IMPROVEMENT OF OFF-TASK BEHAVIOR OF ELEMENTARY AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS THROUGH THE USE OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

This action research project report was conducted at one elementary school and two different high schools from August 20, 2007 to December 14, 2007. The purpose of this research was to decrease student off-task behavior in the classroom. There were four teacher researchers and 94 students at the beginning of the research, but during the action research process two students transferred schools, leaving the final total of students researched at 92. The teacher researchers consisted of two 3rd grade teachers, one 10th grade Health teacher, and one 11th grade English teacher.

The teacher researchers defined off-task behavior as any time a student was not working on classroom activities, demonstrated a lack of self-control, exhibited rude behavior, was poorly motivated, or any other social behavior that negatively impacted academic performance in the classroom. The three tools that were used to establish this problem were teacher surveys, student surveys, and a behavior checklist. In the teacher survey, 93% reported that they either agreed or strongly agreed that off-task behavior interferes with their students meeting their learning objectives. Furthermore, 79% of the students responded that they either agreed or strongly agreed that they thought that being off-task in class has negatively affected at least one of their grades. From the teacher researchers' own behavior checklists used in observing their classes, they reported 165 incidents of off-task behavior.

One solution that the teacher researchers chose to reduce off-task behavior was implementing cooperative learning. Cooperative learning is a method that uses cooperation within student groups to involve all students, increase interactions among students, and promote collaboration in the solution of assigned tasks (Miglietti, 2001). Often times there is an emphasis on improving social skills within these groups. This solution strategy was chosen because it offered students a structured yet interactive environment. Additionally, the students were taught specific social skills when working with their peers and their teacher.

After teacher researchers used cooperative learning as the intervention, the incidents of off-task behavior were lessened, according to the behavior checklists. Additionally, 85% of the students reported in the post-intervention survey that they either agreed or strongly agreed that working in groups helped them focus on the assignment at hand. Clearly, off-task behavior was curbed by using cooperative learning. The teacher researchers recommend that cooperative learning be used an intervention to keep students on task.

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

Students in the targeted 3rd, 10th, and 11th grade classrooms exhibited off-task behavior. Off-task behavior was defined, as any time the student was not working on classroom activities, demonstrated a lack of self-control, exhibited rude behavior, or was poorly motivated. These behaviors negatively impacted academic performance in the targeted classrooms. The behaviors were documented using information gathered from a student survey, teacher survey, and behavior checklist.

Immediate Context of the Problem

Four teacher researchers who taught in three different school districts conducted this action research project. Two teacher researchers taught at Site A, another teacher researcher taught at Site B, and the fourth teacher researcher taught at Site C. All data in this section is from the Illinois School Report Card 2005, unless otherwise specified.

Site A

The teacher researchers at Site A taught self-contained third grade. Site A is an elementary school housing 398 second and third grade students. Of the total 398 students, 54.7% (n = 218) were female and 47.7% (n = 190) were male. Of the 398 students, the majority (86.6%) was Caucasian as seen in Table 1 below. There was 0.3% with limited English proficiency students and 42.1% were considered low-income students.

Table 1

Racial/Ethnic Background and Total Enrollment by Percentage

Caucasian	African American	Hispanic	Asian/Pacific Islander	Native American	Multiracial Ethnic
86.6	3.7	2.9	2.4	0.5	3.9

The school's truancy and mobility rates were lower than the overall state rates, but the attendance rate was higher as seen in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Truancy, Mobility, and Attendance Rates

	Chronic Truancy	Mobility	Attendance
School	0.5	12.3	95.5
District	1.6	12.0	93.7
State	2.2	16.1	93.9

The total number of teachers in this district was 166. Of the 166 teachers in the district, 98.2% were Caucasian, 0.6% were African American, and 1.2% were Hispanic. The percent of male teachers equaled 25.9% (n = 43) and females equaled 74.1% (n = 123). The average teacher salary was $54,435 comparable to the state average of $55,558 . Approximately 26.6% (n = 44) of the teachers in the district held a bachelor's degree; 73.4% (n = 122) of teachers in the district held a master's degree. One hundred percent of the district's teachers were considered highly qualified. Site A teacher has an average of 16 years teaching experience. The ratio of students to teachers at the elementary level was 18.6. The average class size at Site A was 24.5 students.

The core subjects taught at Site A were mathematics, science, English/language arts, and social science. Most minutes per day were spent on English/language arts with 130 minutes of the day devoted to this core subject as seen in Table 3.

Table 3

Time Devoted to Teaching Core Subjects (minutes per day)

Mathematics	Science	English / Language Arts	Social Science
60	30	130	30

Table 4 below shows school student performance on the Illinois Standard Achievement Test (ISAT) as compared to the state scores. Students receiving one or two in reading or mathematics performed below the state standards. Students receiving a three or four met or exceeded state standards. Comparing the test scores between Site A and the state average, Site A's reading scores are markedly better than the state average. The state average for below standards or worse is 33.3%, while the school's average in the same category is only 17% in reading. The meets and exceeds standards category for the state is 66.6%, whereas the school's average is 83%. Meanwhile, math scores are quite similar. The state average for below standards or worse is 20.7%, and the school's average is 21.1%. Similarly, the meets or exceeds standards category for the state average for math is 79.3% and the school's number is 83.4%. The school's scores were slightly higher in comparison to the state scores. The school report card also showed that 25.5% of males were below state standards in reading, and only 9% of females were below state standards. There was a smaller discrepancy in mathematics; 18.3% of males scored below state standards, and 15% of females scored below state standards.

Table 4

Percentage of 3rd Grade Illinois Standard Achievement Test Scores (n=)

	Reading				Mathematics			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
School	2.6	14.4	51.0	32.0	0.5	16.1	51.3	32.1
State	6.6	26.7	45.1	21.5	5.3	15.4	45.2	34.1

*1= academic warning 2= Below Standards 3= Meets Standards 4= Exceeds Standards

Site A employed one principal and two full-time secretaries. There were 18 certified classroom teachers and two certified reading specialists. The site also employed a fulltime student counselor. There were two full-time resource teachers for students with special needs. The physical and health education department consisted of two full-time and one half-time teachers. Music was taught for 40 minutes twice a week, and art was taught for 40 minutes once a week. Non-certified staff included five teacher aides, a reading aide, bus drivers, lunchroom supervisors, four custodians, playground supervisors, a librarian, a technology assistant, and a full-time nurse.

Each spring the school presented a well attended fine arts festival. The students performed musical pieces, dance techniques, and student created artwork. There was a mentoring program for students with reading difficulties. The mentors consisted of business partners from the community. The school had a strong Parent Teacher Association, which was responsible for fundraisers and arranging special events, which brought parents and community members into the building. The school also had 100% parental contact.

The building at Site A was built in the 1930s. It was a three-story brick building consisting of 20 general education classrooms. In addition to the classrooms the building had a

library, two computer laboratories, a gymnasium, a parent resource room, an art room, and a music room. The site included an out-dated playground and a baseball diamond for students' physical activity.

We believe that that none of the data presented above relates directly to the problem of off-task behavior. Furthermore, we found no literature that claims that the information above directly affects off-task behavior.

Site B

The information in this site was retrieved from the Illinois School Report Card (School Site B, 2005). Site B had a total of 252 students, of which 48% (n=121) were female and 51.9% (n=131) were male. The low-income rate at site B was 10.3%. Please note the largest ethnicity at Site B is Caucasian (96.2%) as can be seen below in Table 5.

Table 5

Racial/Ethnic Background by Percentage

Caucasian	African American	Hispanic	Asian/Pacific Islander	Native American	Multiracial Ethnic
96.2	0.2	2.5	0.7	0.2	0.1

In researching the limited English proficient rate at Site B, none was found. At Site B, of the 252 students only 10.3% (n = 26) qualified for free and reduced lunches. Site B reports a high percentage of attendance rates as seen in Table 6.

Table 6

High School Dropout/Truancy/Mobility/Attendance Rate by Percentage

High School Dropout	Chronic Truancy	Mobility	Attendance
0.8	0.0	10.7	95.7

In the school district of Site B, there were 21 classroom teachers. Of the 21 teaching staff, in Site B's district, 100% are Caucasian, which is markedly different from the state rates of 84.3% Caucasian. The percent of male teachers equaled 47.6 (n= 10) and the percentage of female teachers equaled 52.3 (n= 11). The average teacher salary of $43,413 was below the state average of 55,558. Approximately 41.2% of the teachers hold a bachelor's degree, and 58.8% hold a master's and above degree. Site B had an average of 14 years teaching experience. The ratio of teachers to students at secondary level was 14.5. The average class size at Site B was 17.0.

The core subjects taught by the teacher researcher at Site B were health education, physical education, and driver's education. All of these subjects were required by the state of Illinois and Site B requires that each student take 0.5 credit hour of health education, 3.5 credit hours of physical education, and 0.25 credit hour of driver's education to meet graduation requirements. The graduation rate at Site B was 100%, which was above the state average of 87.4%. Site B's average score for the Prairie State Achievement Examination was 48.3, which was lower than the state average of 54.9. The high school's composite ACT score was 19.6, very close to the state's average of 20.1.

The administration staff at Site B consisted of one head principal, one assistant principal/athletic director, and one secretary. The average pay for an administrator was $76,336. The school staffed one personal aide, learning disabled resource aides, and classroom aides. Site

B employed three full-time janitors and one part time. The lunch staff at Site B included three full-time and two part-time lunch personal. Finally, the district had one full-time technology coordinator.

Something that was unique to Site B was their 8-block schedule. The schedule alternated A and B days equally. For example, one week would have an A-day schedule on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and a B-day schedule on Tuesday and Thursday. The following week, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday would be a B-day schedule, and Tuesday and Thursday would have an A-day schedule. Each week alternated like this the entire year. With so many schools reverting back to traditional schedules it was rare to see a block schedule still in use. Ten to fifteen years ago it was thought that block scheduling was the future of education. However, once districts actively participated in the block schedule they realized how expensive it was to maintain. Therefore, because of funding many of the districts have reverted to traditional scheduling.

The building and grounds at Site B were only three years old. The school was built in 2003 along with a new football field and track. The secondary school had new fields to use for their physical education classes and their sporting events. The entire secondary building is air-conditioned, including the gymnasium. The building had a unique design allowing for the use of natural light throughout the majority of the core classrooms. In the center of the secondary building was a courtyard. The students were allowed to go outside in the courtyard between classes and at lunch.

We believe that none of the data presented above relates directly to the problem of off-task behavior. Furthermore, we found no literature that claims that the information above directly affects off-task behavior.

Site C

Of the 588 students at Cite C, 48.9% (n=288) were male, and 51% (n=300) were female. The school's low-income rate at Site C was 24%. Table 7 below shows that the vast majority of students at Site C were Caucasian (95.2%). These percentages were consistent with the district percentages (94.7% were white).

Table 7

Racial/Ethnic Background and Total Enrollment by Percentage

Caucasian	African American	Hispanic	Asian	Native American	Multi-Racial
95.2	0.2	2.9	1.4	0.2	0.2

Of all the students at Site C, 1.4% was considered having Limited English Proficiency. The low-income rate was 9.8%. Table 2 below indicates the attendance percentages, with majority of the students (94.9%) regularly attending school.

Table 8

Attendance, Mobility, and Chronic Truancy, Drop Out Rate by Percentage

Attendance	Mobility	Chronic Truancy	Drop Out
94.9	6.5	0.5	0.9

Of the 97 teachers in the district at Site C, 100% were Caucasian. Twenty-two (22.6%) of them were male, and 75 (77.3%) were female. The average teacher's salary in the district was $55,874, with 70.5% of the teachers in the district have earned their master's degree. The average years of experience in the district were 18.3 years. The average class size at the high school of Site C was 20.9 students. The student-teacher ratio was 26.1:1 at the high school, as opposed to 18.4:1 on the state level.

The core subjects taught by the teacher at Site C were English III (a course designed mostly for juniors), Honors English III (a course designed for accelerated juniors), and Novels (a course for juniors and seniors). All of these subjects were considered English courses, and each student had to pass three full years of English in order to graduate high school. Every student at the high school graduated in 2005.

The district average score for the Prairie State Achievement Exam, taken by juniors across the state, was 60% of the students have met or exceeded state standards. In comparison, the state average was 54.9%. The high school's composite ACT score was an even 20, very close to the state average 20.1 composite score.

The high school at Site C had 1 principal and 1 assistant principal, 3.5 secretary positions, and 1.5 guidance counselor positions. Five custodians, four student aides, and two library aides also worked in the building. The high school had one full-time librarian. One part-time nurse and one technology coordinator were employed in the high school.

The schedule at the high school was a modified 10-block schedule. Each student took four classes per day. The underclassmen reported to school at the beginning of 2nd hour and stayed until 5th hour, while the upperclassmen had school from 1st to 4th hour and left before 5th hour. Each student took 10 total classes – five on A day, and five on B day. The schedule alternated A and B days equally. For example, one week would have an A-day schedule on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and a B-day schedule on Tuesday and Thursday. The following week, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday would be a B-day schedule, and Tuesday and Thursday would have an A-day schedule. Each week alternated like this the entire year. The teachers taught four of the five classes per day.

The original high school building was built in 1911, complete with two stories and a gymnasium. Three more additions were added on since 1966, with the final addition in the 2002-2003 academic year. There was a football field with new bleachers added in 2003-2004 on school grounds. Additionally, a large physical education center was built and attached to the high school in 1998, and it is now used for home volleyball and basketball games. The building had access to two computer laboratories. Roughly half of the total 90 computers were new in fall of 2006. A third computer laboratory was devoted to CAD programming, but was sometimes given access to other teachers if needed.

We believe that none of the data presented above relates directly to the problem of off-task behavior. Furthermore, we found no literature that claims that the information above directly affects off-task behavior.

Local Context of the Problem

The research project was being conducted in communities in northwest Illinois. Sites A, B, and C are located within a 30 mile radius. The three sites are similar in economics and ethnicity with one minor difference: Site A had 14% non-white population as opposed to Sites B and C, which had 2% non-white population. Due to their demographic similarities, the data in this section was based on information from Site C. Unless otherwise noted, these statistics are from the 2000 U S Census Bureau.

The population of Site C was 4,060, with 48.3% (n=1,965) males and 51.6% (n=2,095) females. Since 2000, Site C has grown by 1.89%. The median household income was $34,842. The median family income was $41,250. The families below poverty level was 10.8%. The median age of the population was 38.5 with 76.2% age 18 and over and 17.6% age 65 and older. Site C's ethnicity was nearly entirely Caucasian (96%).

Table 1

Racial/Ethnic Background by Percentage

Caucasian	African American	American Indian	Asian	Pacific Islander	Other Race	Two or more Races	Hispanic or Latino
96	1	0.1	0.6	0.0	0.9	1.3	2.3

The population that earned a high school degree or higher was 79.2%. Seventeen percent of the population earned a bachelor's degree or higher.

The average number in each household was 2.32 people, and the average family size was 2.94 people. The two most prominent areas of business were accommodation and food services at 22%, retail trade at 20%, followed by health care and social assistance, professional scientific and technical services at 13% each. The percentage of the employed population was 56.8%, 3 % were unemployed, and 40.2% were not in the labor force.

According to the FBI, the U. S. crime rate was 3,899.0 crimes per 100,000 people. Site C was 244.6 crimes per 100,000 people.

John Phelps settled Site C in 1833. It is the county seat and in 1892 the courthouse was listed as an Illinois Historic Site. A state highway was expanded which reflects the growth in the town. It is adjacent to three state parks, which are the primary sources of recreation. A popular state park offers hiking, backpacking, birding, hunting and cross-country skiing. There are many city parks that allow the residents to enjoy many outdoor activities.

Site C was in a district that had one feeder school. Site C's district had two elementary, one middle, and one high school. The school district in Site C's mission statement was: "Educate students to be life long learners who are productive, responsible citizens" (Site C School Improvement Plan, 2006, p. 1). Site A's mission statement was: "In cooperation with the community, this district will provide students with a comprehensive educational program that

produces well-educated, self-sufficient, and involved citizens" (Site A School Improvement Plan, 2006, p. 1). Site B's mission statement was:

> The mission of this district is to continue to provide students with the necessary abilities, which will enable them to become positive, informed, contributing citizens in a global society. To this end, educational professionals and others in the community will provide a positive educational climate while continually seeking innovative curricular programs and strategies designed to challenge and prepare our students to become life long learners in an ever-changing society (Site B School Improvement Plan, 2005, p. 1).

Site C's district had one superintendent. The tax rate in 2002 was 4.38 per $100. The most recent referendum passed in 2001 for building modifications. The guiding had access to two computer labs. Roughly half of the total computers were new in fall of 2006. A third computer lab was devoted to CAD programming but was sometimes given access to other teachers, if needed.

We do not feel that the demographics or the socioeconomic status affect off-task behavior. Furthermore, we found no literature that claims that the information above directly affects off-task behavior.

National Context of the Problem

Bru (2006) contends that a lack of time-on-task and troublesome behaviors have become an increasing problem for students in western schools. Furthermore, off-task behavior interferes with true academic development (Bonus & Riordan, 1998). Additionally, a deficiency in listening and communication skills contributes to off-task behavior (Amato-Zech, Off, & Doepke, 2006). Because students are too often not allowed to build collaborative relationships in

the classroom, these problems are exacerbated. Clearly, this is a national issue and not only a localized problem.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Evidence of the Problem

The purpose of this project was to improve off-task behavior through cooperative learning. The student research participants included 46 third graders, 29 sophomores, and 22 juniors, totaling 97 students. The evidence was documented in three ways: one student survey, one teacher survey, and an off-task behavior checklist. The student survey was given to the students and collected in one day during class. The teacher survey was distributed on Monday, September 10, 2007 and all were returned by the end of the week, Friday, September 14, 2007. The off-task observation checklists were used during the two weeks covering Monday, September 10, 2007 through Friday, September 21, 2007. The graphs below present the data.

Student Survey

The purpose of this survey was used to determine the students' attitudes toward off-task behavior while learning in school. A total of 97 students received the student survey in all four teacher researchers' classes. The rate of return was 100% (n=97). The surveys were given to the present students on the day the teacher researchers decided to handout the surveys. Some students were absent this day, so the surveys were handed out to these students when they returned from being absent. This all occurred during the week of Monday, September 10, 2007 to Friday, September 14, 2007. Each teacher researcher discussed the definition of off-task behavior to the students. The elementary school teacher researchers read the questions aloud to their students as the students filled out the surveys. The survey consisted of five Likert Scale questions that ranged from four answers: Strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. The survey can be found in Appendix A. Figures 1 through 5 show the results of this survey.

In Figure 1, the students were asked to respond to: “I am a student who has experienced others being off-task.” A total of 94% (n=88) of the students responded that they had experienced their classmates being off task, which indicated that students themselves recognize that off-task behavior is commonplace in school. Refer to Figure 1 below.

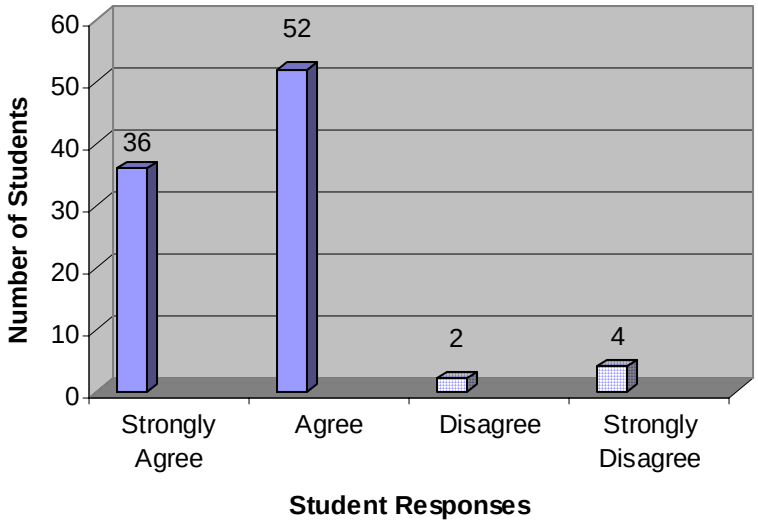

Figure 1: Student Survey Question One (n=94)

Figure 2 asked students to gauge this statement: “I think that being off-task in class has negatively affected at least one of my grades.” Being consistent with Figure 1, 79% (n=74) of students responded that off-task behavior did, in fact, negatively impact their achievement in the classroom. It is worth noting that only 4% (n=4) students strongly disagreed with this statement. Refer to Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Student Survey Question Two (n=94)

The third statement on the student survey was “I have been disciplined (for example, teacher reprimand, detentions, conferences, etc.) for being off-task.” This time the results were more evenly spread. Forty-nine percent (n=46) responded that they agree or strongly agree that they have been disciplined for being off task, whereas 51% (n=48) responded that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with that statement. Refer to Figure 3 below.

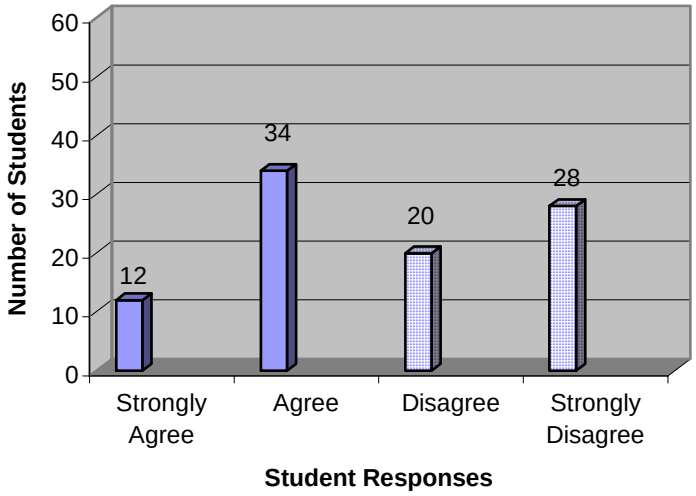

Figure 3: Student Survey Question Three (n=94)

In Figure 4, students were asked, “My off-task behavior interfered with other students’ learning in the classroom.” Of those polled, 40% (n=38) responded that they either strongly agreed or agreed with that statement. Refer to Figure 4 below.

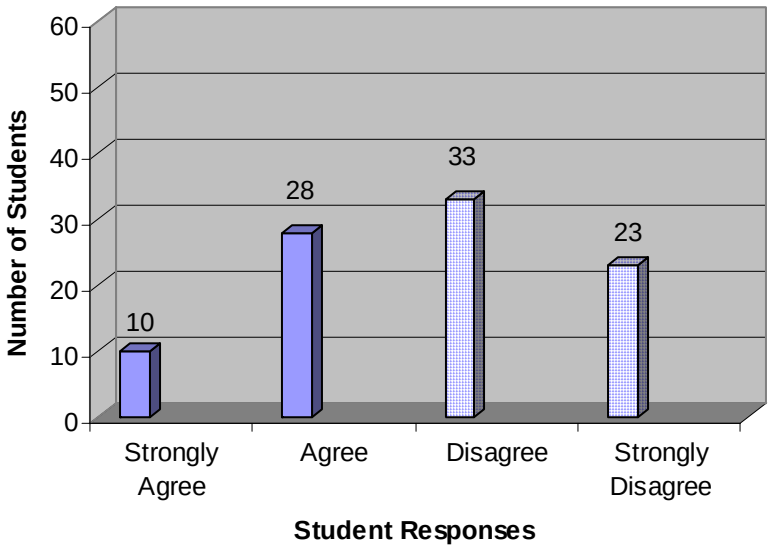

Figure 4: Student Survey Question Four (n=94)

Finally, as shown in Figure 5, students were asked in the fifth question to gauge this statement: “Working in groups helps me focus on the assignment and remain on task”. The students responded in a clear descending pattern from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”. Only 19% (n=18) of the students thought that group work did not help them remain on task, yet a full 80% (n=76) either agreed or strongly agreed that working in groups helped them focus on the assignments at hand. Refer to Figure 5 below.

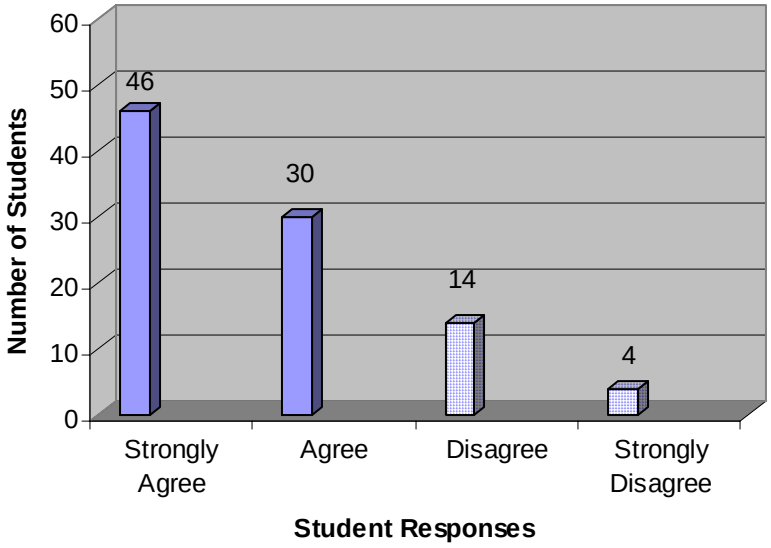

Figure 5: Student Survey Question Five (n=94)

Teacher Survey

The purpose of the teacher surveys, which were distributed and collected from September 10, 2007 to September 14, 2007, was to gauge the attitudes of teachers about off-task behavior and how that relates to group work and cooperative learning. The four teacher researchers distributed a total of 28 surveys across the three sites. They were placed in the teachers’ mailboxes, and were anonymously returned to each teacher researcher’s mailbox. Each survey handed out was returned, making the rate of return 100% (n=28). The survey consisted of four

Likert Scale questions and a fifth question that asked the responders to checkmark off-task behaviors they have witnessed in their classrooms. This survey can be found in Appendix B.

In Figure 6, the teachers were asked to respond to the following statement: “There is a high percentage of off-task behavior in my classroom.” Overall, 32% (n=9) responded that they either strongly agreed or agreed with that statement. Meanwhile, fifty percent (n=14) of the teachers responded that they disagreed with that statement, making that the most popular answer. Only 18% (n=5) disagreed with that statement. Refer to Figure 6 below.

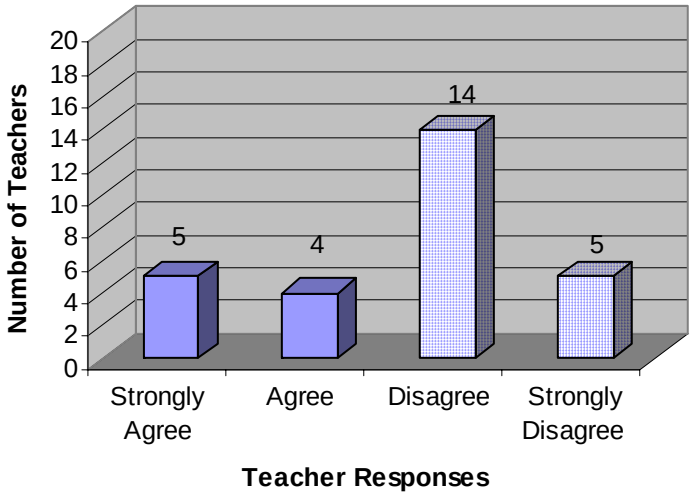

Figure 6: Teacher Survey Question One (n=28)

The second question from this survey asked the teachers to rate how they felt about this statement: “Off-task behavior interferes with my students meeting their learning objectives.” A robust 93% (n=26) either agreed or strongly agreed with that statement. On the other hand, 0% (n=0) of the teachers strongly disagreed with that statement. Refer to Figure 7 below.

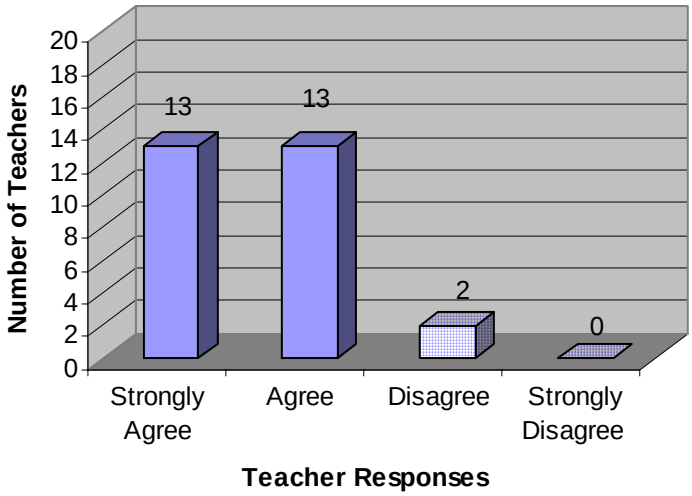

Figure 7: Teacher Survey Question Two (n=28)

Moving on, the third statement each teacher was asked to rate was, “When students work in small groups, I observe less off-task behavior.” The results were split, yet a slight majority of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with that statement (57%, n=16). Refer to Figure 8 below.

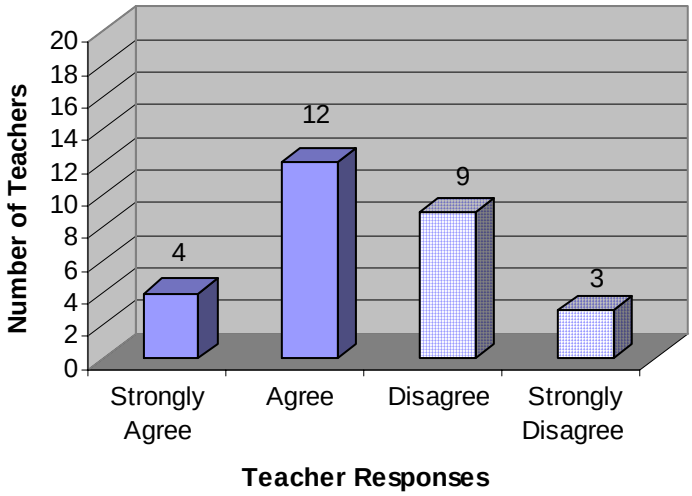

Figure 8: Teacher Survey Question Three (n=28)

The final Likert Scale question that the teachers were asked was, “I have used cooperative learning to diminish off-task behavior in my classroom.” Of those surveyed, 68% (n=19) responded that they either agreed or strongly agreed with that statement. None strongly disagreed.

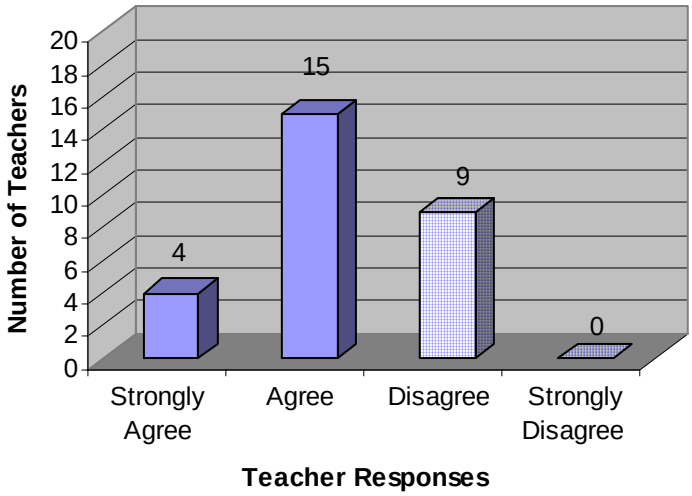

Figure 9: Teacher Survey Question Four (n=28)

The fifth and last question on the teacher survey asked the respondents, “Place a check next to the off-task behaviors that occur in your classroom.” Starting from the most often observed off-task behavior in descending order, teachers noticed students talking while others are talking (27%, n=25), students do not participate (22%, n=21), they use inappropriately loud voices (16%, n=15), they do not respect others’ physical space (14%, n=13), they use put-downs (12%, n=11), and they leave their designated groups during work time (10%, n=9). Refer to Figure 10 below.

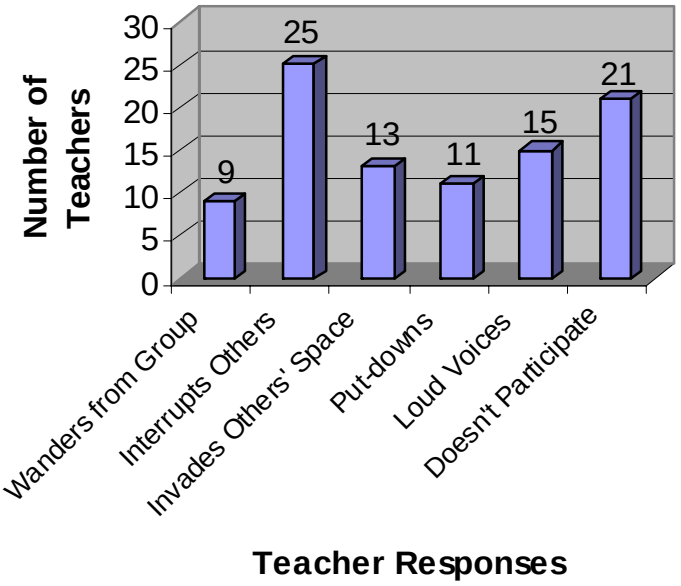

Figure 10: Teacher Survey Question Five (n=94)

Pre-intervention behavior checklist

The purpose of this checklist was to show how many incidents of off-task behavior are shown while in cooperative groups before the intervention. Each of the student researchers spent the September 10, 2007 through September 14, 2007 observing their students’ behavior while in cooperative groups for two 30-minute sections. They repeated this same action a second week

between September 17, 2007 and September 21, 2007. They check marked each of the following behaviors when they witnessed students performing them: Students talked while others were talking, students did not participate, they used inappropriately loud voices, they did not respect others' physical space (such as not keeping their hands, feet, and objects to themselves), they used put-downs, and they left their designated groups during work time. This behavior checklist can be found under Appendix C.

Figure 11 shows the results of the compiled checklists. Loud voices (31%, n=67) were the most observed behavior. Interrupting others (21%, n=45) and not participating in groups (21%, n=45) were equally observed. Going in descending order from the third most observed behavior are wandering from the group (13%, n=27), putting down their groups mates (8%, n=18), and invading others' space (5%, n=11).

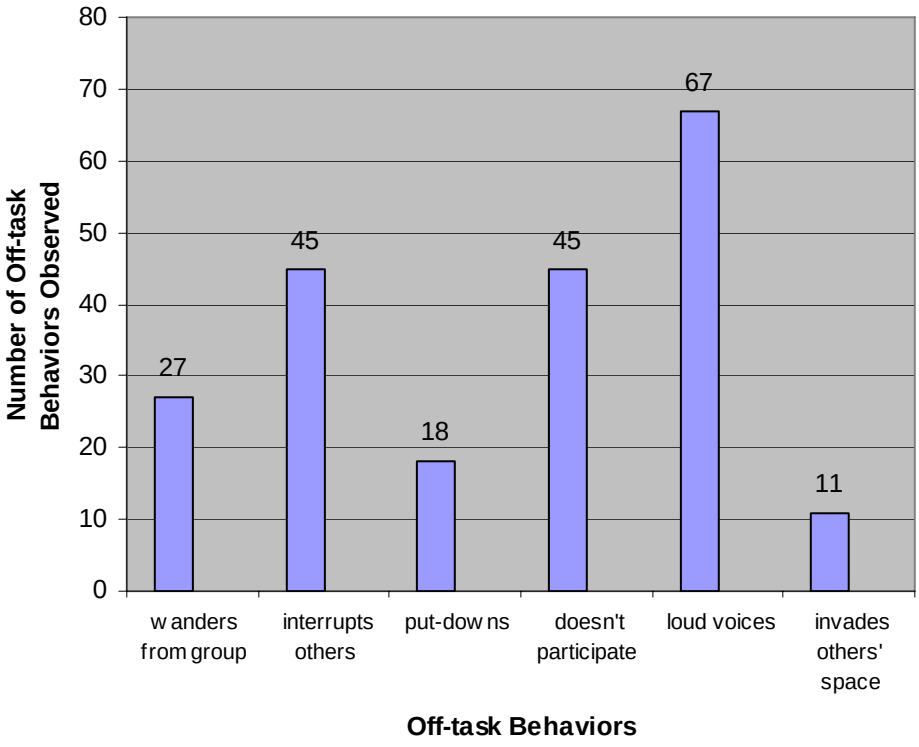

Figure 11: Pre-intervention behavior checklist (n=213)

Summary

Upon analyzing the three tools discussed above, the evidence clearly shows that using cooperative learning will be a useful teaching technique to reduce off-task behavior in the classroom. It seems that the four teacher researchers, their colleagues, and their students agree that off-task behavior is often disruptive in the classroom, which leads to an inefficient learning environment.

Reflection

We believe that from our own experiences, the evidence shown above, and our research, off-task behavior has always been a major obstruction in student learning, but this problem might be compounded because of the lack of social skills taught outside of school, particularly at home. There is no question that society is changing, and this makes teaching more difficult. Some reasons for this growing problem are lack of social skills taught at home, the intrusion of technology on our students' lives – particularly movies, television, cell phones, video games, etc. – which lowers their attention span and time spent meaningfully interacting with others. It is important that teaching today, which increasingly demands instructors to teach specific skills that will be assessed on standardized tests, should be as efficient as possible, and correcting off-task behavior simply gets in the way of efficient instruction.

As shown above, specifically in Figure 5 and Figure 8, almost every teacher and even every student surveyed feels that off-task behavior is a problem in the classroom. From our research we have found that cooperative learning, which is a structured yet interactive learning environment, helps teach social skills without sacrificing academic content. Therefore, we have decided to improve off-task behavior by implementing cooperative learning lessons, which

should help students become aware of how they themselves can curb their off-task behavior and get more out of time spent in the classroom.

Probable Causes

Teachers see students exhibit a high rate of negative social skills, manners, and respect for others and themselves. Teachers have seen an increase in the lack of social skills being taught to students which has amplified the students' lack of control in their behavior and respect for others. Often, students feel little respect from teachers and do not have the skills themselves to respect others or to control their behavior. One of the greatest challenges of the teacher is to maintain order in the classroom to assist students so they can achieve academic objectives (Schecktman & Leichtentritt, 2004). Frequency of misbehavior, including off-task behavior, talking without permission, moving without permission, aggression, daydreaming, inattentiveness, and playing with something or someone are all common concerns of educators today. Rathvon (1990) defines off-task behavior as students doing anything not appropriate to the task at hand. A lack of time on task and troublesome behaviors has become an increasing problem in western schools (Bru, 2006). According to Bonus and Riordan (1998) off-task behavior interferes with academic growth.

Disruptive off-task behavior can interfere with the continuity of an average classroom day. Rathvon (1990) states disruptive off-task behavior can be considered verbal (excessive talking), physical, and disrespectful interruptions. A child who never stops talking, constantly interrupts, and monopolizes the conversation creates problems when trying to teach (Greenberg, 2001b).

According to Capros, Cetera, Ogden, and Rossett (2002), lack of social skills is a contributing factor to off-task behavior. Negative behavior modeled at home may be the negative

behavior students present in the classroom (Greenberg, 2001a). Research shows the lack of positive social skills taught in the home at an early age creates much of the disruptive off-task behavior teachers experience in the classroom.

Off-task behavior directly affects students' ability to achieve academically. Low achieving students spend less time on task than high achieving students (Abramowitz, O'Leary, & Rosen, 1987). Soleil (1999) believes that students who fail academically are more prone to give up in school or become alienated. Many students with low academic achievement often distract the class, only master basic skills, and have seldom persevered through intellectually difficult tasks (Wazneak-Alvarez, 1999). Some students who have low academic achievement can be constantly distracted and have inadequate processing skills (Butler, 2005). According to Jolivette, Stichter, and McCormick (2002), students who perform below grade level in content areas are usually noncompliant and off-task during independent working time.

Off-task behavior occurs among students with and without disabilities (Amato-Zech, Off, & Doepke, 2006). Shechtman and Leichtentritt (2004) state there is increased misbehavior in special education classes of pupils with learning disabilities. As noted by Rosenberg and Sindelar (1985), inattention and distractibility are common problems in students with special needs. Off-task or disruptive behavior that occurs in special education classrooms contributes to low academic performance from mildly intellectually disabled, behavior disordered, and learning disabled students (Moor & Sweeney, 1993).

Mental health problems and personal crisis can trigger off-task behavior beyond the teacher's control (Kilmer, 1998). Children with mental health problems are often not served appropriately in many schools and therefore disruptive behavior is more common. Jolivett et al.

(2002) blame some disruptive behavior and unnecessary classroom behavior on depressed students or students who have emotional and behavior disorders.

Poor classroom management has a direct affect on student off-task behavior (Emmer & Gerwels, 2005). There are many factors that contribute to poor classroom management. One example of poor classroom management would be a teacher creating a hostile environment. According to Marshall (March 2002) teachers establish rules that are counterproductive, and when a student does not follow the rule, the tendency is to think in negative terms. Marshall (March 2002) goes on to state that rules foster obedience rather than responsibility. Thus students are merely responding to an authoritarian demand rather than learning in a positive environment. Often the demands are set too high for students to even attempt to attain. When the demand of task completion is unattainable, students react with negative behavior because of frustration. Also, students become uninterested during simple ordinary projects and assignments because the students are easily bored or distracted when they are not involved in the learning process. Therefore, frustration levels become high for students (Jolivett et al., 2002). When projects are simple and ordinary, off-task behavior heightens because the students recognize the teachers' lack or variety and students are not required to use higher level thinking skills on a regular basis. Student-to-teacher ratio is growing, which makes it harder on teachers and as a result, students may have needs that are not addressed (Butler, 2005).

According to Metcalf (1999), poorly motivated students are a basic problem to off-task behavior. Kilmer (1998) states lack of motivation causes low rate of academic productivity, disenchanted students, and students who do not always participate in class. Mueller and Fleming (2001) state that discontent; aggressive behavior, lack of initiative, frustration, unfinished work, and lack of productivity are products of poorly motivated students. According to Miglietti

(2002), decreased motivation is directly related to low productivity, lack of ownership and satisfaction in student work, and unequal distribution of individual effort devoted to completing assignments.

Many times poor teacher training or lack of experience is the cause of inadequate classroom management (Soleil, 1999). Poor training and inadequate classroom management could lead to the classroom not having a sense of community (Gupta, 2004), the teacher breeding competition in their classroom, especially when students are first learning a skill Marshall (March 2002), the teacher's inability to deal with students of different learning needs Soleil (1999), the teacher not having a behavior management plan Keating (2000), and the teacher's lack of consistency and disorder in the classroom. Cawelti (1999) states poor classroom management is a lack of strategies for handling a variety of conflict situations in the classroom.

Often it is not the teacher's poor classroom management skills that cause off-task behavior, yet it is the fact that they must concentrate on state and school mandated curriculum. Teachers are feeling the pressure to cover the curriculum and prepare for high stakes tests in a limited time frame. The expectation to expose academic skills rather than master them is taking precedence. Students become frustrated when given a task to complete without enough time to fully understand the skill. Moore, Anderson and Kumar (2005) give evidence to prove that difficulty of a given task directly relates to off-task behavior. If a task is too difficult for a student, off-task behavior will arise (Moor & Sweeney, 1993). If a given task was lengthy or had multiple steps off-task behavior would become a problem with particular students (Moore et al., 2005). Due to pressures to cover all curriculum material, there has been an increase in teachers lecturing too much.

Numerous times disruptive behavior in the classroom takes up important teacher and student interaction time and more importantly less time will be given to students who are on task and would benefit from extra guidance and instruction. Managing behaviors while teaching is a problem that teachers need to tackle quickly and fairly without disrupting the learning that is going on in the classroom (Keating, 2000). According to Rosenberg et al. (1985), off-task behavior in the classroom negatively affects both the lower level students and the higher-level students.

When researching the literature about off-task behavior, it is apparent that teachers and students need to work as one to better understand ways in which off-task behaviors can be minimized. A fair understanding of classroom rules and expectations by both students and teacher is the first step in building a solid foundation in the classroom.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Review of the Literature

Teachers and schools face a problem in the classroom that seems to be growing worse over the years, and it even has veteran teachers scratching their heads as to how to solve this problem: student off-task behavior. While this problem may exhibit itself in many different forms, there are many possible solutions in dealing with this problem head on. The first element to be covered is school-wide solutions.

Research suggests that there may be several school wide solutions that can help decrease off-task behavior. Soleil (1999) states that an improved school environment can reduce overall student disruption. For example, lowering class sizes may help reduce help. Large class sizes often make it difficult for teachers to observe students (Hillmann, 2004). Also, the social, emotional, and cognitive needs of students must be addressed through a more flexible, relevant, and differentiated curriculum in which greater emphasis is placed on supporting students on a school-wide level (Wakefield, 2004). Wakefield believes that the curriculum must be modified to show students that it is relevant to their lives. Providing staff and teacher training on how to nurture creativity and imagination may also help to reduce off-task behavior (Is Your High School Afflicted By Senioritis?, 2003). Furthermore, teachers need to know when to go to the principal or fellow teachers for advice (Greenberg, 2001a; Keating, 2000).

Research suggests that the following practices result in substantially improved student achievement: tutoring, early childhood programs, behavioral classroom techniques, parental involvement, classroom management skills, and time on task (Chafouleas, McDougal, Riley-Tillman, Panahon, & Hilt, 2005). Soleil (1999) adds that the following three strategies work to

contribute to a productive learning environment in secondary schools: a strong emphasis on the academic mission of the school; firm, fair, and consistently enforced discipline; and an ethic of caring that guides student relationships.

This is all true on a macro level. Furthermore, research also revealed what can be done at the micro level of teaching. The following offers some important solutions when creating assignments and student tasks.

The basic argument is that the type of assignment or task a teacher assigns may have an impact on a student's off-task behavior. Research suggests that making assignments brief, allowing students to choose their own assignments and delivering a more rapid pace of academic stimuli may decrease off-task behavior (McCurdy, Skinner, Grantham, & Hindman, 2001). Keep up with the students' attention span. It is also important to introduce a variety of critical thinking tasks (Amato-Zech et al., 2006). Moore et al. (2005) state that breaking assignments into small steps rather than giving multiple steps at one time may help to reduce off-task behavior. They also found that no demand or lower demand tasks would significantly reduce off-task behavior. Time on task can be controlled through the use of academic performance based contingencies such as simple versus difficult tasks (Rosenberg et al., 1985). They also report that time on task was greater for students who have received a simple task as opposed to students who received a difficult task. With effective lessons, students express themselves more frequently, cognitively and emotionally (Shechtman & Leichtentritt, 2004).

Additionally, effective classroom management and positive social skill development are key factors to reducing off-task behavior (Frydendall, LeWald, Walls, & Zarring, 2001; Gillies, 2006). It is important to teach the classroom procedures and let students know the teacher's expectations (Marshall, November 2002; Kilmer, 1998). Additionally, teachers need to have a

behavior management plan set and ready to go at the start of the school year (Keating, 2000). They also need to be consistent when using the behavior management plan and when disciplining students (Keating, 2000; Greenberg, 2001a). Effective teaching allows for fewer negative behaviors and more positive behaviors (Shechtman & Leichtentritt, 2004). Establishing an attention procedure to easily regain the attention of all the students can be the key to decreasing off task behavior (Marshall, February 2002). It is also important for teachers to use standards rather than rules. Standards bring more of a helping attitude rather than a punitive one (Marshall, March 2002). Hillmann (2004) believes that developing a classroom where disruptors can work individually and learn proper social skills is essential. Of course, reprimand may also reduce the incidences of off task behavior (Amato-Zech et al., 2006).

Greenberg (2001b) and Heering and Wilder (2006) offer some suggestions for students who are off-task due to excessive talking. They suggest redirecting the students comments back to the activity at hand, helping students differentiate between settings in which it is appropriate to talk and those in which it is not, and having a private conversation with the students about their problem behavior.

Research has shown that using reinforcers may reduce off task behavior. The use of reinforces such as candy, computer time, and free time result in decreases of students off-task behavior (Moor & Sweeny, 1993). Task completion has also been known to be an effective reinforcement and lead to increases in on-task behavior (McCurdy et al., 2001). Furthermore, using brief questions on student assignments can help students focus on the task and minimize off-task behavior (Clare, Jenson, & Kehle, 2000).

Paying careful attention to the lesson format and structure may hinder off-task behavior. Teachers need to emphasize quality work that will lead to true joy (Marshall, March 2000). They

should structure experiences to apply to life outside of school and place more emphasis on the practical subjects, especially in secondary school (Marshall, February 2002; Brush, 1997). Posing questions that are open-ended and offering student's choices may also lead to a decrease in off-task behavior (Marshall, February 2002). Again, teachers should also try to create a fast pace to the lesson (Bru, 2006).

Moore et al. (2005) find that reducing the duration of tasks significantly decreases off–task behavior. It is also important to give students time in class to complete assignments (Kilmer, 1998). Teachers need to provide students with ample class time for reflection on a variety of issues (Gillies, 2006). Moreover, Randolf (2007) writes that response cards have a large statistical effect on test achievement, participation, and reduction in off-task behavior. Randolf (2007) suggests using response cards to allow multiple students to reply to a single question, unlike hand raising.

Furthermore, computer assisted learning has shown increases in peer interactions, time on-task, and student attitudes toward school (Capros et al. 2002). They report that it has positive effects on student's behavior and motivation. The use of computers has been widely used as an effective reinforcing tool (Moor & Sweeny, 1993).

Another possible remedy to off-task behavior is self-monitoring. Moore et al. (2005) writes that many studies show that self monitoring has been instituted to reduce off-task behavior. Results indicate that self monitoring leads to increases in targeted appropriate social skills. They further say results also show a decrease in off-task behavior when self-monitoring is used. Self monitoring also is an effective procedure to promote the use of appropriate social skills (Peterson, Young, Salzberg, West, & Hill, 2006). In a separate study, it was found that self-monitoring can take the pressure off of the teacher and put it on the student and therefore

increase on-task behavior (Bonus & Riordan, 1998). Self-monitoring has been proven to dramatically increase on-task behavior (Dalton., 1999). In Dalton's study, after self-monitoring was implemented in a variety of classrooms, students went from spending 33% of their time on-task to spending 86% of their time on task. Emmer and Gerwels (2005) believe that introducing a self-management program with three components – a checklist, a behavior rating scale and a self-monitoring form – will be helpful to decrease off-task behavior. Teacher ratings of positive student behavior were found to increase when the self-management program was implemented (Emmer & Gerwels, 2005). An off-shoot of self-monitoring, contract learning, is another approach that may help to increase on-task behavior. It involves the students in setting their own learning goals (Brush, 1997).

Yarbrough and Thompson (1997) discuss using two methods to decrease off-task behavior: reality therapy and solution-focused brief counseling. Reality therapy teaches the students that he or she has the ability to make the right choice. Solution-focused brief counseling is a quick counseling technique that teaches the student to be aware of the problem at hand and find a solution to fix it.

Another separate way to decrease off-task behavior is to increase student motivation. It is important that classrooms provide opportunities that genuinely foster motivation to learn (Is Your School Afflicted By Senioritis?, 2003). Flexible methods of instruction that focus on the learner and his or her needs and interests raise the motivation to learn and naturally may reduce misbehavior. Teachers need to create curiosity and a desire to learn (Shechtman, & Leichtentritt, 2004; Marshall, February 2002). Additionally, using humor in the classroom may help to get students motivated (Kilmer, 1998). Developing a sense of personal responsibility in the students

may also be beneficial (Marshall, March 2002). Finally, there needs to be a balance between teacher direction and student exploration (Morgan-Fleming, 2003).

Amato-Zech et al. (2006) found that greater pupil involvement in decision making could increase on-task behavior. Jolivette et al. (2002) found similar evidence, stating that providing opportunities for students to make choices may be effective in increasing appropriate behaviors. Jolivette et al. (2002) wrote that it is important to let students make choices that affect their daily routines.

Praise is also a simple, yet important, strategy in reducing off-task behavior. Research shows that students who receive praise for being on task exhibit more time on task than students who do not (Rosenberg et al., 1985). Giving students verbal praise and using encouraging statements may help to decrease off task behavior (Rathvon, 1990). During difficult tasks, praise for working through these tasks must be given to maintain high levels of time on task (Rosenberg et al., 1985). Although this research shows praise can help to reduce off-task behavior, Amato-Zech et al. (2006) disagree, reporting that encouraging statements had no consistent effects on student behavior.

Taking time to teach social skills and build peer relationships may reduce off task behavior. Frydendall et al. (2001), Butler (2005), and Cartney and Rouse (2006) believe there needs to be an increased emphasis on positive social skills to improve academic achievement. Research data indicated that teaching social skills will show academic growth, awareness of appropriate social skills, and a stronger sense of belonging in students (Cartney & Rouse, 2006). Furthermore, teachers need to focus on improving relationships with students, not improving rules (Marshall, March 2002). Referring to the personal lives of children, including their perceptions, emotions, and behavior is effective teaching (Shechtman, & Leichtentritt, 2004).

Listening to students and letting them tell their side of a story is also important. (Greenberg, 2001a; Keating, 2000). Finally, teaching courtesies and manners is more effective than posting rules; these teachings also tend to last longer with students (Marshall, March 2002).

Finally, research has shown significant reductions in off-task behavior with the cooperative learning method (Cartney & Rouse, 2006). Cooperative learning is a method that uses cooperation within student groups to involve all students, increase interactions among students, and promote collaboration in the solution of assigned tasks (Miglietti, 2002). According to Veenman and Kenter (2000) cooperative groups improve social skills, self-esteem and on-task behavior. Also, cooperative learning groups foster critical thinking skills, improve interpersonal skills, increase active participation in learning, and enhance student achievement (Miglietti, 2002). Members of cooperative groups express diverse ideas and work diligently to complete projects (Mueller & Fleming, 2003). Furthermore, students are more likely to be on-task, develop new ideas, recognize their errors, and explain their thoughts during cooperative learning time (Clare et al., 2000). Brush (1997) states that creating a cooperative learning climate that reduces social comparison and competition is a vital component to increasing on-task behavior. Cooperative grouping may also increase academic achievement. Capros et al. (2002) find that students who work in cooperative groups perform significantly better on basic math tests than students who worked independently.

Cooperative grouping can be used to engage students. Engaged students generally show more on-task behavior then students who are not engaged. Establishing true cooperative learning rather than simply doing group work makes a dramatic difference between engaged students and bored students (Gupta, 2004). Cooperative learning sparks more excitement with students and allows them to have fun while learning (Mueller & Fleming, 2003). Marshall (November 2002)

and Greenberg (2001b) state that there is a sense of working together with cooperative grouping and there is less competition between students, and research has shown that working together is more productive than working competitively. Positive feedback from working with others may be the single most powerful influence on the brain's chemistry (Marshall, 2000). The use of cooperative groups allows students to learn by helping each other and valuing each person's contribution to the lesson or project (Migliettie, 2002). Cooperative grouping can also offer a sense of identity and belonging as well as promote social integration (Cawelti, 1999).

Other significant data indicates that the way students are combined in cooperative groups may play a role in off-task behavior. Capros et al. (2002) found that low ability students were engaged for longer periods of time when placed with high ability students. Also, it is recommended to place highly motivated peers with less motivated peers (Sage & Kindermann, 1999; Bru, 2006). It is also important to combine students of different skill levels (Bru, 2006). Overall, these researchers suggest grouping students heterogeneously. Under the direction of a group leader, groups work together in a coherent manner and help one another with projects (Mueller & Fleming, 2001). Teacher intervention can increase time on task and problem solving during cooperative learning (Clare et al., 2000).

Although there is much evidence to support cooperative learning, Nelson and Johnson (1996) found that the academic performance of students is enhanced when teachers use an instructional sequence of (1) demonstration, (2) guided practice, and (3) independent practice. Nelson and Johnson (1996) also state that students display much higher rates of on-task behavior and are less disruptive during direct instruction as opposed to cooperative learning and independent learning.

Overall, student off-task behavior is a problem that can clearly be curbed to maximize student learning in the most efficient possible manner. All the strategies mentioned are possibilities for both new and veteran teachers to employ in the classroom, and once these strategies are used, research proposes that teachers should see results, and the classroom will ultimately grow into a more learner-friendly place.

Project Objective and Processing Statements

As a result of cooperative learning, during the periods of August 20, 2007 through December 14, 2007, the students of Teacher Researchers A, B, C and D will decrease off-task behavior.

To meet this objective, the teacher researchers did the following prior to implementing the intervention:

- Developed and implemented cooperative learning lesson plans.
- Created cooperative learning groups within individual classrooms.
- Identified social skills to be taught.
- Developed and implemented lesson plans devoted to social skills.
- Monitored progress in reducing off-task behavior.

Project Action Plan

The following tasks needed to be accomplished to implement the research project:

<u>Pre-Study (August 20 – August 31, 2007)</u>

- Copy parent letters and all tools
- Send out parent and student consent forms
- Begin developing cooperative learning lessons
- Develop lessons for age appropriate social skills (responsibility, respect, trustworthiness, and fairness)
- Collect parent consent forms
- Create cooperative groups

Pre-documentation weeks

Week One (September 10 – September 14, 2007)
- Send out teacher surveys
- Administer student surveys
- Implement a cooperative learning lesson
- Observe and record students' off-task behavior using the behavior checklist
- Implement lessons for age appropriate social skills

Week Two (September 17 – September 21, 2007)
- Continue cooperative learning lesson
- Observe and record students' off-task behavior using the behavior checklist
- Analyze teacher and student surveys
- Identify social skills the teachers will teach
- Finish developing cooperative learning lessons
- Implement lessons for age appropriate social skills

Intervention

Week Three – Week Four (September 24 – October 5, 2007)
- Begin placing students in cooperative groups
- Establish procedures for cooperative groups
- Implement lesson plan A for cooperative learning
- Implement lessons for age appropriate social skills

Week Five – Week Six (October 8 – October 19, 2007)
- Implement lesson plan B for cooperative learning
- Review the cooperative group procedures
- Implement lessons for age appropriate social skills

Week Seven – Week Eight (October 22 – November 2, 2007)
- Implement lesson plan C for cooperative learning
- Review the cooperative group procedures
- Implement lessons for age appropriate social skills

Week Nine – Week Ten (November 5 – November 16, 2007)
- Implement lesson plan D for cooperative learning
- Review the cooperative group procedures
- Implement lessons for age appropriate social skills

Week Eleven – Week Twelve (November 19 – November 30, 2007)
- Implement lesson plan E for cooperative learning
- Review the cooperative group procedures

- Implement lessons for age appropriate social skills

Post-Documentation

Week Thirteen (December 3 – December 7, 2007)
- Re-administer student surveys
- Implement a cooperative learning lesson
- Observe and record students' off-task behavior using the behavior checklist
- Review age appropriate social skills

Week Fourteen (December 10 – December 14, 2007)
- Implement a cooperative learning lesson
- Observe and record students' off-task behavior using the behavior checklist
- Analyze student surveys
- Analyze behavior checklist
- Review age appropriate social skills

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of the intervention, two methods were used. Anonymous student surveys were administered to show if students' attitudes toward off-task behavior had improved after the teacher-researcher intervention. These surveys enabled the teacher researchers to determine if the interventions that were implemented had an impact on the students' behavior. The teacher researchers conducted the surveys in their respective classrooms. The surveys were distributed to 44 3rd graders, 29 high school sophomores, and 19 high school juniors. The student surveys were given and returned to each student between December 3, 2007 and December 7, 2007. The surveys were given in a private manner in all three of the targeted classrooms. This data was compared to the pre-intervention surveys administered before teacher-student intervention.

As part of the post documentation for the research project, the members of the research group kept behavior checklists in each of their four classrooms to show evidence of decreased off-task behavior. To complete the checklists, the researchers observed the behaviors of their

students four times over 30-minute periods—twice between December 3, 2007 and December 7, 2007, and twice more between December 11, 2007 and December 15, 2007. This data was compared to the pre-intervention observation checklists for changes.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

The objective of this action research project was to improve off-task behavior through cooperative learning. The student research participants included 44 third graders, 29 sophomores, and 21 juniors, totaling 94 students. This study was conducted between September 10, 2007 and December 14, 2007. We used three pre-intervention tools: a teacher survey, a student survey, and a behavior checklist. We also used two post-intervention tools, which consisted of a student survey and another behavior checklist.

Historical Description of the Intervention

During week September 10, 2007 to September 14, 2007, week one of pre-documentation, we sent out the teacher surveys and collected them. We also administered and collected the student surveys. We observed and recorded off-task behaviors during group work. We developed and implemented cooperative lesson plans, what social skills the students would be focusing on, and what off-task behaviors we would be addressing during instruction time in the classroom. It was difficult to monitor these six off-task behaviors at the same time in hopes to make this observation scientifically-based data. We felt it was difficult to work within the student groups while at the same time trying to implement the behavior checklist. We felt encouraged that the students thought that off-task behavior does, in fact, negatively affect their grades. The students provided honest feedback.

During week September 17, 2007 to September 21, 2007, the second week of pre-documentation, we analyzed teacher and student survey data. Our research group met to analyze the data. Once again, we observed students in their self selected groups. The third grade teachers

planned the cooperative lesson and social skill to be taught for the next week. We rearranged student seating areas to better conduct the cooperative learning lessons we taught. Once again, we found it difficult to administer and monitor the behavior checklist. We found through our observations that the students understood that they are not currently working to capacity in their groups. Also, through analyzing the data from the behavior checklists we discovered which behaviors are concerns and which needed to worked on. The high schools teachers felt it would have been beneficial to add a seventh off-task behavior to the observation check list that would observe students discussing non-projected related topics. One third grade student found if very difficult to work in the group and had to be pulled to work independently.

During weeks three and four, September 24, 2007 to October 5, 2007, we divided the students into heterogeneous groups. The third grade teachers taught the social skill of using six inch voices. The high school teachers taught the social skill of dividing the work equally. Each teacher implemented a cooperative lesson plan. Students were genuinely excited.

During weeks five through twelve, October 8, 2007 to November 30, 2007, this same general pattern was repeated: The teacher researchers gave a lesson plan involving improving a specific social skill, and then they implemented a cooperative learning lesson plan focusing on that skill. The social skills taught by the third grade teachers were encouragement and no put-downs, listening to others and accepting ideas, working together and sharing the workload equally, and coming to a consensus within a group. The social skills taught by the high school teacher researchers were listening to others, using six-inch voices, developing roles within the group, getting to know one another and looking beyond stereotypes, appropriately critiquing each others' work, staying on task, and being productive while working.

There were many positives the teacher researchers experienced during these weeks. Some pluses from the third grade teacher researchers were seeing many examples of encouragement, using feedback to recall information, the lower-skilled students were improving their decision-making skills and academic performance due to working closely with the higher-achieving students, which, in turn raised everyone's self esteem. Additional pluses involved students finding creative ways to come to a consensus—for example, using rock, paper, scissors—that the teacher researcher didn't teach them. The high school teacher researchers experienced less unproductive noise in the classroom, the students quickly got into their roles and the leadership was worked out among them, they also became very comfortable within their groups as the lessons progressed. The high school teacher researchers also saw the students become better acquainted with peers outside of their normal social groups. The classes seemed to work together better, and barriers seemed to break down. The students also learned the academic content fairly well. There did not seem to be any academic drop-off due to working in groups, which can sometimes be a distraction.

However, there were also some negatives that occurred from week's five through twelve. The teacher researchers felt that one definite disadvantage is that the students didn't always work together well. Sometimes students worked much harder than others. The groups occasionally argued over roles. There were inevitable personality clashes, which usually resulted in inefficient groups. The high school teacher researchers thought the students grew tired of cooperative learning several weeks into it. They also could not get through as much material using cooperative groups so often because these types of activities take quite a bit of time in class. Additionally, there were not as many individual assessments in cooperative groups, which makes it difficult to see if there were any students lagging behind in understanding the material.

During week 13, December 3, 2007 through December 7, 2007, the teacher researchers re-administered the student surveys, observed and recorded student off-task behaviors using the behavior checklist, implemented a cooperative learning lesson, and reviewed age-appropriate social skills. During this week the teacher researchers concluded that the behavior observation checklist was difficult to use accurately. Overall, this was not an effective tool.

During week 14, December 10 through December 14, the teacher researchers analyzed the student surveys and behavior checklists, implemented another cooperative learning lesson, reviewed age-appropriate social skills, and observed and recorded student behavior using the observation checklist. The students' social skills improved. They also were more on task and efficient while working in groups, but also improved on-task behavior while in regular activities as well.

On a larger level, some things the teacher researchers found good is that the students generally seemed receptive and open to cooperative learning. They were overall quite patient with the process and saw its benefits.

The original research plan was to teach a lesson while incorporating cooperative strategies and specific social skill lessons. According to Veenman and Kenter (2000) cooperative groups improve social skills and on-task behavior. So the researchers hoped that by implementing these cooperative strategies and social skill lessons, positive social skills would be learned and used by the students, and that the children would retain more information about the content than they would if working alone. In order to promote more positive social skills, a social skill lesson was taught at the beginning of each cooperative learning lesson. By week thirteen students were practicing these social skills while in cooperative groups.

All the teacher researchers followed the same basic process when creating cooperative learning lessons. They all divided the classes into heterogeneous groups based on skill, gender, and ethnic background. Then they focused on specific social skills each teacher researcher felt the groups needed. For example, one high school teacher researcher found that, during a previous lesson involving group work, the students by in large did not share the work equally. Therefore, he decided that the cooperative groups should focus on dividing the work equally. To continue the example, after discussing sharing equal work in groups, the teacher gave each group a sheet (Appendix D) that showed exactly what each student did for points. After the teacher researchers identified the social skill, they embedded these skills into their cooperative group lesson plans.

The cooperative lessons that were implemented in the classrooms seemed to go rather well. The students seemed to enjoy working in their groups and did a good job of staying on task. Each instructor tried to use cooperative learning a minimum of two times per week during the intervention period. Each instructor taught the same content curriculum that they had in the previous year, but they changed the strategies in which they presented it. This meant that the teachers altered their existing lesson plans to include cooperative learning activities. A sample of a lesson plan done by each researcher can be found in Appendices D, E, and F.

As a high school English teacher, I have learned a couple new tricks to put in my teaching bag. Overall, a good teacher should be able to bring more and more ideas to the table when it comes to doing the job well, and the teacher should be accumulating these ideas as he goes along the course of life. What this project has taught me is that bringing more organizing into the classroom in general has a positive impact on the students. I have had to write extended and detailed lesson plans, and I have had to make sure they were done right the first time around. Cooperative teaching leaves little room for error or improvisation—especially with upper level

high school students. I have seen the benefits. The classes seem more tightly knit than they were before, the students themselves are more aware of what it means to be a good group mate, and the classes in general have benefited from these activities. Overall, they have learned both how to treat each other and the content put in front of them. There are, however, a few drawbacks. One of them is that this method of teaching can certainly be driven into the ground. My lesson plans were designed for several days at a time, and the students grew weary of being in groups after the first six weeks or so. Another disadvantage is that it is still difficult to determine if every student understands the material well enough in cooperative learning (or really any other group work). In the end, cooperative learning is a decent tool to have in the bag, but it certainly is not the Shangri-La of teaching methods.

As a high school health teacher researcher, I have learned that cooperative learning can work if the students are taught the proper skills to work together in their groups. I like cooperative learning, but I do not feel that it should monopolize the majority of your classroom time. I do feel that once my students were taught how to properly delegate tasks and communicate in their groups that the groups did stay on task better and accomplish the goal they were given. I could tell a huge difference in my students as the weeks went by and they started taking responsibility for their own groups' actions and behaviors. In my situation it seemed as if there was at least one leader in each group who would take charge and be responsible for making sure everyone had a task and accomplished it.

I have learned that it is just not enough to break the students up into groups and give them a task to perform. You must first teach the students the proper skills they will need to be successful in cooperative learning. I used to think that by the time they got to me in high school that I would not need to introduce group skills; however, I have learned that I was wrong. I also

learned that it does not take more than a few minutes each class period to reinforce the skills you are teaching them. I do feel that cooperative leaning should be done in moderation. Too much of it will make the students grow bored and tend to start reverting back to the off-task behavior that we were trying to fix in the first place. I will definitely continue to incorporate cooperative learning into my classroom, but it will not be an everyday activity.

As a third grade teacher researcher, I was forced to take a closer look at the way I implemented group work and social skills in my classroom. I have a more structured way of doing both because of this project. I am pleased with the outcomes I have seen. My students are functioning better during group work time and their social skills have improved at all times of the day not only during group work. I feel that my classroom management has also improved as a result of this project. Better classroom management has positively affected my attitude toward work and my student's behavior in the classroom. I am delighted with the results of this project, and I will continue to implement the same skills throughout this year and into next year.

As a third grade teacher researcher, I discovered that cooperative learning is overwhelmingly positive, and the cooperative approaches are appropriate for all curriculum areas. I found the more complex the outcomes (high-order processing of information, problem solving, social skills and attitudes), the greater are the effects. As cooperative learning was implemented in my lessons, I observed my students working with their peers to accomplish a shared or common goal. There were students of all levels of performance working together in structured groups toward a shared or common goal. I observed my students negotiating, initiating, planning and evaluating together. Rather than working as individuals in competition with every other individual in the classroom, students were given the responsibility of creating a learning community where all students participate in significant and meaningful ways. They

were working together to achieve goals which they could not achieve individually. Through the development of social skills, my students were able to see points of view other than their own. As I observed my students working in cooperative learning groups with classmates who have different learning skills, cultural backgrounds, attitudes, and personalities, these differences forced them to deal with conflicts and interact with others. Implementing cooperative learning into my daily teaching has allowed me to assist students achieve many social and academic benefits. Cooperative learning gave me the methods to promote learning because these collaborative experiences engage students in an interactive approach to processing information, resulting in greater retention of subject matter, improved attitudes towards learning, and enhanced interpersonal relations among group members. Cooperative learning has helped me grow as a teacher from the traditional approach of instruction to a nontraditional approach allowing for greater student achievement. I became more of a coach, facilitator, or sometimes a spectator rather than a lecturer. I found that I was teaching my students to teach themselves and each other. It felt good to see my students learn from their peers and become less dependent on me for help. I will continue to use cooperative learning in my everyday teaching throughout the future.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

The purpose of this project was to improve off-task behavior through cooperative learning. The student research participants included 41 third graders, 29 sophomores, and 22 juniors, totaling 92 students. This number is different from the total number of 94 when the pre-intervention tools were previously administered due to two third graders transferring schools. To check the students' attitudes toward off-task behavior and cooperative learning, the teacher researchers used one student survey that had the same questions as the pre-intervention student

survey. The teacher researcher, as a second tool, again administered an off-task behavior checklist. The student survey was given to the students and collected in one day during class during the week of December 3, 2008 to December 7, 2008. The off-task observation checklists were used during the two weeks covering December 3, 2008 to December 14, 2008. The graphs below present the data for both pre-intervention and post-intervention.

Student Survey

The purpose of this survey was used to determine if the students' attitudes toward off-task behavior changed after intervention. A total of 92 students received the student survey in all four teacher researchers' classes. The rate of return was 100% (n=92). The surveys were given to the present students on the day the teacher researchers decided to handout the surveys. As before, some students were absent this day, so the surveys were handed out to these students when they returned from being absent. Again, each teacher researcher discussed the definition of off-task behavior to the students. The elementary school teacher researchers read the questions aloud to their students as the students filled out the surveys. This survey was identical to the pre-intervention student survey. The survey consisted of five Likert Scale questions that ranged from four answers: Strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. The survey can be found in Appendix A. Figures 1 through 5 show the results of this survey.

In Figure 12, the students were asked to respond to: “I am a student who has experienced others being off-task.” Of the students polled, 88% responded that they either agree or strongly agree with that statement. The rest of the findings can be seen in Figure 12.

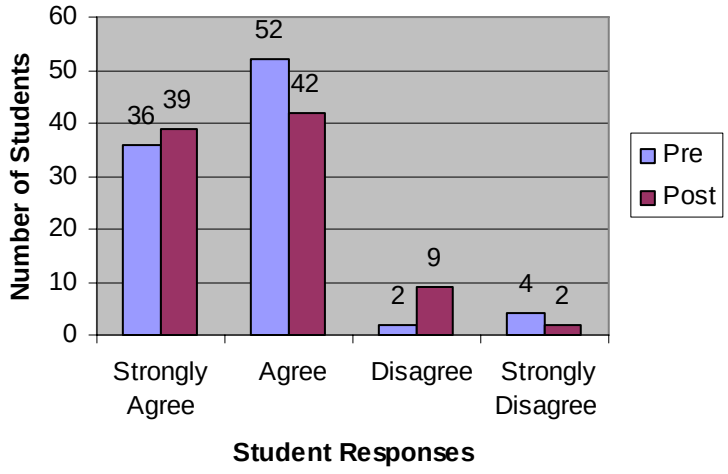

Figure 12: Student Survey Question One (n=92)

Figure 12 shows that, overall, student attitude on this question changed by only a little. There was a 5% increase (n=5) of the students who reported that they either disagree or strongly disagree with this statement.

Figure 13 asked to gauge this statement: “I think that being off-task in class has negatively affected at least one of my grades.” Of these students, 76% (n=70) either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Meanwhile, only 24% (n=22) disagreed or strongly disagreed. Refer to the chart below.

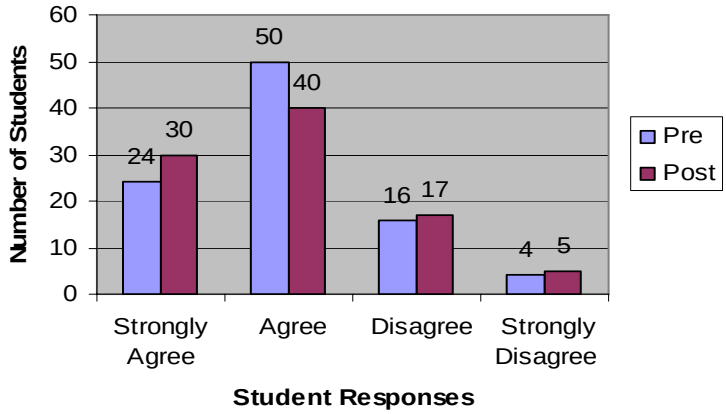

Figure 13: Student Survey Question Two (n=92)

Again, there seems to be little change in student attitude. There was only a 4% increase (n=4) in students agreeing or strongly agreeing with this statement.

Figure 14 asked the statement: “I have been disciplined (for example, teacher reprimand, detentions, conferences, etc.) for being off-task.” Only 9% (n=8) responded that they strongly agree with that statement. The rest of the students scattered their responses over the remaining three choices: 36% (n=33) responded that they agreed with the statement, 24% (n=22) disagreed, and 32% (n=29) strongly disagreed. Refer to Figure 14 below.

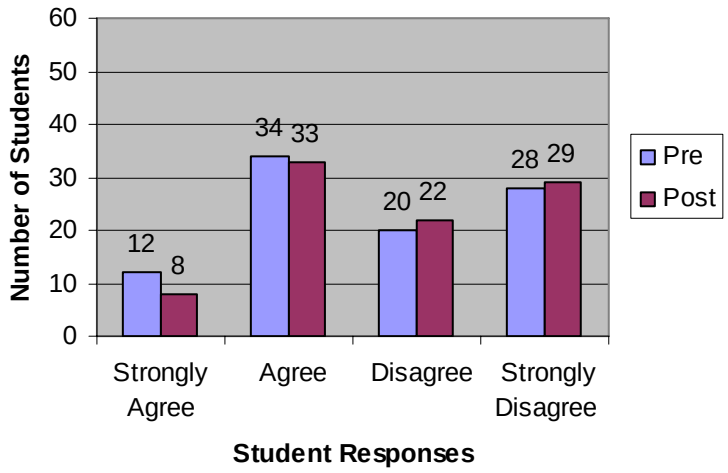

Figure 14: Student Survey Question Three (n=92)

Again, the students’ attitudes changed very little. The most significant change was the 4% drop (n=4) of students strongly disagreeing with that statement. The remaining figures kept almost identical.

In Figure 15, students were asked, “My off-task behavior interfered with other students’ learning in the classroom.” The response was that 58% (n=53) of the students either disagreed or strongly disagreed with that statement.

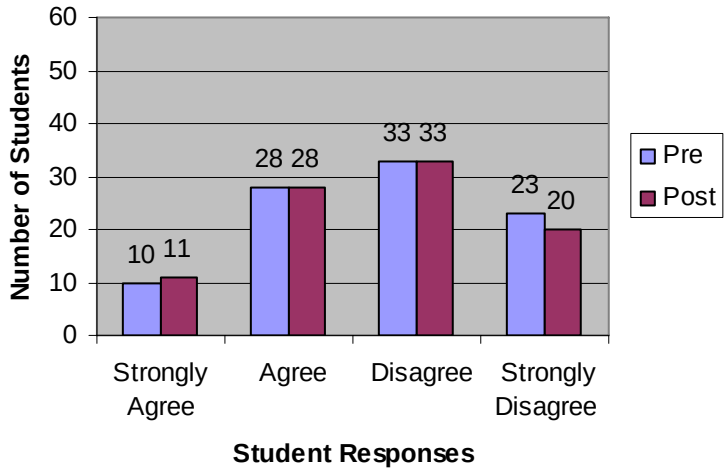

Figure 15: Student Survey Question Four (n=92)

Again, as seen in Figure 15 above, there is little difference in the students’ attitudes pre-intervention and post-intervention. The most notable drop was that 3% less students (n=3) strongly disagreed with that statement after intervention. The numbers of students who either agreed or disagreed remained identical.

In the last statement, as shown in Figure 16, students were asked in the fifth question to gauge whether "Working in groups helps me focus on the assignment and remain on task". Only 15% (n=14) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with that statement. Refer to Figure 16 below.

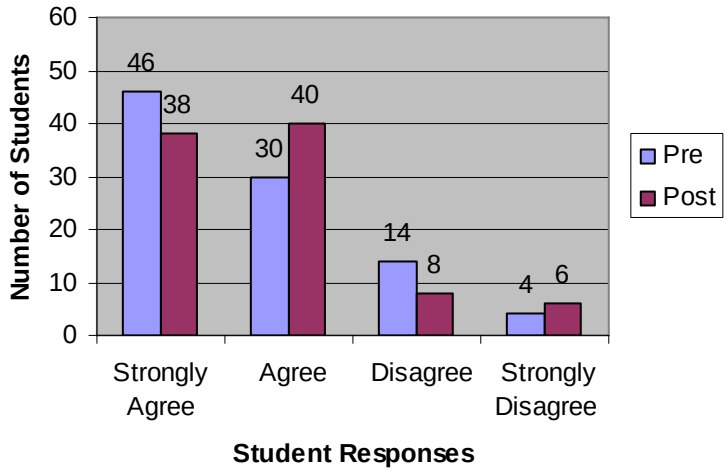

Figure 16: Student Survey Question Five (n=92)

This question showed the most change in student attitude. Forty-one percent (n=38) reported that they strongly agreed, which was a drop of 9% (n=8). Meanwhile, 43% (n=40) said that they agreed with that statement, an increase of 11% (n=10).

Post-intervention behavior checklist

The purpose of this checklist was to record how many incidents of off-task behavior were exhibited while in cooperative groups before the intervention. Each of the student researchers observed his or her students' behavior for two 30-minute sections while in cooperative groups. They repeated this same action the second week. As before, they check marked each of the following behaviors when they witnessed students performing them: Students talked while others were talking, students did not participate, they used inappropriately loud voices, they did not respect others' physical space (such as not keeping their hands, feet, and objects to themselves),

they used put-downs, and they left their designated groups during work time. This behavior checklist can be found under Appendix C**.**

All of the off-task behaviors monitored decreased after the intervention. In descending order, loud voices (n=34), interrupts others (n=18), doesn't participate (n=6), wanders from group (n=4), invades others' space (n=3). There were no incidents of put-downs. Refer to Figure 17 below.

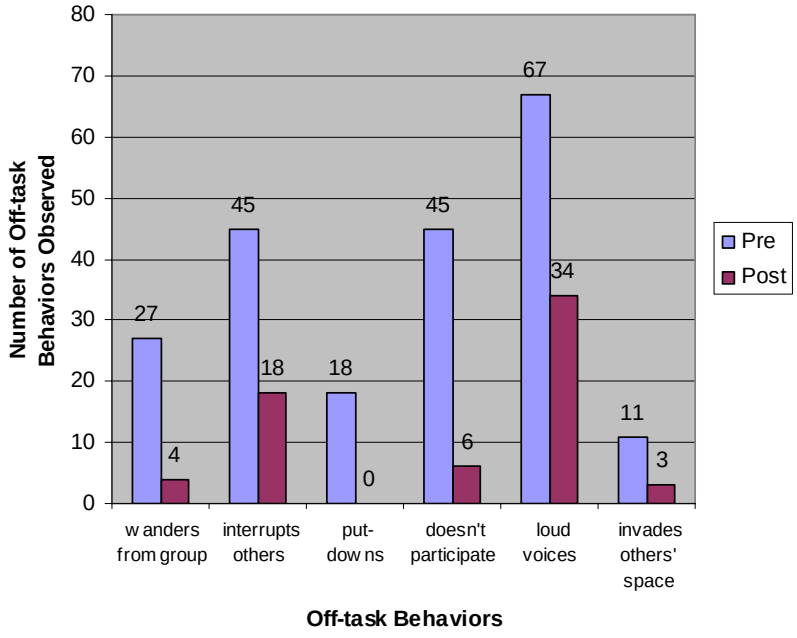

Figure 17: Pre-intervention and Post-intervention Individual Behavior Checklist (n=65)

Comparing pre-intervention and post-intervention numbers, the two largest drops were students not participating (n=6), a drop of 39 incidents, and using loud voices (n=34), a drop of 33 incidents. The smallest difference was invades others' space (n=3), a drop of only eight incidents.

The behaviors of the students between post-week 1 and post-week 2 are similar, yet there was an increase of five more behaviors seen in post-week 2. Refer to Figure 18 below.

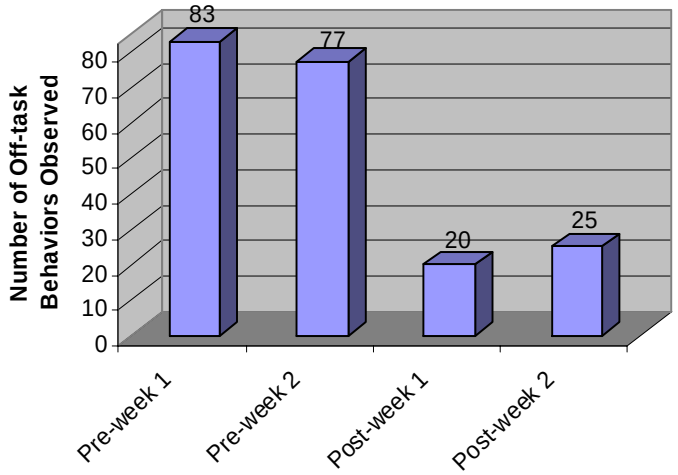

Figure 18: Pre-intervention and Post-intervention Total Behavior Checklist (n=205)

As seen in the figure above, there were significant decreases in off-task behavior in the pre-intervention weeks and post-intervention weeks. Combined, there were 160 total off-task behaviors charted in the two weeks of observation by the teacher researchers, but that number dropped to 45 total off-task behaviors in the two weeks post-intervention, a drop of 72%.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Comparing the pre-intervention and post-intervention student surveys, we found that there was little change in students' attitudes toward the relationship between cooperative learning, grades, and off-task behavior. One explanation for the third graders not changing their attitudes was that they may not have fully understood the whole meaning and scope of cooperative learning. This intervention was a rather abstract concept for such young children. The high school teachers found that their students' attitudes would not change all that much, either, simply because this was one of six or seven different courses they take throughout the semester. It would be tough to change their attitudes because there is only so much time they

spend in cooperative groups. Also, the questions themselves were not necessarily designed to gauge students' changes in attitudes. For example, "I am a student who has experienced others being off-task" doesn't lend itself to change. No matter what the students' experiences were during the intervention, their responses can not change because this gauges prior experiences in their entire academic careers.

The behavior checklists, as noted before, were not totally accurate because it was difficult for us to keep track of the entire room at once. Yet, even though the checklists were not accurate, there was enough of a difference between the number of pre-intervention and post-intervention behaviors to indicate that there was a definite decrease in off-task behavior. We felt that unquestionably there was a higher frequency of on task behavior while working in cooperative groups. Overall, based on the behavior checklist tool and our own observations, we feel that cooperative learning works in decreasing off-task behavior.

One drawback to the behavior checklists, though, was that the behaviors to be checked were geared much more toward an elementary level classroom. For instance, "invades other's space" is an act that can frequently happen at the younger ages, yet this generally does not occur at the high school level.

Two changes we would make to the pre-intervention and post-intervention tools would be to not use the student survey as a post-documentation tool. It worked as a general information gathering tool about students' attitudes toward cooperative learning and off-task behavior, but didn't offer any new information the second time it was implemented. We also think that using the behavior checklist would have been better implemented if someone else in the classroom recorded the off-task behaviors. It was simply too much to keep track of their behaviors with any real accuracy and assist in learning. We also believe that another behavior to keep track of would

be “talking about something other than the activity,” because that was a highly occurring incident.

We feel that cooperative learning is an effective strategy to decrease off-task behavior and promote positive skills, so we would recommend using this as an intervention. Even though this is an excellent strategy, there can be some modifications. We recommend that we would not use cooperative learning as much at the high school level because the students began to get bored with it and the teachers could not get through as much material as they wished. At the elementary level, we feel that we will continue cooperative learning as it was implemented.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Student Survey

1. I am a student who has experienced others being off task.

1	2	4	5____
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

2. I think that being off task in class has negatively affected at least one of my grades.

1	2	4	5____
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

3. I have been disciplined (for example, teacher reprimand, detentions, conferences, etc.) for being off task.

1	2	4	5____
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

4. My off-task behavior interferes with other students' learning in the classroom.

1	2	4	5____
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

5. Working in groups helps me focus on the assignment and remain on task.

1	2	4	5____
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Appendix B

Teacher Survey

Completing this survey indicates consent.

1. There is a high percentage of off-task behavior in my classroom.

1	2	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

2. Off-task behavior interferes with my students meeting their learning objectives.

1	2	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

3. When students work in small groups, I observe less off-task behavior.

1	2	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

4. I have used cooperative learning to diminish off-task behavior in my classroom.

1	2	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

5. Place a check next to the off-task behaviors that occur in your classroom.

a) Students leave their designated groups during work time. _____
b) Students talk while others are talking. _____
c) Students do not keep hands, feet and objects to themselves. _____
d) Students use put-downs. _____
e) Students use inappropriately loud voices. _____

Appendix C

Off-Task Behavior Checklist

* Leaves their designated group.
** Does not listen to others in their group or talks while others are talking.
*** Uses written or verbal name-calling.
**** Does not contribute to the group task.
***** Does not use their six-inch voices. Interferes with other working groups.
****** Does not keep hands, feet, and objects to themselves. Lacks spatial awareness.

	Date/ Time	Wanders from Group *	Interrupts Others **	Put-downs ***	Doesn't Participate ****	Loud Voices *****	Invades Others' Space ******	TOTAL
Pre-week 1 a								
b								
Pre-week 2 a								
b								
Post-week 1 a								
b								
Post-week 2 a								
b								

Appendix D

English III – Cooperative group work for "Civil Disobedience"

The following will be due by the end of class Friday. Here are the project requirements:

1) **Vocabulary sheet:** You will mark a little number on "Civil Disobedience" next to each word your group doesn't know. There may be a lot, but that's fine right now. Once finished with that, look up the different definitions of these words, and write these words on a separate sheet of paper. Refer to the board as an example of what I'm looking for. Worth 10 points.
2) **Highlight sheet:** On another copy of "Civil Disobedience", highlight or underline all the independent or nonessential clauses that can be pulled from the sentence without the sentence losing its basic meaning. Worth 10 points.
3) **Similes/Metaphors sheet**: On a separate sheet of paper with a line down the middle, write down five similes/metaphors or any poetic language that Thoreau uses in his writing. On the other side of each entry, write the meaning of it. In other words, explain what Thoreau means by using these similes/metaphors or poetic language. Worth 10 points.
4) **Annotations**: Then, after the above tasks are completed, discuss what each paragraph means, providing notes for each paragraph on a separate sheet of paper. Someone who has never read "Civil Disobedience" should be able to clearly understand what Thoreau's main points are after having read your annotations for each paragraph. That's how I'm going to approach your notes when grading them. This will be the most time consuming part of the project. You can write this in either bullet points or paragraph form. Worth 20 points.
5) **Thin questions/answers**: You will then write 10 specific, factual questions and answers to those questions as if you were giving someone a quiz over "Civil Disobedience". Make these questions fair and worthy of being on a test a teacher would give. Worth 10 points.
6) **Project sheet**: Fill out the provided project sheet as you go along doing this project. Be sure to update it at the end of every class period. Worth 10 points.

Here's the schedule to follow for this assignment:

1) Get to know one thing about each of your group mates. I'll quiz you on this as I go around to other groups, so be ready to dish out some info!
2) Discuss the project and potential group member's strengths for each section. Then divide the work **equally** among yourselves.
3) Set goals for each day, having an even amount of work done for each day.
4) Begin working on "Civil Disobedience", keeping in mind to update the project sheet as you go along.

Appendix E

Jennifer Dusing
Lesson Plan

Chapter 2
Building Health Skills and Character

Subject:
Health Education

Grade Level:
Sophomore

Task Assignment:
Students will work together to develop strategies for effective communication skills, refusal skills, and conflict resolution skills.

Academic Objectives:
The students will role play communication skills in building and maintaining healthy relationships. They will also develop strategies and conflict resolution skills.

Cooperative Objectives:
The students will work together to teach each other effective communication skills, effective refusal skills and effective conflict resolution skills.

Duration:
30 to 40 minutes

Decisions:
Group Size: Each group will consist of 5 people

Getting into Groups: Heterogeneous determined by me the teacher.

Strategy/Activity:
After discussing the strategies that we will be using, the groups will be asked to go to their places and create two different skits in which teens use effective communication and refusal skills. Each student in the group is to create a portion of the skit. They are then responsible for acting out that part. The groups will then get up in front of the class and present their skits. I will assess whether they successfully followed the steps presented in the book.

Materials:
Textbooks, paper and pencils

Build in Higher-Order Thinking:
Critical and Creative Thinking
Problem Solving

Decision Making
Application

Unite Teams:
Bonding and Group Identity
Group Grade
Group Reward

Insure Individual Learning:
Assigned Roles
Individual Grades

Look Over and Discuss:
P.M.I.
Teacher Observation
Student Observation

Develop Social Skills:
Encourage others
Accept others ideas
Reach Consensus

Appendix F

COOPERATIVE LEARNING LESSON PLAN
Fractured Fairy Tales

Name: Phyllis Houck and Rebecca Pate-Clevenger
Grade Level: Third Grade
Subject: Literature
Lesson Topic: Students study and diagram elements of fairy tales, read a fractured fairy tale, and then write their own fractured tales.

ACADEMIC OBJECTIVES:
$ Students will read a variety of fairy tales
$ Students will identify characteristics of fairy tales
$ Students will use a Venn diagram to compare three fairy tales
$ Students will read The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs
$ Students will write their own fractured fairy tales
$ Students will compile fairy tales into a book
$

SOCIAL SKILLS OBJECTIVES:
$ Students will paraphrase ideas
$ Students will seek consensus
$

ORGANIZATION:
$ Group Size/Assignment: 3 per group, to be determined by teacher
$ Room Arrangement: Students participate/sit in groups at assigned areas
$ Materials: a variety of fairy tale books, The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs by Jon Scieszka, paper, pencils construction paper, binding spirals (for books)

GOAL:
$ Students will understand the characteristics of fairy tales and write their own fractured fairy tale

PROCEDURE:

Gather a collection of fairy tale books that includes your students' favorites. Share some titles and let students talk about their favorite fairy tales. Invite students to identify some common characteristics of fairy tales. They might offer such ideas as;

$ Fairy tales often begin with the words *Once upon a time or Long, long ago*
$ They usually include a good character and a bad character (evil)
$ They can include magic or something enchanted
$ They frequently include a forest or castle in a fairy tale
$ The plot usually involves some kind of problem, the problem in eventually solved, and the good people live happily ever after

When the students have a good grasp of the elements of a fairy tale, arrange them in groups of three. Have each student read aloud one fairy tale to his or her group. Then invite the group to use a 3-circle Venn diagram to compare and contrast the fairy tales.

After the students are familiar with the elements of fairy tales, read aloud The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs by Jon Scieszka. Talk about how the story is different from the version they are familiar with. Discuss what a fractured fairy tale is, and explain to students they are going to write their own fractured fairy tales.

Before students begin the assignment, you might discuss how other fairy tales might change if told from a different point of view. Discuss some fairy tale titles and brainstorm how the tales might change. Then students have to make the following decisions:

$ Which fairy tale will they "fracture?"
$ How they will change that fairy tale?
$ Who will be the good character? The bad character?
$ Where will the story take place?
$ What problem will have to be solved?

You might write the questions on the chalkboard so students can refer to them as they write

When students' fractured fairy tales are complete, have a story sharing session.

ASSESSMENT:

Students will earn 1-10 points for each element or writing skill listed below, based on the success with which they incorporated that element into their stories:

$ Is the story properly set" the setting clearly described?
$ Does the tale begin with the words *Once upon a time or Long, long ago*?
$ Is a problem incorporated into the plot?
$ Are there good and evil characters?
$ Is the problem believably solved?
$ Do the good characters live happily ever after?
$ Does the story include at least three paragraphs?
$ Is the writing neat and properly indented?
$ Did the writer do a good job of "fracturing"?
$ Is spelling and punctuation correct?