroom in order to boost the students' oral language skills and their ability to communicate their needs to others (Schnapp & Olsen, 2003; Holbrook, 1987). It is important to give students the opportunity to role-play a variety of scenarios in order to as to practice appropriate conversations, receive feedback, and practice assertive behaviors in a safe environment (Hess, 1997; Schnapp & Olsen, 2003). These activities address issues such as how to recall information, the effect of verbal and nonverbal communication, listening skills, concentration, turn taking, and socially acceptable behaviors (Schnapp & Olsen, 2003). Role-playing in a variety of contexts provides students the opportunity to practice their problem solving skills (McCay & Keyes, 2001/2002; Kling, 2000). Interventions such as teaching social communication behaviors, modeling, and role-playing can also help students play cooperatively and enter into peer groups more confidently (Timler et al., 2005). Teachers can assist by providing positive group play opportunities for children and by setting social development goals to practice peer relations (Lacinda-Gifford, 2001; McCay & Keyes, 2001/2002). Charades and puppets can also be used to role-play ways to take turns in a conversation (Holbrook, 1987; Seefeldt & Prohett, 2004). In one intervention, students are given the opportunity to sing, read, act, or journal about their feelings, and then encouraged to role-play these emotions in small groups. This activity will allow the students to recognize their feelings and better express themselves (Hess, 1997; Novick, 1998). In order for role-play to be a successful intervention, it is important for teachers to allow

discussion afterward. Students can discuss alternative ways to handle each situation and find possible causes and solutions (Hess, 1997; Kozminsky & Kozminsky, 2003). Students can also learn to mediate, negotiate, and build consensus. Teachers should encourage students to develop multiple solutions to a problem (Obenchain & Abernathy, 2003).

There are many activities that can be incorporated into the school day that will encourage classroom participation and advocacy skills among the students. Frequently, establishing a group identity through class rituals and traditions assists in classroom morale (McCay & Keyes, 2001/2002). Also, conducting class meetings in order to discuss academics, learning experiences, time management and classroom relationships will promote cohesiveness within the classroom. During these meetings all participants should be at the same eye level, including the teacher. A talking stick may be used to encourage participation and respect (Obenchain & Abernathy, 2003). One of the most effective teaching strategies is to use teachable moments. By addressing a specific behavioral issue or subject as it arises, the teacher and students are able to immediately learn from the experience (McCay & Keyes, 2001/2002; Phillips, 2003). These teachable moments can also be used to discuss advocacy skills with the class. The use of a sharing chair may provide an individual or small group with an avenue through which they can share an issue, current event, concern or celebration (Obenchain & Abernathy, 2003). Giving the students opportunities to share and listen are vital to the development of self-esteem, communication skills, and eventually, advocacy skills. Social icebreakers can be used to encourage relationships within the classroom (Brophy, 1996). Icebreakers and other activities may elicit the discovery of shared interests with peers (McCay & Keyes, 2001/2002). The teacher can also provide opportunities for students to get to know one another better by integrating class activities that encourage oral communication (Holbrook, 1987). Shy students may require additional effort on

behalf of the teacher. Teachers can try to engage quiet students in specially designed activities (Brophy, 1996), or physically join a group and gently invite the quiet student to participate. Once the quiet student has become comfortable within the group, the teacher can then leave the group (Bullock, 1993). The use of cooperative groups also encourages the development of peer relationships (Obenchain & Abernathy, 2003). Peers that are socially competent should be given opportunities to interact with those who need support (Harriott, 2004).

Writing in a journal or having a one-on-one conversation may be a more comfortable avenue through which students can share (Trienweller, 2006). Dialogue pages offer a similar approach. With dialogue pages, students are encouraged to write about a recent success or failure that they have experienced, and state a theory explaining the results. The teacher would then give a written response providing the student with other possible strategies for the situation (Kozminsky & Kozminsky, 2003). This activity will develop students' self-awareness, build confidence, and lead to increased self advocacy skills.

In order for participation to increase and advocacy skills to develop, students need to gain a sense of self-ownership. Students should be encouraged to embrace their feelings and abilities. Students ought to be allowed a brief time at the beginning of class to review the subject content and organize their own thoughts and questions (Townsend, 1998). Likewise, students should be given an expectation with a time stipulation. This allows the students to organize their thoughts. For example, a teacher may warn the class that they will be discussing a specific issue or topic in two minutes (Trienweller, 2006). Once students have been exposed to a variety of strategies, teachers need to allow the students to practice those strategies on a variety of tasks, and in several curricular areas (Lapan et al., 2002). Authentic assessment and portfolios allows children

to be engaged and able to monitor their learning (Glazer, 1993). Each of these activities will allow the students to recognize their individual needs.

After reviewing the literature, primary students' participation and ability to communicate effectively can be increased through direct instruction of communication skills, role-play, and teacher modeling. A teacher utilizing these strategies can positively impact a student's ability to function within both the school and community setting.

Project Objective and Processing Statements

As a result of role play, teacher modeling, and direct instruction of communication skills, during the period of January 29, through May 18, 2007, the students of Teacher Researchers A and B will increase their participation and advocacy.

In order to accomplish the implementation of the interventions, the teacher researchers collaborated on necessary communication skills for primary students. Researcher C designed and prepared the communication lessons. Researchers A and B made time available for Researcher C to present lessons weekly. These researchers provided additional visual and verbal support for communication skills would be introduced. A warm fuzzy jar was created in each classroom as a reward system for the reinforcement of appropriate communication skills that would be demonstrated.

Project Action Plan

The following project action plan delineates, week by week, the steps that were taken throughout the research period. Each week specifies the actions that were taken in order to increase classroom participation among primary school students. This action plan includes steps that were taken during pre-documentation, implementation of the interventions, and post-documentation.

Pre-Week

January 29-February 2, 2007

- Copying teacher observation checklist
- Copying parent survey
- Copying student questionnaire booklet
- Collecting and organizing materials and props to be utilized in lessons
- Send home parent consent

Pre-Documentation

Week 1: February 5-9, 2007

- Distribute parent survey
- Administer student questionnaire
- Begin observations using teacher observation checklist-completed daily
- Finish collecting parent consent forms

Week 2: February 13-16, 2007

- Collect parent survey
- Continue teacher observation checklist
- Analyze data collection: parent survey, observation checklist, and student questionnaire
- Copy materials for lessons for intervention weeks

Intervention

Week 3: February 19-23, 2007

- Guest Speaker
- Introduce what is communication
- Group discussion
- Complete PMI documentation (PMI documentation is a worksheet provided by The Skylight Program to record pluses, minuses, and interesting questions/observations related to study)

Week 4: February 26-March 2, 2007

- Guest Speaker
- Introduce a communication skill
- Group discussion/role play
- Begin reward system: warm fuzzy
Class votes on a reward as a goal
- Send home parent letter about skill taught
- PMI documentation

Week 5: March 5-7, 2007

- Guest Speaker
- Review and introduce new communication skills
- Group discussion/role play
- Continue warm fuzzy jar
- Send home parent letter
- PMI documentation

Week 6: March 12-16, 2007

- Guest Speaker
- Review and introduce new communication skills
- Group discussion/role play
- Continue warm fuzzy jar
- Send home parent letter
- PMI documentation

Week 7: March 19-23, 2007

- Guest Speaker
- Review and introduce new communication skills
- Group discussion/role play
- Continue warm fuzzy jar
- Send home parent letter
- PMI documentation

Week 8: April 2-5, 2007

- Guest Speaker
- Review and introduce new communication skills
- Group discussion/role play
- Continue warm fuzzy jar
- Send home parent letter
- PMI documentation

Week 9: April 10-13, 2007

- Guest Speaker
- Review and introduce new communication skills
- Group discussion/role play
- Continue warm fuzzy jar
- Send home parent letter
- PMI documentation

Week 10: April 16-20, 2007

- Guest Speaker
- Review and introduce new communication skills
- Group discussion/role play
- Continue warm fuzzy jar
- Send home parent letter
- PMI documentation

Week 11: April 23-27, 2007

- Guest Speaker
- Review and introduce new communication skills
- Group discussion/role play
- Continue warm fuzzy jar
- Send home parent letter
- PMI documentation

Week 12: April 30-May 4, 2007

- Guest Speaker
- Review new communication skills
- Group discussion/role play
- Evaluate progress of jar-earned reward?
- Send home parent letter
- PMI documentation

Post Documentation

Week 13: May 7-11, 2007

- Distribute parent survey
- Administer student questionnaire
- Begin observations using teacher observation checklist-completed daily

Week 14: May 14-18, 2007

- Collect parent survey
- Continue teacher observation checklist
- Analyze data collection: parent survey, observation checklist, and student questionnaire

Methods of Assessment

Post documentation was accomplished through the use of three tools: student questionnaire, parent survey, and teacher observation checklist. The student questionnaire (Appendix C & D) was to establish the students' input and feelings about classroom participation and peer interaction. This questionnaire was administered on May 7, 2007, to 19 afternoon kindergarten and 20 first grade students. The data collected from this tool, which was the identical tool used in pre-documentation administered from February 5, 2007, through February 16, 2007, was compared to the previous analyzed data.

The parent survey (Appendix A) was used to collect information about the students' behaviors and communication style within the home setting. The survey was sent home on May 7, 2007, with a collection date of May 11, 2007. The parents of the research participants anonymously completed the survey. The data collected from the parent survey was analyzed and compared to the pre-documentation, which utilized this identical tool on February 5, 2007, with a collection date of February 16, 2007.

For post documentation, each teacher researcher completed the same teacher observation checklist (Appendix B) that was used for pre-documentation from February 5, 2007, through February 16, 2007. This tool was used to record the occurrences of six specific behaviors: hand raising, inappropriate or lack of peer interaction, off-task behaviors, bodily needs not being met, not having appropriate materials, and classroom outbursts. This tool was administered from May 7, 2007, through May 18, 2007. Researchers A, B, and C observed the 39 students in whole

group, small group, and center time activity. The data collected from the teacher observation checklist was analyzed and compared to the pre-documentation data.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

The three teacher researchers identified a lack of student participation and advocacy skills in primary children within the classroom setting. The students exhibited the inability to communicate effectively in a variety of settings. The teachers recognized frequent interrupting and the failure to convey one's needs. These behaviors seemed to negatively impact instruction and student development. The research participants consisted of 19 afternoon kindergarten students at Site A and 20 first grade students at Site B. The third teacher researcher's role was to assist in implementing the interventions and collecting data. The research study began on February 5, 2007, and terminated May 18, 2007. The interventions consisted of direct instruction of communication skills, role play, and teacher modeling. The communication skills were introduced in each classroom on a weekly basis by the third teacher researcher.

Historical Description of the Intervention

During weeks one and two of our study, we administered the pre-documentation tools. The third teacher researcher distributed, orally read, and collected the student questionnaire (Appendices C and D) at both of the research sites. Since the third teacher researcher did not have an established rapport with the students, we felt as though this added a nice sense of neutrality for the questionnaire. Upon introduction of this tool, the students were excited to assist us in our "school work". While documenting and analyzing our data for the student questionnaire, it came to our attention that the questions may not have been as clear to the students as we had intended. The parent surveys (Appendix A) and consent forms were placed into the students' backpacks. The rate of return for these documents was encouraging. We were discouraged; however, that the parent responses frequently reflected behavior attributes that did

not seem congruent with the behaviors generally observed in the classroom. Also, many parents took the opportunity to add additional comments clarifying that their child behaved differently in various environments. Although this information was informative and interesting, we were seeking a direct response to the prompt. For example, one questionnaire described a student as both passive and assertive. In our opinion, these responses are in direct conflict to one another. All of the teacher researchers participated in collecting data using a Teacher Observation Checklist (Appendix B). We enjoyed this particular tool because it allowed the teachers to step outside of the instructional role and simply observe the students and their behaviors in their educational environment. Since the third teacher researcher was an observer only, this checklist also provided an opportunity to give the classroom teachers feedback on the students' behaviors during their lessons. We identified several flaws in this particular tool. The domains that we decided to document did not accurately measure the behaviors that we were hoping to identify. We should have provided a time parameter for the length of time each setting would be observed, for example, 60 minutes of small group, 60 minutes of center time, and 60 minutes of whole group instruction. Realizing that we did not establish these parameters previously, we noted the length of time that we observed in each environment. Our purpose in noting this is so that we can attempt to observe a similar amount of time during post documentation. By justifying the length of time we observed, hopefully our pre and post data will be comparable. It was interesting to note that the students were more on task during center time than during whole group and small group activities. Perhaps, these students were motivated by the opportunity to be self directed and allowed physical movement.

In the first week of our intervention, the third teacher researcher visited both classrooms as a guest speaker. Using a lesson based on a curriculum entitled *The Communication Lab*, she

introduced the concept of communication and its importance in education and relationships. The students were given the opportunity to participate in role plays including the throwing a ball back and forth to simulate the sending and receiving messages. At times the ball was thrown too hard, making it difficult to catch, just like communicating harshly. At other times the ball was not thrown with enough force, so that it could not reach the recipient, this was used to compare speaking too softly or in a belittling way. The ball was also simply thrown up in the air and caught over and over again by the teacher as a student waited for it to be thrown to him. This provided a good example of how a person may feel left out of an interaction if turns are not taken. This activity was followed by a brainstorming session on communication. A list of good communication skills evolved from the students throughout the role play experience. Some of the attributes included turn taking, observing, listening, body language, voice tone, eye contact, acting interested and remaining on topic. A parent letter (Appendix E) was sent home with the students explaining Communication Lab and the skills that would be introduced during following nine weeks. We felt as though all of the students were excited, engaged, and eager to participate in the Communication Lab. Later in the week the students were easily able to recall the characteristics of a good communicator and the examples that were given during the lesson. Both of the classroom teachers were able to highlight various communication skills throughout the week, including discussing the communication skills of characters in a book. A challenge that was experienced by both classroom teachers was an adjustment in their pacing and routine due to the time allotted for the guest speaker. The researcher serving as the guest speaker also quickly noted the maturity difference between kindergarten and first grade students, and some adjustments that she would have to make to the lessons.

In the second week of our intervention, the third teacher researcher introduced the Communication Lab for the week. The students enjoyed playing a game to introduce the concept of observation. In front of the class, five students were dressed in distinctive costumes and then asked to leave the room with the classroom teacher. While in the hallway, the students switched costumes and returned to the classroom. The students that had remained in the classroom then stated changes that they had observed and how making observations prior to communicating will encourage a positive reception. This skill should reduce the number of interruptions that a child makes, as they learn to observe that the other person is engaged in a conversation or activity. A strategy the students were taught was to make an appointment when they observe that it is a difficult time for someone to communicate. The students were also introduced to the idea of “saying what you see”. For example, a person might say, “Mom, I can see that you are busy right now, when might be a better time for me to talk to you?”. Following the lesson, one of the teacher researchers created a poster with big eyes to remind the students to observe before they communicate. Hand signals and the use of a stop sign were also implemented in the classroom to remind the students to use their observation skills. The warm fuzzy jar was introduced and implemented by both classroom teachers as a reward system for reinforcing positive communication skills. It was explained to the students that once the warm fuzzy jar was filled, the class would be rewarded. A parent letter was sent home (Appendix F) explaining the attributes of being an observer while communicating, and the verbiage that was used in the lesson. Several parents have already shared their delight in the positive changes noted in their children’s communication skills at home. For example, one parent was pleasantly surprised as her child noted that she was busy and asked for an appointment. Another parent was pleased when her child waited patiently while the parent finished a phone conversation before

communicating. It became frustrating as the students in both classes took it upon themselves to frequently ask for a warm fuzzy each time they interacted appropriately.

In the third week of our intervention, the third teacher researcher introduced body language as our *Communication Lab* skill for the week. The lesson began with the teacher saying, “freeze” and interpreting the body language that was being sent by various students in the classroom. The idea that our bodies and faces can communicate without uttering one word was surprising to some of the students. Several students were able to participate in role plays by acting out an emotion that was written on a card. The rest of the class guessed the emotion being demonstrated by the card holder. The students’ excitement about Communication Lab remained this week. The entire research team was also excited about the application and potential effect of this lesson on the students’ interactions and readiness to learn. We were also impressed by the students’ ability to comprehend the somewhat complex lessons being taught. This week both classroom teachers were convicted to reflect upon their own body language that they use daily, in professional and social situations. Due to parent teacher conferences there was not much allowance for reinforcement since it was a shortened week. This particular lesson was a bit challenging for the kindergarten students since they still have a bit of stage fright. However, through prompting the students were able to portray the emotions with their bodies. This also led to an excellent opportunity for us to discuss how we can read another person’s body language inaccurately, and should always ‘say what we see’. We feel as though this particular skill will contribute to the confidence that students need in order to advocate for themselves. A parent letter (Appendix G) was sent home with the students explaining the attributes of effective body language and what they had learned during this particular Communication Lab.

In the fourth week of our intervention, the third teacher researcher introduced listening as our *Communication Lab* skill for the week. She asked for feedback concerning the body language that they had sent and received throughout the week. The third teacher researcher recognized and commended the children on all the warm fuzzys that the children had earned. As an introductory activity, she instructed the students to listen carefully to a book that would be read aloud and to clap each time she inserted the word 'fruit loop'. After a few pages, the instructions were changed and instead of the word fruit loop, the students were to follow simple commands that were inserted throughout the text. The students listened very intently and enjoyed responding quickly each time they heard the inserted word. After the introductory activity, the third teacher researcher discussed the habits of a good listener. The skills that were included and practiced through role play were eye contact, staying on topic, not fidgeting, asking appropriate questions, and using body language to convey interest. A parent letter (Appendix H) was sent home describing the listening lesson that had been taught. During Communication Lab, Teacher Researcher A had to be out of the classroom for a meeting, therefore, she was consulted by the third teacher researcher as to what should be modeled throughout the week. This particular week the third teacher researcher noted how frequently the students leave the room for special services. As a special services teacher, it was remarkable for her to note the disruption that occurs during the transitions. Teacher Researchers A and B had really been reaping the benefits of improved communication in their classrooms at this point and both noted their appreciation. Researcher A imagined the improved behaviors that would be evident throughout the school if all students were to receive lessons in positive communication. Researcher B noted that although all the students did not have consent for data collection, the entire class was experiencing the benefits of improved communication.

In the fifth week of our intervention, the third teacher researcher introduced turn taking as our *Communication Lab* skill for the week. Through role plays, the students discovered the negative effects of a conversation that is controlled by one person, and how hurt feelings can result from not including others. This week also introduced the idea of surrendering, or allowing the other person to prevail. A term that was introduced was “get over it”. This phrase was a highlight for the children because it was novel and the verbiage was easy to understand. This was reinforced through a role play which included waiting in line. The students’ location in line was discussed and determined to be insignificant. The fact that the final destination does not change, and that each person in line will see and experience different things along the way were emphasized. Comparing conversational turn taking to a zipper provided a word picture that seemed to make sense to the students. If each tooth of a zipper does not take its turn, the zipper will get stuck and not work, just as a conversation without turn taking will not be successful. In order to demonstrate this skill, a student volunteer was brought up to the front of the class and asked to tell the third researcher about a vacation that he had taken. The teacher then continually interrupted and controlled the conversation. After a few moments, the role play was stopped, and what had ensued was reflected upon with the class. Since the initial role play was somewhat hurtful, the teacher apologized for her communication mistakes and genuinely asked the student to retell her vacation experience. This time the teacher modeled appropriate turn taking skills, and both participants were pleased. It was highlighted that the students turn take everyday as they raise their hands, wait in line at a fast food restaurant, and in traffic. Both researchers felt as though this was an easy skill to model and encourage since it is used daily and in a variety of settings. Some of the students used the ‘get over it’ term inappropriately as they had negative voice intonation, exhausted the phrase, and used it to their advantage, hoping that others would

‘get over it’ when they did something inappropriate. However, the majority of the students applied this phrase correctly within their peer interactions. A letter (Appendix I) was sent home with the students informing their parents of the attributes of turn taking and examples that had been shared with the class.

In the sixth week of our intervention, the third teacher researcher was sick. Since she became ill suddenly, her absence was unexpected. Teacher Researchers A and B took this opportunity to review the skills that had been introduced thus far. Since the students were returning from a long spring break, this opportunity to review was optimal. The teachers used the posters that they had made as a tool to guide their review lesson. It was encouraging to see the students’ disappointment when they learned that the third teacher researcher was unable to teach the lesson that day. However, they were still eager to review the previous lessons with the classroom teacher. The classroom teachers realized this week that by relying on one person as the keeper of the *Communication Lab* materials and having one teacher most familiar with the lessons themselves was a disadvantage.

In the seventh week of our intervention, the third teacher researcher was unable to teach the Communication Lab since there was no school on Monday. The third teacher researcher’s teaching schedule did not allow for her to visit the classroom on an alternative date. However, the three teacher researchers collaborated prior to this week in order to prepare Teacher Researchers A and B to teach the lesson entitled “The Way”. Although anxious, both classroom teachers enjoyed teaching the Communication Lab. Since they were honest with their students about their anxious feelings, and the students had not had a new lesson in a while, the classes seemed receptive and excited about the new communication topic. Both researchers began their lesson using a bored and unenthusiastic voice to express their ‘excitement’ in teaching the lesson.

This provided a fun hook to engage the students. The lesson included using body language, voice and facial expression to convey clear messages. Through role play, the students experienced encouraging and discouraging communication through a variety of scenarios. Student volunteers were given a card with a short phrase that can take on a variety of meanings depending on its delivery. For example, a student said “Can I play?” while whining, demanding, and then in an appropriate tone. After each delivery the class discussed whether the message was encouraging or discouraging, and how it made them feel. The classroom teachers sent home the parent letter for the week (Appendix J), describing the new skills that had been introduced so that the parents could review the skills at home. The classroom teachers updated the third teacher researcher on the success of their lessons, however, she felt somewhat disconnected because of the length of time she has not seen the students.

In the eighth week of our intervention, the third teacher researcher returned to the classrooms for the first time in approximately a month. She immediately noted and praised the number of warm fuzzys that the students had earned. This provided a nice transition into the lesson entitled “Praise”. In order to start the role play portion of the lesson, one student was asked to leave the classroom. Once that student was in the hallway, the teacher told the rest of the class how the student was kind and hard working. When the student was invited back into the classroom, the teacher asked him how he felt about what had been said about him. Obviously, he had no clue what had been said, and demonstrated these feelings through facial expression and body language. The student then verbally expressed that he did not know how to feel. This led to teaching the students about “going to the source”, which means praising a person directly. The students were also taught that it is important that their praise be sincere and that they receive praise as well as they send it. In order to practice this skill, the students participated in a praise

whip. The praise whip involved the students sitting in a circle and sending sincere praise to the person on their left and appropriately receiving the praise from the person sitting on their right. The students enjoyed the praise whip, but had a difficult time straying from the superficial compliments such as “I like your shirt” or “You are nice”. The classroom teachers appreciated this lesson and felt as though the parents would benefit from it as well. Often in the busyness of daily life, parents may overlook the power of praise. By being specific and sending praise to their children, they can encourage desired behaviors. A parent letter (Appendix K) was sent home explaining the lesson on praise and the positive effect that it could have on communication and relationships. The days following the praise lesson the students needed to be corralled, as a plethora of praises were being used daily in an effort to earn as many warm fuzzys as possible. The students were reminded to be sincere with their praise and that if used too frequently it loses its effect. Both classroom teachers commented that this lesson refreshed their knowledge of the power of praise to motivate particular behaviors. They also appreciated the reminder that their praise needed to be sincere and specific.

In the ninth week of our intervention, the third teacher researcher introduced sending and receiving constructive criticism as our *Communication Lab* skill for the week. The lesson began with the question, “Raise your hand if you think you are perfect.” It was interesting to see the number of raised hands implying that the students were confident and flawless. The teacher gently let them know that all people including parents and teachers make mistakes. The importance of criticism was explained to the students. Several examples were given demonstrating the chaos that would occur if mistakes were left uncorrected. Two students were asked to make their desks messy. The teacher approached one student and exclaimed, “Clean your desk, it can’t look like that!” She then approached the second student and stated how untidy

the desk was and provided suggestions for improved organization. The point modeled and discussed demonstrated how criticism could be delivered in a helpful as opposed to a hurtful way. A handful of students had a difficult time grasping the concept of helpful criticism and were insistent that revenge would be an appropriate response when they are criticized. This led to some clarification of the lesson and additional role plays. This particular week the students in both classrooms demonstrated their increased level of comfort with the third researcher and were not as compliant during the lesson. All of the teachers felt as though this was partially due to the complexity of the concept. However, this provided a great platform for the third teacher researcher to apply some helpful, specific criticism. Although the students may not have comprehended the full meaning of criticism, they did discover that everyone has flaws and that we should give one another guidance and grace. A parent letter (Appendix L) was sent home informing the parents of the components presented in the lesson on criticism.

In the tenth week of our intervention, the third teacher researcher introduced success and failure as our final *Communication Lab* skill. The two primary concepts introduced this week were positive self-talk and “flipping the pancake”. The students were taught how to talk positively to themselves when they are being challenged. Role plays were performed demonstrating the negative effect of mentally belittling yourself. “Flipping the pancake” means changing one’s internal attitude. Anyone has the ability to “flip the pancake” at any time and in any situation. All of the teachers agreed that this was a short lesson and that it would be beneficial to review all of the skills that had been introduced throughout Communication Lab. The students were able to recall every skill with very little prompting. When the students were initially unable to produce some of the individual skills, they were reminded of a particular phrase or role play to jog their memory. The teachers and students were impressed with all that

had learned. The students were told that they now have the knowledge to be expert communicators and were encouraged to model their communication skills for others, and to apply the skills that they know for successful interactions. The final parent letter (Appendix M) introduced the lesson on success and failure, and summarized the skills that had been taught throughout the Communication Lab. Both classes celebrated the final Communication Lab. One class presented the third teacher researcher with an illustrated book that they had created and served cookies to celebrate the warm fuzzys that they had earned. The book highlighted the many skills that they had learned, some of the phrases that had been used, and memorable role plays. The other classroom presented the third teacher researcher with a thank you card that had been signed by the whole class. The students in both classes expressed their disappointment that Communication Lab was over.

During week 13 of our study, the third teacher researcher visited both classrooms to distribute, orally read, and collect the student questionnaire (Appendix C & D) for post documentation. During this visit the kindergarten classroom celebrated the warm fuzzys that they had earned by serving brownies. The parent surveys (Appendix A) were sent home and asked to be anonymously returned so that the researchers could gather data for post documentation.

The 13 and 14 weeks of our study involved all of the teacher researchers participating in collecting data using the Teacher Observation Checklist (Appendix B) that had been used during the pre-documentation period. In an effort to make the data that was collected with this tool comparable to the pre-documentation data, the teacher researchers attempted to observe for a similar length of time in each of the three educational settings: small group, whole group, and center time. The time spent gathering data in each of the settings was 390 minutes.

I, Teacher Researcher A, found the implementation of the interventions meaningful and effective. The students were engaged and excited about the *Communication Lab* lessons, and through the role plays were provided the visual and kinesthetic connections to make them more meaningful. I was able to refer to and model the skills that had been taught throughout our research period as review and continual reinforcement of appropriate communication. As with any other concepts that are introduced and taught in the classroom, whether it be addition, letter recognition or how to count, direct instruction of appropriate communication skills is essential in the education of primary children. Reflecting upon my 14 years of teaching experience, this project allowed me to identify an improvement in my students' ability to advocate for themselves and treat others with greater respect and patience. They were not pushing to get in line, and they were giving one another praise for things done well. More importantly, there was a greater awareness for others' space and feelings, more turn taking and less interrupting. I intend to utilize the knowledge and strategies with my morning and afternoon kindergartners next year. Having the guest speaker was unique and a great hook to engage the students, and I will have to confer with my third researcher as a resource to review the essential points of the lessons in the future. The Communication Lab was her passion, and this was evident when sharing the information in the development of our lessons and when she presented to the children. The other classroom teacher researcher is positive, motivated, and technologically savvy, which has been very helpful in the development and writing of our thesis. Our group has worked very well together. During the implementation period we were always eager to share progress in the classroom and reflect upon what needed to occur next in our plan. Personally, this project has encouraged me to be aware and reflect on how effectively I communicate with students, parents, administrators, family and friends. From this research experience, I have been challenged to

become familiar and utilize new technologies and software, collect and analyze data, and navigate through the internet, different data bases, and other resources to acquire information. Personally and professionally this experience will influence the way that I communicate and educate children.

As Teacher Researcher B, I have learned a great deal about myself, my research team, and my students as a result of our project. I feel much more comfortable collecting data, analyzing, and presenting it. This comes at an important time in my professional career since our district is becoming more data driven. The Communication Lab lessons were so beneficial to my students that I will begin the school year using the activities with my incoming first graders. I am sure the role playing and teacher modeling of good communication skills will help these young people develop into better communicators, which will make my job as a teacher more effective. It was remarkable to see my class from an observer's standpoint. When lessons were being taught by the third researcher, it allowed me to observe my students' interactions. It also provided an opportunity to see which students needed more support in certain communication areas. It was interesting to hear the third teacher researcher's observations of my class. She gave me some valuable insight in regards to particular students that I would have overlooked. Not only were the lessons helpful to my students, but they made an impact on myself as well. I became more aware of my body language, making eye contact, being a better listener and observer when I communicated with students, parents, and colleagues. The teacher researchers who I worked with were amazing! We worked so well as a group. Our skills greatly complemented each other. We were a huge support to each other when our research (and life in general) got overwhelming. This project has helped me to grow professionally and as a person.

I, Teacher Researcher C, feel as though I have grown professionally and personally during this research project. I was blessed to be working with two hard working and knowledgeable educators. It was amazing how each one of us had strengths and knowledge that complimented the other two. Although the literature and process enlightened us in many ways, we also learned a great deal from one another. As a traveling educator, I think that one of the things that impacted me most was the disruption that occurs when a service provider arrives in a classroom to remove specific students. Since I was teaching the communication lesson each week in both classrooms, I was able to experience the frequent interruptions. I feel as though I will now be more cognizant of my approach as I arrive to render services with my students. This project has also confirmed my belief that the development of positive communication skills is beneficial for optimal classroom functioning. Although, we initially questioned the readiness of kindergarten and first grade students to participate in role-plays and to learn somewhat complex communication skills, we quickly learned that they were ready, able, and willing. Collecting and analyzing data was a learning experience for me as well. I feel as though the process itself is not as intimidating as I had initially thought and has the potential to offer insightful information in a variety of venues. Finally, I also learned how to make graphs on the computer! Although I am still not a professional, I know that I am better able to navigate the graphing options on my computer. Working collaboratively with my team of professional educators on this research project has been extremely rewarding and has already contributed to my personal and professional being.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

Advocacy among primary students and lack of classroom participation was the identified problem area for this research project. The goal of the research was to improve students'

participation and advocacy and document the impact of role play, teacher modeling, and direct instruction of communication skills. There were 19 student participants in an afternoon kindergarten at Site A, and 20 student participants in a first grade classroom at Site B. The research team consisted of three teacher researchers. Two of the researchers were classroom teachers (Sites A & B), and the third was an itinerant teacher. The post data collection occurred April 30, 2007 to May 11, 2007. The three tools used were a parent survey, teacher observation checklist, and student questionnaire.

Parent Survey

As indicated in Chapter 2 the Parent Survey (Appendix A) was used to establish incidence of students' behaviors within the home setting. The data utilizing this tool is displayed in the following Figures 9 through 13.

In post documentation Figure 9, given 12 attributes from which to choose, 86% (n=114) of the responses were behaviors that would compliment advocacy. Whereas, 14% (n=18) of the responses indicated behaviors that do not exhibit advocacy.

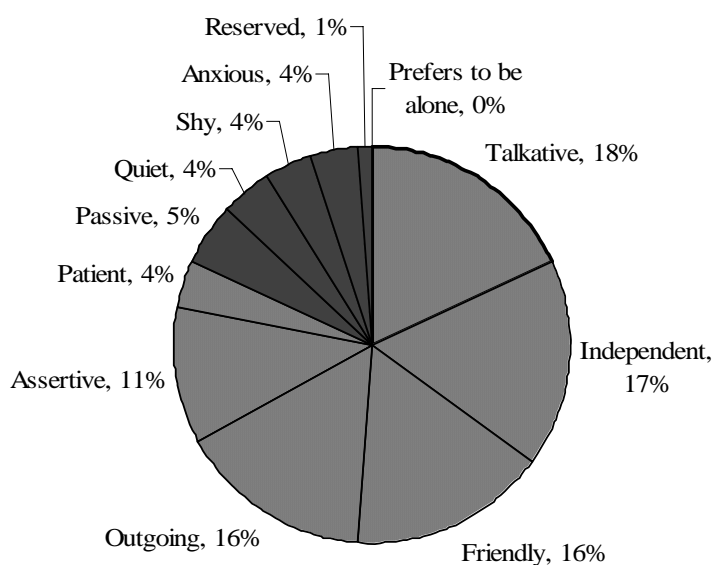


Figure 1: Parent Survey Pre-Documentation (n=151)

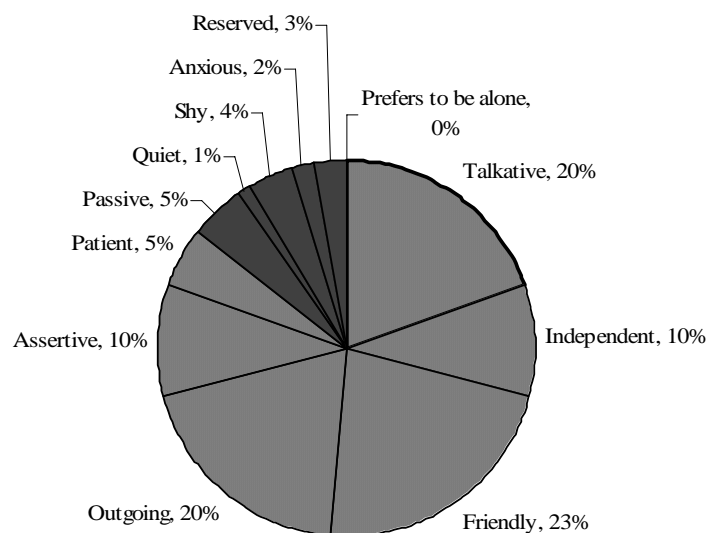


Figure 9: Parent Survey Post Documentation (n=132)

As indicated in Figures 1 and 9, there was a 4% decrease in undesirable behaviors. There is a notable increase in the areas of participation (talkative 2%), outgoing behaviors (4%), and friendliness (7%).

Figures 10 through 13 each represent one of three questions that offered four behavioral choices on the pre-documentation Parent Survey (Appendix A).

Post documentation Figure 10 showed inappropriate conduct 41% (n=17) of the time according to parents' responses. The inappropriate conduct included being demanding 17% (n=7), whining 19% (n=8), and passive 5% (n=2).

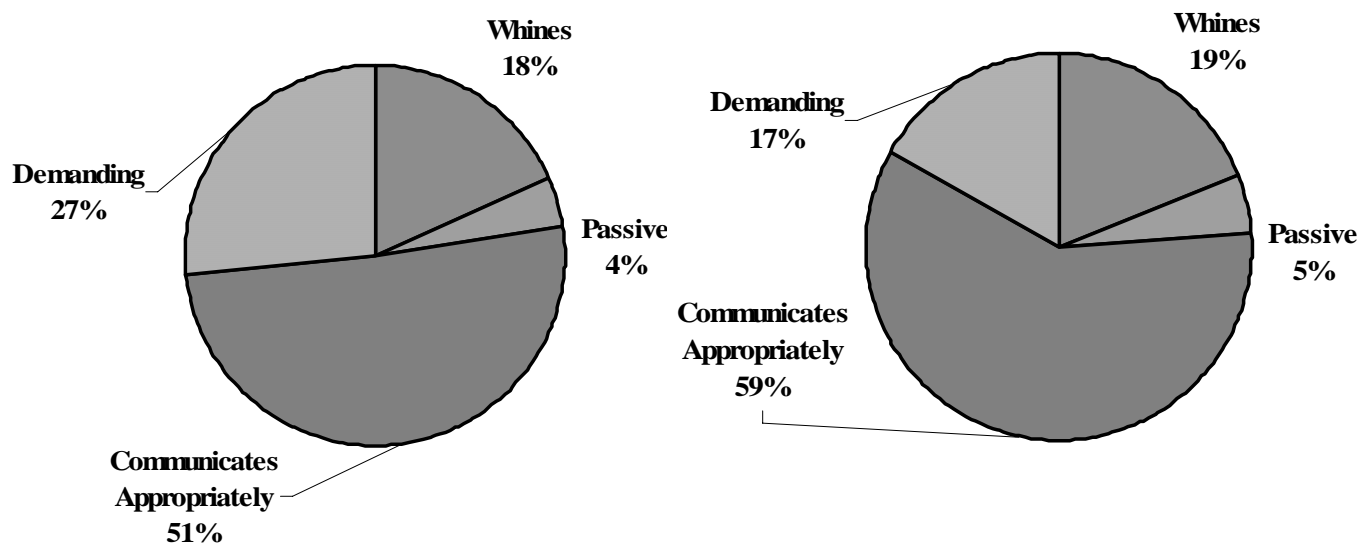


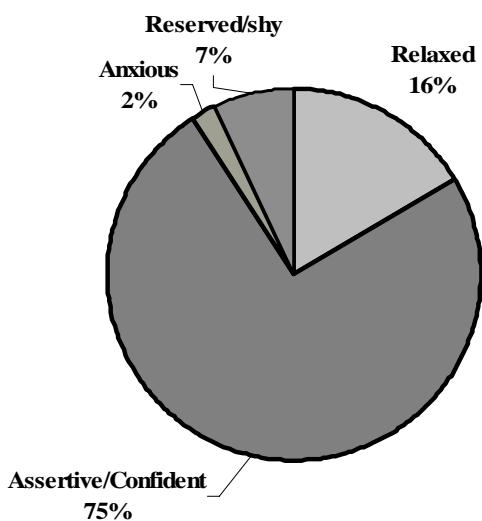
Figure 2: Communicates When Needs Assistance Pre-documentation (n=39)

Figure 10: Communicates When Needs Assistance Post documentation (n=42)

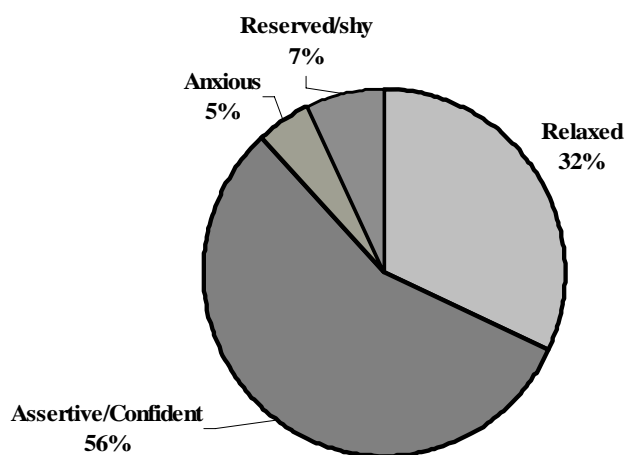
Figure 2 and Figure 10 document an increase of 8% in the area of appropriate communication among the research participants. These figures also show the notable decrease of

10% in the area of demanding behaviors demonstrated by the participants. Whining and passive behaviors each showed a 1% increase.

In post documentation, Figure 11 shows 88% (n=38) of parent responses reported assertive and relaxed behaviors in unstructured activities. However, 12% (n=5) of parent replies showed a lack of advocacy and communication skills.



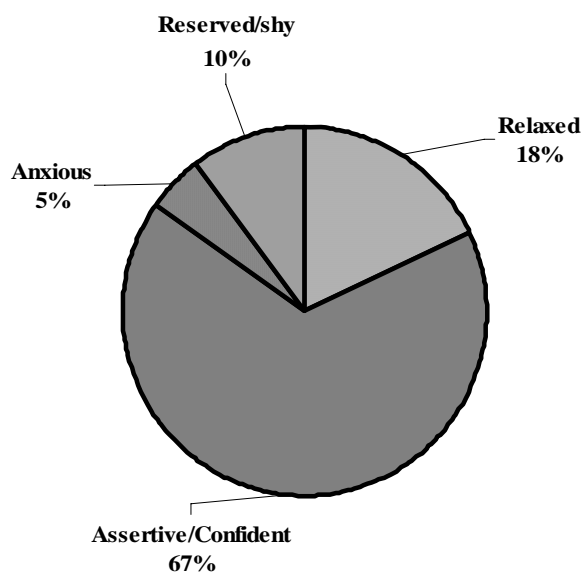
*Figure 3: Unstructured Activities
Pre-documentation (n=43)*



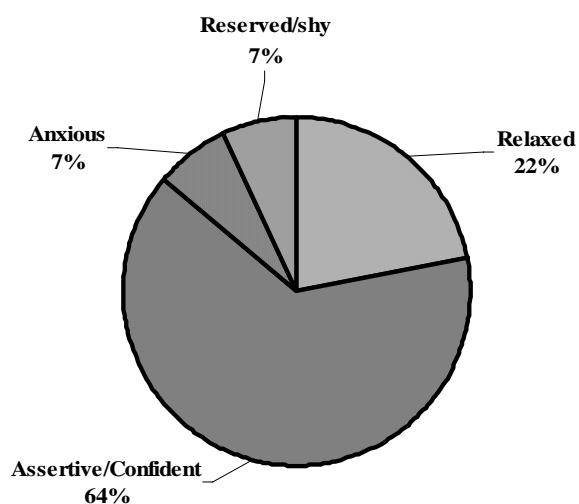
*Figure 11: Unstructured Activities
Post documentation (n=43)*

The data collected to document the participants' behaviors during unstructured activities shows a 19% decrease in assertive/confident behaviors. Also a 16% increase in relaxed behaviors was noted.

Figure 12 indicates post documentation responses which showed in structured activities 86% (n=35) of parents felt their children had exhibited pro-social communication skills. These behaviors included being assertive/ confident 64% (n=26) and relaxed 22% (n=9). Fourteen percent (n=6) reported that their child did not demonstrate self-advocacy behaviors (reserved/shy 7%, n=3; anxious 7%, n=3).



*Figure 4: Structured Activities
Pre-documentation (n=39)*



*Figure 12: Structured Activities
Post documentation (n=41)*

Comparing Figures 4 and 12 indicated a slight increase of 1% in the areas of desired behaviors. The desired behaviors included assertiveness/confidence and being relaxed. The undesired behaviors, which included being anxious, and reserved/shy, indicated slight decrease of 1%.

As indicated in Chapter 2 the fourth part of the Parent Survey required the parent to respond either yes, or no to whether or not their child initiates conversation about his/her experiences or feelings. In post documentation, Figure 13 showed that 86% (n=32) of parents indicated their child started conversations about their feelings and experiences. Fourteen percent (n=5) parents showed that their child did not initiate conversations.

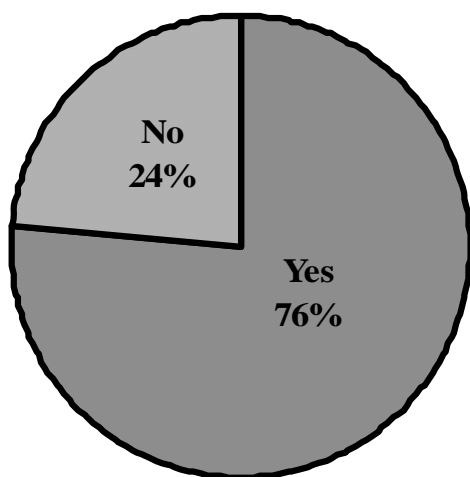


Figure 5: Initiation of Conversation About Feelings Pre-documentation (n=39)

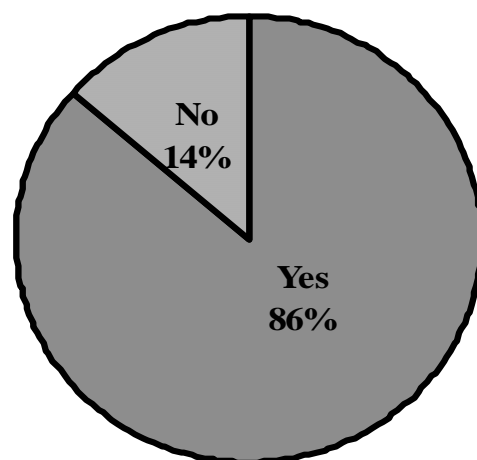


Figure 13: Initiation of Conversation About Feelings Post documentation (n=37)

As indicated in Figures 5 and 13, there was a 10% increase in the number of students who initiated conversation and expressed their feelings to others in the home environment. The percentage of students that did not initiate conversation with their parents, decreased by 10 percent.

Teacher Observation Checklist

Figure 14 represents pre-documentation and post documentation of behaviors recorded by each researcher on the Teacher Observation Checklist (Appendix B). Post documentation included 390 total minutes of observation. Of the 259 observed behaviors, 72 (28%) instances of hand-raising occurred. The remaining behaviors indicated a lack of classroom participation and advocacy totaling 187 (72%). Off-task behaviors represented the largest incidence of lack of student participation in the classroom totaling 107(41%). Classroom outbursts included 43 (17%) and 31 (12%) incidences of inappropriate peer interaction were examples of undesirable behavior. Five (2%) occurrences of not being prepared for a classroom activity and 1 (1%) events of bodily needs not being met indicated a lack of self advocacy.

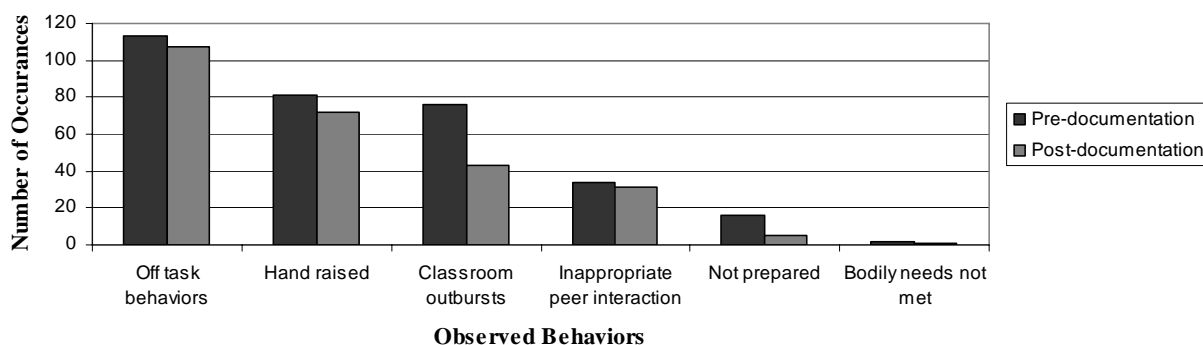


Figure 14: Teacher Observation
Pre-documentation (n=314) and Post documentation (n=259)

Figure 14 shows a decrease in all areas of behaviors that were noted on the teacher observation checklist. Hand raising was a behavior where an increase was desired, but not seen. There was a decrease from 81 in pre-documentation to 72 in post documentation, with a total of

nine. The number of off-task behaviors decreased by six from pre-documentation 113 to post documentation 107. The number of classroom outbursts had a significant decrease of 33 from pre-documentation 76 to post documentation 43. The number of incidences of inappropriate peer interaction showed a small decrease of three from pre-documentation 34 to post documentation 31. The number of students who were not prepared for class, decreased by 11 from pre-documentation 16 to post documentation five. The number of occurrences of bodily needs not being met decreased from two to one.

Of the 196 whole group behaviors recorded in pre-documentation, Figure 7 shows 62 instances of hand raising, 57 instances of off task behaviors, and 43 occurrences of classroom outbursts. Inappropriate peer interaction occurred 21 times, 12 instances of students not being prepared, and one occasion of bodily needs not being met.

Of the 66 small group behaviors recorded in pre-documentation, Figure 7 shows 19 instances of hand raising, 22 instances of off task behaviors, and 17 occurrences of classroom outbursts. Inappropriate peer interaction occurred 6 times, one instance of a student not being prepared, and one time of bodily needs not being met.

Of the 52 behaviors documented at centers during pre-documentation, Figure 7 show zero instances of hand raising, 34 instances of off task behaviors, and 16 occurrences of classroom outbursts. Inappropriate peer interaction occurred 7 times, there were three instances of students not being prepared, and zero times of bodily needs not being met.

Figure 15 represents 190 minutes of teacher observation time during whole group instruction during post documentation. Of 159 observed behaviors, 62 instances of hand-raising occurred. The remaining 97 behaviors had demonstrated lack of classroom participation and advocacy, including 12 instances of inappropriate peer interaction, and two occurrences of not

having appropriate materials. Seventeen classroom outbursts and 66 off-task behaviors showed evidence of students' inattentiveness.

Figure 15 represents 65 minutes of teacher observation time during small group activities. Of 38 observed behaviors, 10 instances of hand-raising occurred. The remaining 28 behaviors had demonstrated lack of classroom participation and advocacy, including four instances of inappropriate peer interaction, and two occurrences of not being prepared for class. Eleven classroom outbursts and 10 off-task behaviors showed evidence of students' inappropriate behavior.

Figure 15 represents 135 minutes of teacher observation time during centers. There were 62 noted observed behaviors. All of the documented behaviors 62 demonstrated inappropriate participation and lack of advocacy skills. These include 15 unsuitable peer interactions, 31 off task behaviors, one instance of not being prepared, and 15 classroom outbursts.

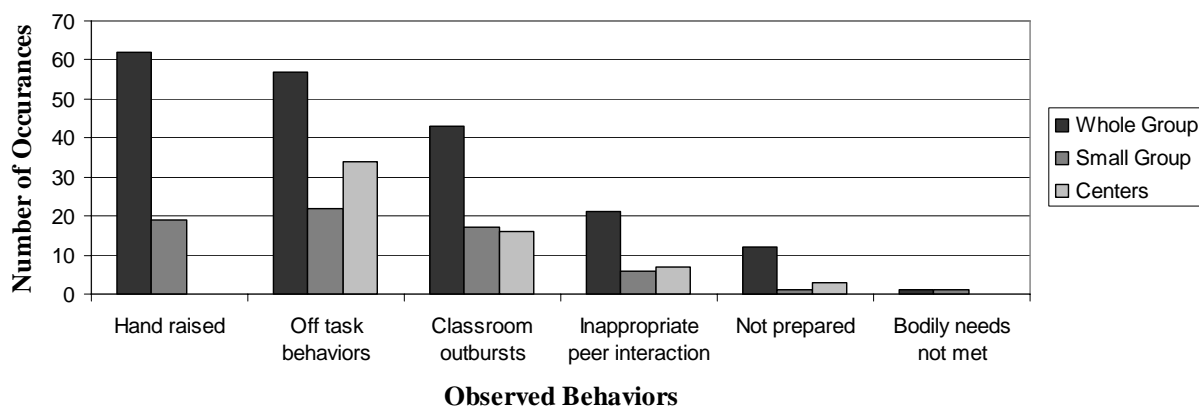


Figure 7: Teacher Observation/Whole Group ($n=196$), Small Group ($n=66$), Centers ($n=52$) Pre-documentation

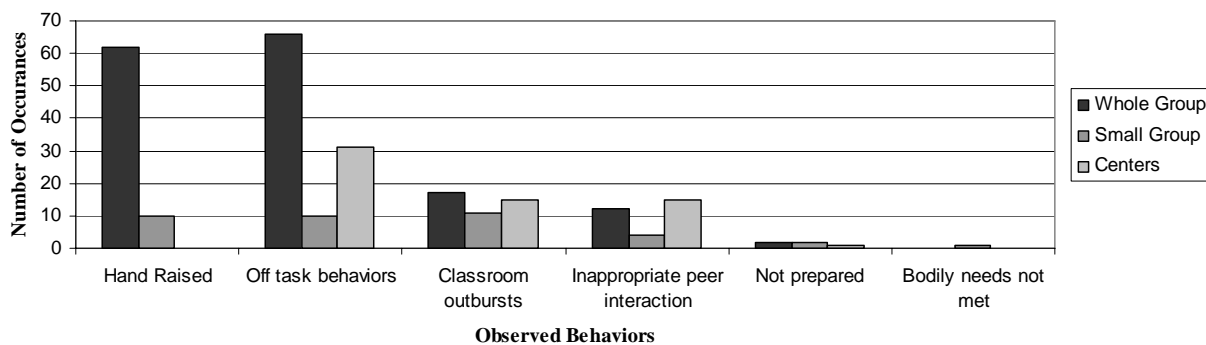


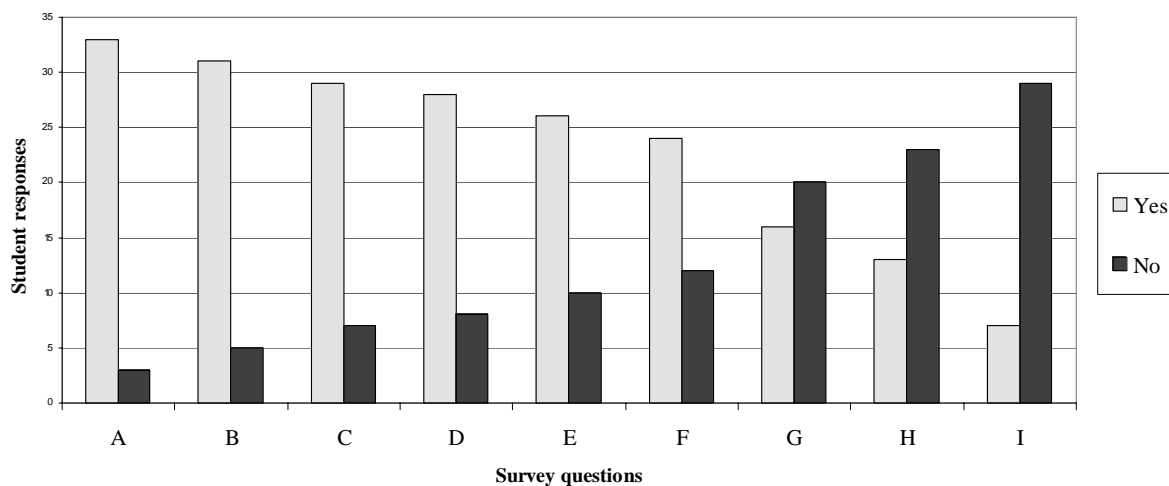
Figure 15: Teacher Observation/Whole Group ($n=159$), Small Group ($n=38$), Centers ($n=62$) Post documentation

Comparing Figures 7 and 15 showed a notable decrease in classroom outbursts, from 43 in pre-documentation to 17 in post documentation which totals a 26 decrease in outbursts.

Inappropriate peer interactions showed a decrease of nine instances from 21 in pre documentation to 12 in post documentation. Data collected of students being unprepared for class in the whole group environment, showed a decrease of 10 occurrences from pre-documentation 12 to two in post documentation. There was an increase of nine instances of off

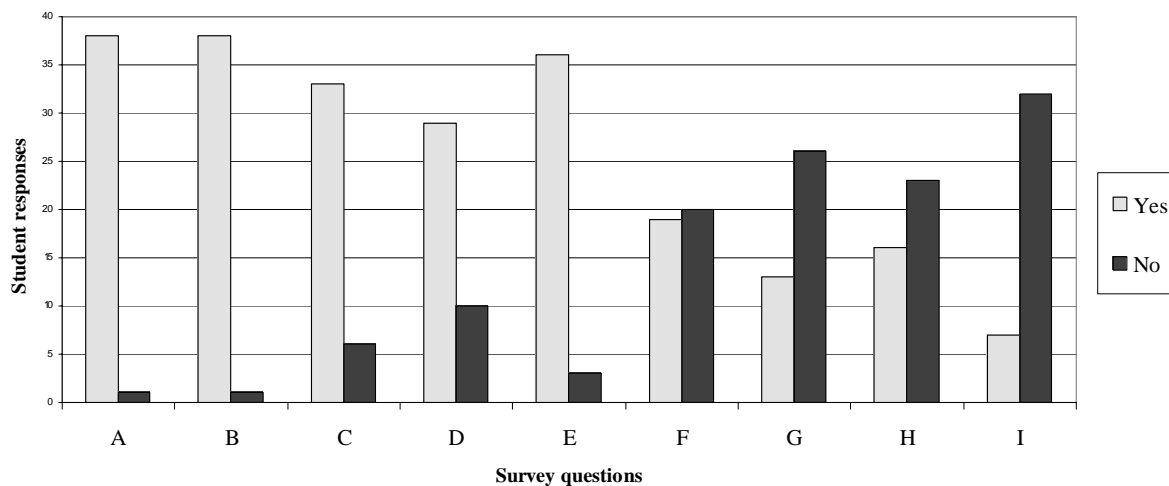
task behaviors in the whole group environment from 57 in pre-documentation to 66 in post documentation. In the small group environment an overall improvement in positive behaviors including a reduction of nine from pre-documentation 19 to 10 in post documentation for hand raising. Off task behaviors showed a decrease of 12 from pre-documentation 22 to post documentation 10. The number of classroom outbursts decreased by six from pre-documentation 17 to post documentation 11. There was a small decrease of two in inappropriate peer interactions from pre-documentation six to four. There was a notable increase of eight occurrences of inappropriate interactions during center time from pre-documentation seven to 15 in post documentation.

Using the Student Questionnaire (Appendix C & D), the post documentation data in Figure 16 illustrates 36 or more of the students (95%) responded yes to activities that involved social interaction with peers and student driven experiences. Thirteen students (33%) enjoyed sharing ideas at group time and 26 students (67%) did not like sharing in the group setting.



A = I like to play with my friends
 B = My teacher is happy
 C = I like to raise my hand
 D = I like telling about the sharing bag/journal
 E = I like to do work with a partner or a friend
 F = I like to work by myself
 G = I like to tell my ideas at group time
 H = I like to tell my ideas only to a grown up
 I = I like to play by myself

Figure 8: Student Survey (n=324) Pre-documentation



A = I like to play with my friends
 B = My teacher is happy
 C = I like to raise my hand
 D = I like telling about the sharing bag/journal
 E = I like to do work with a partner or a friend
 F = I like to work by myself
 G = I like to tell my ideas at group time
 H = I like to tell my ideas only to a grown up
 I = I like to play by myself

Figure 16: Student Survey (n=351) Post documentation

Figure 8 and Figure 16 displayed a decrease of three in the area of students telling ideas at group time from pre-documentation 16 to post documentation 13. There was also a decrease of five from pre-documentation 24 to post documentation 19 in the area of students preferring to work with by themselves. The most marked increase of 10 was in response to students preferring to work with a partner or friend from pre-documentation 26 to post documentation 36. There was little change noted in the areas of students playing by themselves or telling about their sharing bag/journal to a small group. The remainder of the behaviors measured by this tool documented a slight increase.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Reflecting upon our data and professional observations, we were pleased with the positive impact that our interventions had on our students. We feel as though the communication strategies that were provided to the students through direct instruction and the weekly parent letters (Appendixes E-M) contributed to the improvement in communication and behavior in the home environment.

The parent survey (Appendix A) provided an opportunity for parents to describe their child's disposition and behavior within the home environment. In Figures 1 and 9, the pre- and post data demonstrated the increase in desired communication and behaviors. Since the parents were not limited as to how many behavioral attributes they were able to select to describe their child, there were a multitude of responses. Given fewer descriptors, the data collected may have been more specific. The vocabulary we selected to describe the students may not have been concise. For example, the terms reserved and shy could be interpreted similarly. In addition, during post data collection, Site B did not have a good return rate which may have impacted our post data results. Upon comparing Figures 2 and 10, we saw a notable increase in appropriate

communication when the students required assistance in the home environment. In particular, the students being demanding towards their parents decreased significantly. We feel as though there is a direct correlation between these results and the specific skills that were introduced and role played by the students. The data results concerning students' demeanor during unstructured and structured activities (Figures 3, 4, 11, and 12) once again may have been construed due to the verbiage utilized in the parent survey. For example, the terms assertive/confident may convey multiple meanings. It should be noted however, that there was marked decrease in students' being assertive/confident within unstructured environments according to the parent responses. There was little change in the data collected concerning student behaviors during structured activities. We were encouraged to discover that there was a considerable increase in the students' initiation of conversation within the home environment (Figures 5 and 13). This increase could be attributed to the communication skills that were introduced, role played, and modeled by the teachers. Although the parent survey provided us with useful information, we feel as though this tool could be modified in order to provide more reliable data.

The teacher observation checklist (Appendix B) was particularly insightful. Prior to this project, we had not taken the opportunity to observe and document various student behaviors. The information collected provided us with immediate feedback that helped us reflect upon our teaching. Each negative behavior that was recorded showed a decrease in occurrences from pre- to post documentation (Figure 14). We feel as though the positive communication skills that were taught, modeled, and reinforced throughout our intervention contributed to this change. According to our data, there was an overall decrease in off task behaviors, classroom outbursts, inappropriate peer interactions, and the number of students that were unprepared for class. An exception of off task behaviors in the whole group environment could be attributed to the timing

of the post data collection. Since post documentation occurred during the final weeks of school, the students' level of comfort within the classroom setting had increased and the activities observed were not part of their typical routine. During those final weeks there were multiple assemblies, drills, and assessments. We feel as though there are several improvements that could be made to this tool. For instance, we initially felt as though the students' ability or inability to address their bodily needs was significant, the data negated that assumption. Also, the addition of time parameters to clarify the length of time that the students would be observed in each environment would have made the comparison of the pre- and post data more reliable. The classroom teachers sometimes found it challenging to introduce a lesson and collect data simultaneously. The teachers also noted that the students' behaviors varied quite a bit as their teachers and their expectations changed, such as during art, music and computers. Finally, certain behaviors that were included in our checklist were found to be insignificant during specific environments such as hand raising during center time.

The students enjoyed completing the Student Questionnaire (Appendixes C and D). The results of this tool were generally encouraging. The questions that pertained to prosocial interactions, showed an overall increase when the pre- and post data were compared (Figures 8 and 16). The exception was the question regarding students sharing their ideas during group time. Since such a marked number of students responded negatively to this question, and the behaviors that we observed daily show otherwise, we deduced that the students did not fully understand the question. Given that the questionnaire was read orally to the students, a simple change in voice intonation may have altered its meaning. The data supported that behaviors that are more typical among introverted children decreased. This data suggests that the students increased their likelihood of advocating for themselves and participating in classroom activities.

A strategy that we used on the Student Questionnaire that we really found helpful was the use of different symbols on each page. Since some of the students were non-readers, the questionnaire was read orally to the students, and the symbols assisted in making sure that the students were on the correct page. The format that we used for the Student Questionnaire provided an avenue for students to anonymously express their feelings about various situations. Each of us is eager to use this questionnaire format in the upcoming years.

The most meaningful data that we collected throughout our research project included our own personal observations and parent feedback. Through conversations with the teachers, hand written notes, and casual conversations in the community, several parents raved about the interventions and skills being taught to their children. Although the use of a third person as a regular guest speaker is not possible, all of the teacher researchers plan on continuing to incorporate communication skills and role play into the curriculum. In fact, we are eager to initiate the *Communication Lab* at the beginning of the year as opposed to half way through the school year. The use of role play assisted in making the skills that were taught more comfortable for the students and demonstrated their application in daily interactions. Incorporating the introduced communication skills through out the school day was natural and applicable.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Parent Survey

Parent Survey

Please circle the words that best describe your child:

Outgoing	Quiet	Talkative
Assertive	Friendly	Reserved
Passive	Shy	Anxious
Prefers to be alone	Independent	Patient

- Which words best describe your child's communication style when he/she requires assistance:

passive whines/begs communicates appropriately demanding

- Which word best describes your child in unstructured activities (ie. free play, birthday parties, playground):

relaxed assertive/confident anxious reserved/shy

- Which word best describes your child in structured activities (ie. games, club activities, after school classes):

relaxed assertive/confident anxious reserved/shy

- Does your child initiate conversation about his/her experiences/feelings?

Yes

No

- Additional comments: _____

Appendix B: Teacher Observation Checklist

Teacher Observation Checklist

This checklist is intended for use by the teacher researchers for documenting students' behaviors in the areas of advocacy, participation, and socialization. It is designed to be used daily in an afternoon kindergarten classroom and a 1st grade classroom. It will be filled out during the documentation period from January 29, 2007 to February 9, 2007. This checklist will be used again after the intervention period from April 30, 2007 to May 11, 2007.

Date	Environment	Hand Raised	Inappropriate or Lack of peer interaction	Off task behaviors (no eye contact, fidgeting,...)	Bodily needs not met	Doesn't have appropriate materials	Classroom Outbursts
	Whole group Small group Centers						
	Whole group Small group Centers						
	Whole group Small group Centers						
	Whole group Small group Centers						
	Whole group Small group Centers						

Appendix C: Student Questionnaire: Site A

How I Feel About School

I like to do work with a
partner or a friend.

yes

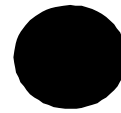
no



I like to do work by
myself.

yes

no



I like to play with my
friends.

yes

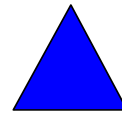
no



I like to play by
myself.

yes

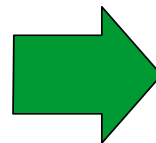
no



I like to raise my hand.

yes

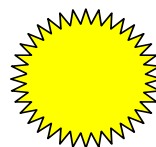
no



I like to tell my ideas
at group time.

yes

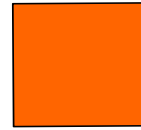
no



My teacher is happy.

yes

no



I like to tell my ideas
only to a grown up.

yes

no



I like telling about
the sharing bag.

yes

no



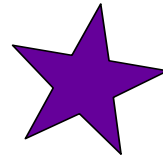
Appendix D: Student Questionnaire: Site B



I like to do work with a
partner or a friend.

yes

no



I like to do work by
myself.

yes

no



I like to play with my
friends.

yes

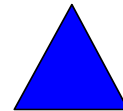
no



I like to play by
myself.

yes

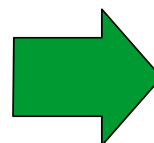
no



I like to raise my hand.

yes

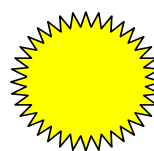
no



I like to tell my ideas
at group time.

yes

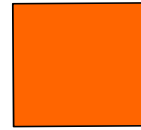
no



My teacher is happy.

yes

no



I like to tell my ideas
only to a grown up.

yes

no



I like sharing my
journal.

yes

no



Appendix E: Parent Letter: Introduction to Communication Lab

February 19, 2007

Dear Parents:

This week we were introduced to the concept of COMMUNICATION. Mrs. Boyd a colleague and fellow Master's student will be visiting our class weekly (for nine weeks) to introduce a new positive communication strategy. Through role plays and classroom discussion, the students will increase their awareness and appreciation of good communication. This week they learned that good communication does the following:

- Use eye contact
- Observe before they communicate
- Notice body language
- Listen
- Take turns
- Use a polite tone of voice
- Speak clearly
- Use an appropriate rate of speech
- Act interested
- Remain on topic

The following lessons will highlight and put into practice each of these skills. To help your child focus on good communication, your family might spend this week noticing all the habits good communicators use. For example, if someone accidentally interrupts you and apologizes, you might comment on their good communication. You may also have each person in your family identify their best communication skill. For instance, dad might be a good turn-taker, and brother may be a good listener. As your family and the class become increasingly aware of their communication, enhancing, and learning new skills will be far easier.

Have fun with this, and enjoy the benefits of improved communication!

Sincerely,

Appendix F: Parent Letter: Observation

February 26, 2007

Dear Parents:

Its 5:00 o'clock and you have had a productive, yet long day. You try to capture five minutes of solitude by sitting down to read the newspaper before you have to refuel and make dinner for the family. Just as you sink into the recliner, in bursts your child with a long list of things he needs for school tomorrow.

Is this just another one of those times when your child is being inconsiderate of other people? It may be, or it may be evidence that your child simply needs to improve his *observation* skills before communicating. The truth is, many children (and adults) fail to make important *observations* before communicating. Frequently this leads to interrupting or poor timing.

This communication skill that we are focusing on this week is *observation*. Soon you will be *observing* your child use such strategies as "Oh, dad, I observe that you are reading the newspaper. When would be a good time to talk to you about some things I need for school?" When this happens in your home I am sure that you will be so pleased with your child's consideration that you will be tempted to put down the paper right then and there! Although that response will reinforce the positive communication skill, it will be equally helpful for you to indicate an appropriate time to talk later. Just be sure that you follow through with the agreed upon time.

It will be helpful if you would model good *observations* skills by noticing when your child is actively engaged in something and making an appointment to communicate with him later.

Together you and your child will share and learn improved ways to communicate. These newly learned skills will help to strengthen your family connection!

Sincerely,

Appendix G: Parent Letter: Body Language

March 5, 2007

Dear Parents:

Hopefully you have noticed your child using his/her observation skills this week!

Sometimes our *body language*, or non-verbal messages can cause poor communication or confrontation. For example, think about a time when you asked your child to take out the garbage or complete some chore, and they did it, but his/her body language made you furious!

This week we focused on sending and receiving *body language*, or non-verbal messages. Your child should be using his/her observation skills to read and monitor body language so that she can become more aware of the non-verbal messages that accompany his/her words and others.

Your child also learned to recognize when a speaker needs *thinking time*. Perhaps you have observed your own child struggling to find words or to organize himself verbally. Take the time to make sure that your *body language* is communicating that it is all right for him to take thinking time to find the right words. To reinforce this skill you may consider asking your child about thinking time. Does he/she need it? When?

Next, your child learned to *say what you see* to avoid miscommunication. For example, your child might say, "You look mad" and you might respond, "Actually, I was just thinking". Next time you see your child struggling when he/she is doing his homework, you might say what you see: "You look frustrated. Do you need thinking time, or would you like help?"

Your child also learned to observe a listener's facial expression to determine whether his/her message was understood.

Together we are reminding ourselves and our children that *body language* speaks as loud, if not louder, than words. Our *body language* can encourage or discourage people around us. We hope that you are observing some improved communication in your home.

Sincerely,

Appendix H: Parent Letter: Listening

March 12, 2007

Dear Parents:

How many times have you reached the end of your fuse because you felt as though your child was not listening? Have you ever found yourself saying “How many times do I have to tell you?” or “I feel like I am talking to a brick wall!”

Teachers and parents can relate to the growing frustration that results from all of the repeating that is necessary when someone doesn’t listen the first time. This week in Communication Lab your child learned the *habits of a good listener*. Ask your child to recall some of these habits and talk about them. You can then praise your child for the *good listening habits* that you see him/her using! Examples of good listening habits include eye contact, head nods, asking questions on the subject, commenting, and acting interested. You may also want to discuss how each member of the family might improve his/her listening skills.

Your child also learned how busy life is and how it is not always possible for people to drop what ever they are doing to give us their full attention. They did learn about the importance of talking about talking (that is, to say that we can’t drop what we are doing, but that we are still listening). “I am listening to you right now, but I need to continue stirring the soup.” Once a person has explained the situation, a good communicator will accept the lack of eye contact.

Most importantly, we discussed *how we listen* to others. Listening to others communicate that we care. Our lives are often so busy that we need to examine our own listening habits so that we are cautious of the messages that we are sending to the people we love.

It is our hope that this week you see some improved listening in your home and at school!

Sincerely,

Appendix I: Parent Letter: Turn Taking

March 19, 2007

Dear Parent:

Parents and teachers share the overwhelming task of trying to give all their family members an equal amount of attention and meet their individual needs. Sometimes this feels like an unmanageable goal, as we feel that we are being bombarded from all directions. Quite possibly, you are being bombarded because your family members are not using good *turn-taking habits*.

This week is our Communication Lab, we focused on *turn-taking*. During our time together, your child learned how to get in and out of a conversation without interrupting. They also learned how to *self-correct* (or apologize and wait their turn) when they accidentally interrupted. These *turn-taking* skills will prove useful to your child throughout their life. Practicing these skills as a family will reinforce what your child is learning in their Communication Lab.

Since meal time can be hectic when people don't take turns, we recommended that you invite your child to share the secrets for getting in and out of a conversation, so your whole family can practice turn-taking during the family meal. At the end of the meal or over dessert, invite each family member to share their observations about the turn-taking that occurred. What made it easy or difficult for each person to get into a conversation? What can the rest of the family do to make it easy for everyone to get included? Next, challenge your family by asking each family member to think of one small thing they can do to improve their turn-taking for the next family meal.

Taking turns will always be challenging. Let your child know when it is difficult for you to wait your turn. Since *turn-taking* involves waiting, it is especially difficult for children. Adults can help children wait their turn by building up a trust, so that he/she will understand that they will get their turn eventually if they can just wait.

Sincerely,

Appendix J: Parent Letter: The Way

April 10, 2007

Dear Parents:

Our choice of words is undeniably important when we communicate; however, *the way* we communicate is often remembered far longer than *what* we communicate. Generally, when someone communicates with us by using a good attitude, we are more willing to listen and cooperate.

This week in Communication Lab, your child learned that their tone of voice and body language can communicate an attitude that either encourages or discourages others to cooperate with them. We call this *the way we communicate*. Now your child will know exactly what you mean when you remind them that you don't like the way he communicates. Moreover, now your child knows how to change the way they say things, so they can communicate with greater respect, thereby contributing to the caring, cooperative climate you want to nurture in your home.

To help your child practice these new communication skills, you may want to ask them to show you all the different ways they can use their voice when requesting a favor from you. For instance, they may ask you if you could drive them to the store or to a friend's house. Following each of their attempts to get you to do the favor, tell them how you would respond if they communicated using a whining, demanding, or possibly angry tone of voice. To further reinforce these good communication habits, seek opportunities to praise your child when they ask you for something or respond to you in a courteous and caring way.

Sincerely,

Appendix K: Parent Letter: Praise

April 16, 2007

Dear Parents:

Have you ever met anyone who could say that they have had enough praise to last them for a lifetime? Probably not, since it seems that we can never get enough positive encouragement amongst all the challenges we face. How wonderful it would be if our homes and schools were ringing with praise. Well, they can be.

This week in Communication Lab, your child not only learned the importance of *praise*, but also how to send and receive specific praise. Ask your child to share some of the things they learned about sending and receiving praise.

First, they learned that *praise* needs to be specific. For example, rather than merely saying, “Good job,” we can communicate more specifically by saying, “What a nice job you did making your bed this morning.” Specific praise is more powerful because it lets a person know exactly what they did that was appreciated. Your child also learned to reinforce *praise* by receiving it with a smile or a simple “thank you” rather than ignoring it due to embarrassment.

Your family can brainstorm ways you can incorporate more *praise* into your daily lives. You might like to participate in a family “Praise Whip” or “Proud Time” activity. Your child’s classroom teacher will be using these praising activities in their classroom and can give you the instructions, so your family can also enjoy these self-esteem building activities. However, you choose to enrich your child’s lesson on *praise*, you will help to contribute to their increased self-esteem as well as create a more positive, encouraging home environment.

Sincerely,

Appendix L: Parent Letter: Constructive Criticism

April 23, 2007

Dear Parents:

No doubt, following last week's Communication Lab, your home is echoing with family members communicating praise to one another. This week, your child learned about an equally important communication tool: sending and receiving *constructive criticism*.

Many people feel that *criticism* is as difficult to send as it is to receive. During Communication Lab, your child learned new ways to send *criticism*. Ask your child to teach you about *can do criticism* rather than *should have done criticism*. Your child also learned new strategies for receiving criticism that they can share with you. They can teach you about accepting criticism by listening, asking for more information, and thanking the person for being helpful.

If your family is interested in practicing sending and receiving *criticism*, you may wish to choose a special time during the week when each family member can share one thing they personally want to improve upon and one thing on which they wish a family member would work. Family activities such as these can help to build everyone's trust and confidence in themselves and in others.

Sincerely,

Appendix M: Parent Letter: Success/Failure

April 30, 2007

Dear Parents:

How exciting to be celebrating our 9th week of Communication Lab!

Today's topic was *success and failure*. Your children never cease to amaze me with learning these 'advanced' words! We discussed the fact that no one is always successful and that we need to know *how* to fail. This had allowed us to introduce the idea of *positive self-talk* and '*flipping the pancake*'. *Positive self talk* is to encourage ourselves when we have experienced *failure*. '*Flipping the pancake*' supports the idea of looking at the bright side of a situation. The students learned that each one of them has the power to flip the pancake through words of encouragement to others and positive self-talk.

We used the second half of Communication Lab to review the skills that have been introduced throughout the past nine weeks. We were amazed and encouraged with what they had retained! Hopefully you have witnessed some of these skills happening in your home!

- Turn taking
- Observation and making appointments
- Appropriate body language and voice intonation
- Encouragement instead of discouragement
- Self-correcting
- Listening and staying on topic
- Clear messages
- Specific and sincere praise
- Helpful criticism (not hurtful)

I (Mrs. Boyd) will miss working with your children. Hopefully the skills that they have learned will impact their experiences for years to come! Thank you for your support during this program.

Thank you!

