Motivating Students by Increasing Student Choice

Becky S. Birdsell, B. A.
Sarah M. Ream, B. A.
Ann M. Seyller, B. S.
Pam L. Zobott, B. S.

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

Saint Xavier University

Chicago, Illinois

May, 2009

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to increase motivation in 7th grade students. Four teacher researchers examined the change in motivational levels as a result of choice strategies. They gathered data from four different classes, 101 students in all, to track levels of motivation. They monitored their levels of observable behavioral patterns with a checklist to see if motivation affected students' performance in the classroom. A student survey was given pre-intervention which asked questions based on student opinion of how they felt regarding choice in the classroom. The last data gathering tool that was used were student reflection questions. These reflection questions asked students to write out how they interpret choices in the classroom according to grouping, curriculum, homework, and assessments. Interventions were then implemented on a weekly basis. Students were offered four types of choices: group choice, curriculum choice, assignment choice, and assessment choice. Reflection questions were given to the students prior to each intervention as well as after to determine their overall attitudes toward choice. The results of the post intervention data was compared with the baseline data to see if progress was made. The results showed that by giving the students choice in the above mentioned areas, there was an increase in student motivation to some degree. One substantial difference between pre and post-intervention in the area of curriculum, showed that when students were given more choices, 38% of the students felt they were able to utilize their strengths, which also created more success and enjoyment in the classroom. Another major difference between pre and post-intervention in the area of choosing groups showed that 58 students said they chose groups according to friends, and 36 chose their groups based on ability levels when only 13 chose their groups based on ability level pre-intervention. We concluded that validating middle school students' desire for freedom through the offering of choice produced more positive behaviors and an increase of self-motivation. It is our recommendation that the knowledge gained in this study be used by other educators to create successful students.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1
PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

Many students in the middle school setting struggle with low motivation to succeed in academics. This problem is evidenced in low test scores, lack of participation in classroom activities, incomplete homework assignments, and a disinterest in becoming independent learners. The four teacher researchers came to this belief through their reflections and observations in their classrooms throughout their years of teaching experience.

Immediate Context of the Problem

The information in this action research project was compiled by four seventh grade teacher researchers, all from the same public middle school. Teacher Researcher A and Teacher Researcher B both teach reading and language arts. Teacher Researcher C teaches science, and Teacher Researcher D teaches physical education.

The Middle School

The Middle School is located in an urban mid-western community established in 2005. The Middle School includes sixth- through eighth-grade classrooms. The building is currently undergoing a revamping in anticipation of an influx of students due to recent district boundary changes. Currently, the Middle School's student population is at 829 (School Report Card 2006). The State School Report Card identifies the ethnicity of the student population at the Middle School as shown in Table 1.

Diagram 1: School's Student Racial/ethnic Background
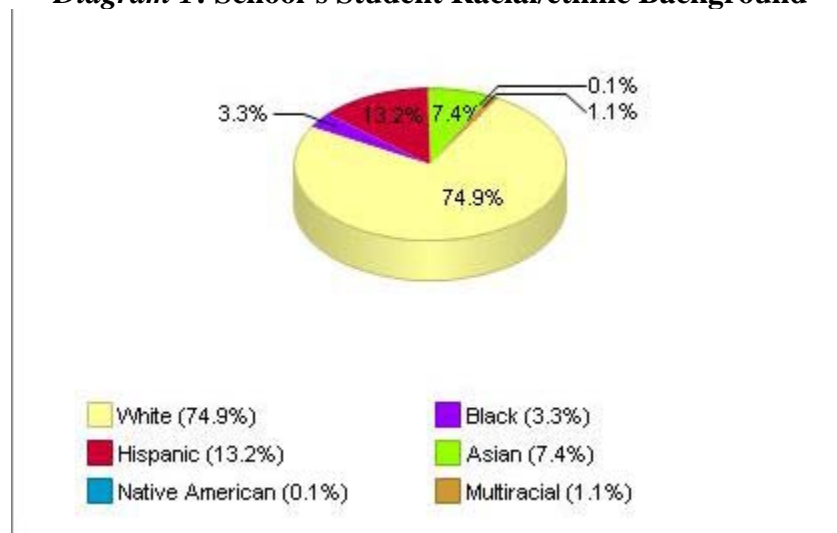
Source: iirc.niu.edu/School

As seen in Figure 1, the majority of the student population is white/Caucasian. The

Limited-English-Proficient Rate, which consists of students eligible for the school's

English Language Learner (ELL) program, is 3.3% compared to the District's 3.6%. The

Low-Income Rate of the Middle School at 5.3% compared to the District's 4.6%. Out of

the 829 students enrolled at Site A, 430 are male and 399 are female (State School Report

Card, 2007).

The average financial earnings at the Middle School for full-time employees is

$47,579. The average teaching experience is 6.8 years, and the percentage of teachers

with a bachelor's degree is 54.6%. Those with a master's degree or above are 45.4%. The

gender ratio at the Middle School is 17.8% male to 82.7% female. The staff's ethnic

background consists of 98.5% white, .2% black, .7% Hispanic, and .7% Asian/Pacific

islander. Student to staff was a ratio of 22.3:1. The average class size of the research class

subjects was 24.4. These figures represent administration and staff numbers for the

district. Table 2 shows the divisions of the Middle School staff.

Table 1

Administration	Special Needs	Regular Education	Exploratories	Support Staff
1 principal	2 guidance counselors	15 6th grade teachers	5 health and PE	3 secretaries
1 assistant principal	1 ELL coordinator	13 7th grade teachers	5 fine arts	2 custodians
	1 gifted and talented coordinator	14 8th grade teachers	2 media aides	1 food service coordinator
	1 speech and language specialist	Special Education	1 media specialist	
	1 reading specialist	2 6th grade teachers	2 synergistic	
	1 psychologist	2 7th grade teachers	1 computer application	
	1 nurse	3 8th grade teachers	1 food and nutrition	
	2 social workers		2 foreign languages	

The core subjects at the Middle School consist of science, social science, mathematics, reading, and language arts. According to the 2006 State Report Card for grade seven, the time devoted to teaching core subjects at the Middle School included: forty-two minutes of mathematics, science, and social science, while eighty-minutes are spent on reading and language arts. The students take yearly State Standard Achievement Tests (SSAT) in reading, mathematics, and science. The Middle School's test scores indicate the percentage of students at the seventh grade level who met or exceeded standards in the above mentioned subjects. The students scored a 77.3% in reading, an 87.4% in math, and an 85.3% in science. The above mentioned scores indicate that the students' scores are average or above average, however their participation and homework completion does not reflect this ability. The academic ability is portrayed by the test scores, but the effort in the classroom is lacking.

The students at the Middle School received 42 minutes per day of physical education/health and an additional 42 minutes per day of an exploratory class. Exploratory classes include: Foods and Nutrition, Computers, Spanish, synergistic (cooperative learning technology class), and theatre. Recently added to the list of exploratory classes offered is Chinese as a foreign language class. There are a variety of extra-curricular activities offered at the Middle School such as different sports and clubs available to students such as volleyball, basketball, cheerleading, beta club, student council, and academic team.

The Middle School is one of the three schools located on a large campus that includes a kindergarten through second grade building and third through fifth grade building. It is a three year old, two-story brick structure that just underwent a new renovation in 2007. The building is divided by grade levels with each grade subdivided into four teams that are housed in individual pods. Currently, only three pods are occupied. Each pod has its own computer lab, work station, and locker area. The Middle School has two gymnasiums, a fitness room, auditorium, large cafeteria, library, and two computer labs. The school is located on a large, open piece of land which has two baseball fields, and a regulation size track and field arena that houses a full-length football field.

The demographics and context of the School do not readily suggest a relationship to a lack of motivation in the seventh grade population.

<div align="center">Local Context of the Problem</div>

The Middle School is located in a northwestern suburb of a major metropolitan city in the Midwest. Three villages feed into the School, but after reviewing the

demographics of each community, we have concluded that one village contributes most of the School's student population. All our demographic information will be extracted from this specific village's profile.

The population of the village in 2006 was 29,195, which shows a 49.7% growth rate from the 1990s. The average income of the people living in the village is over $75,000. The ethnicities of the people residing in the village were 91% white, 8.3% Hispanic, 1.7% African-American, 3% Asian, and 1.8% American Indian. The percentage of individuals who were high school graduates or higher was 93.2. The percentage of students with a bachelor's degree or higher was 32.5 (www.lith.org/developmentsbusres).

The average number of people living in an individual household in this particular village was 3.04. The employment rate was 73.5% for individuals 16 years of age and older. The percentage of workers who were salary workers was 86.1 while 10.4% of workers were government workers. The percentage of self-employed workers was 3.2, and there were 0.3% of unpaid family workers. According to the 2005 State Police Crime Report for the village's county, the crime rate per 100,000 was 747.7 with a total crime index of 211 (*Crime in State 2005*, State Police Department, 2005).

The village used to be a small, farming community with few dirt roads and simple economic needs. The village had four major lakes and beaches with wildlife preservations dotting the landscape. In 1923, a federal judge began purchasing property around the village's main lake. In the 1950s the first decision-making body of the village was organized. Since 1952, when the village was incorporated, it has drastically increased in population while losing much of the farmland that surrounded the area. Dirt

roads had turned into major, congested roads and highways. Many residents and businesses had come to the community for its high quality of life and the many opportunities it had to offer. Commercial and residential projects were continuously increasing throughout the area. The village is home to one small airport with a single paved air strip that generates income for the community. Eight schools now exist in the area where there was once only one. The recreational opportunities consist of golf courses, a community park district, library, health and fitness centers, and an active adult community.

A third grade through fifth grade elementary school feeds into the Middle School. The mission statement for the Middle School is, "We challenge and motivate our students to become successful life-long learners" (http://www.districtxxx.org/mms/index.html). The district is the home to eight schools, including five elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school with one superintendent overseeing them all. The Middle School is a result of the most recently passed tax-based referendum. Due to the newness of the school, it has had no current referendums before the board. The next probable referendum will lead to building a new high school as the result of the rapid student growth. The technology at the Middle School is accessible and readily available to the students. The school contains 316 computers, an LCD projector in every classroom, internet-based grade books for parents and students to view, and district and school information is readily available through the school's web page.

National Context of the Problem

"By the time students reach middle school, lack of interest in schoolwork becomes increasingly apparent in more and more students" (Lumsden, 1994). The literature offers several reasons that explain why students across the country appear to lack the drive to become successful learners. Research shows that many of the reasons seem to stem from two main areas: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. A student who lacks intrinsic motivation may appear to be bored, possess self-esteem issues, lack personal goals and interests, or feel they are not being challenged to their ability level. A student who lacks extrinsic motivation may be influenced by social issues. On the other hand, a teacher can also create low motivation for the student by not possessing enthusiasm during instruction, not giving student choice, or possessing a lack of rapport with the students (Brewster & Fager, 2000).

Teacher Researcher Reflections

We feel that the lack of motivation our students show in the classroom is reflected in their overall study habits and will impede their future academic success. As teachers, we want to see students become personally invested in their learning. We observe low motivation daily in students' lack of participation in class, incomplete homework assignments, low test scores, and overall lack of focus. As shown in the local context of the problem, most students at the Middle School come from high income households where both parents work. Based on this information, we can infer that students are not with their parents after school. If that is true, there would be no accountability for the completion of school work and possibly little parental support. It is also difficult for teachers to contact parents when they both work.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Evidence of the Problem

The purpose of our research project was to increase student motivation by offering choice on curriculum, grouping, assignments, and assessment. The teacher researchers documented evidence by utilizing the following tools: Observation Checklist, Student Survey, and Reflection Questions. During the week of September 22nd through October 3rd 2008, the teacher researchers collected their baseline data by administering the Student Survey (Appendix A) and completing the teacher Observation Checklist (Appendix B). Students were offered choice of curriculum, grouping, assignments, and assessment on three different occasions during the time period of October 6th through December 5th 2008. Before each intervention, the students were asked to complete the Reflection Questions (Appendix C, D, E, F) based on their past experiences.

Observation Checklist

The Observation Checklist was used to informally observe 98 seventh grade students in physical education, science, and reading on the following behaviors: attentiveness, off task behavior, cooperation, disruptiveness, independent work, and participation. The teachers recorded their observations indicating whether or not behaviors were demonstrated by checking "yes", "no", or "sometimes". This Observation Checklist was designed to gain data of student motivation through observable behaviors. During the week of September 22, 2008, the Observation Checklist was used to gather baseline data on student motivation.

The first category on the checklist was an observation of how attentive students were on the task at hand. According to teacher observations, most students (60/98) demonstrated attentiveness while working on an assigned task.
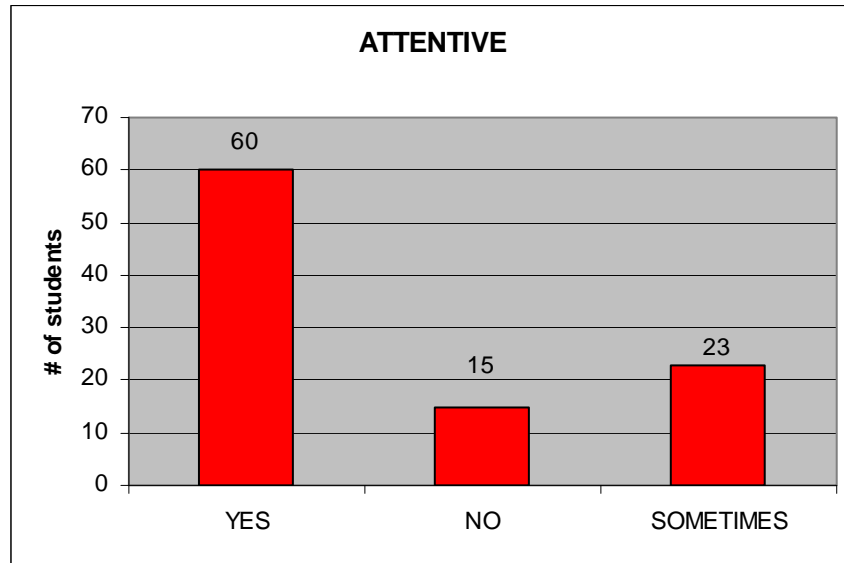

Figure 1: Observation checklist - attentive

Also observed on the checklist was student's off-task behavior. The checklist revealed that a large amount of students (62/98) were not off-task while only 11/98 were off-task.
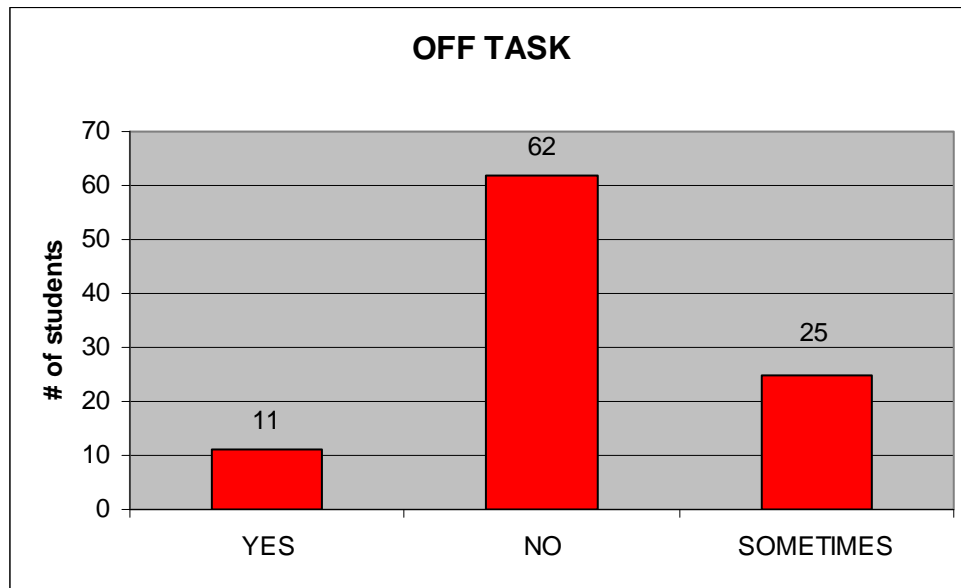
OFF TASK

Figure 2: Observation checklist – off-task behavior

Another category on the checklist was an observation of student's cooperation while working on an assigned task in class. According to teacher observations a majority (88/98) of students were cooperating with other students while completing a task.
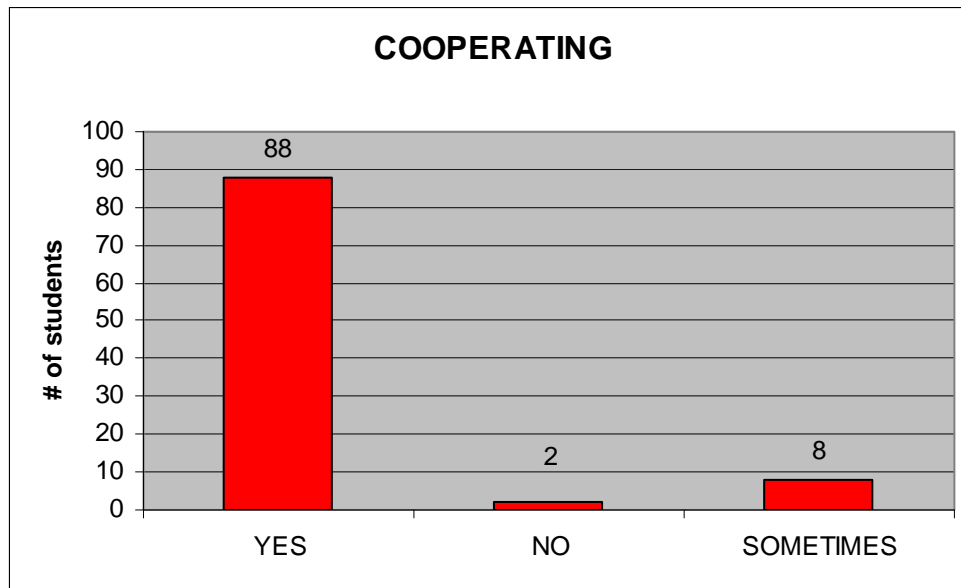

Figure 3: Observation checklist – cooperating

The next category on the checklist was an observation of the students'
disruptiveness in the classroom. According to teacher observations a noteworthy number
of students (77/98) were not exhibit disruptive behaviors during an activity in the
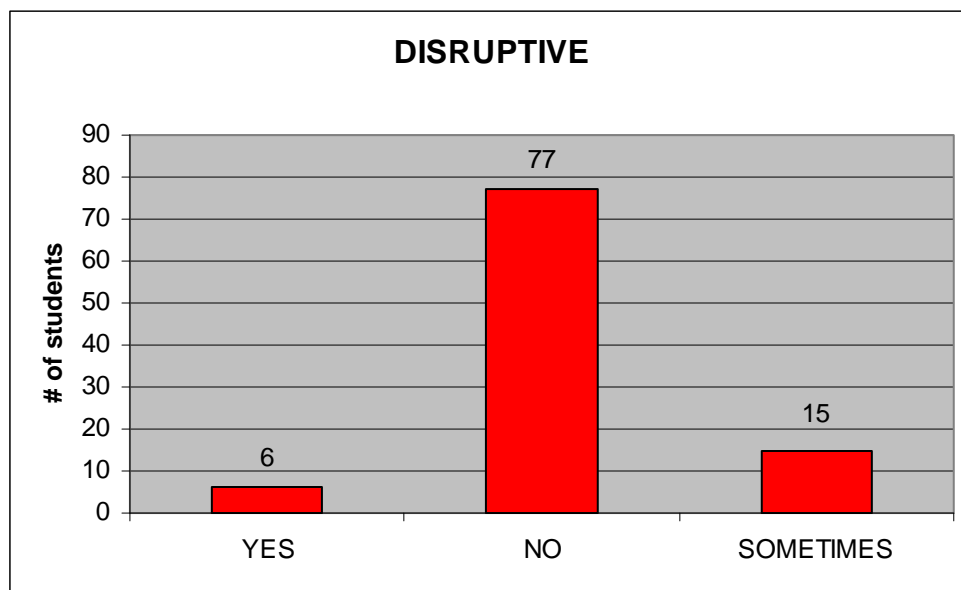classroom.

Figure 4: Observation checklist- disruptive

The second to last category on the observation checklist was students' ability to work independently in the classroom. According to teacher observations, this category revealed the most even distribution of results. The number of students who worked independently was 43/98 while 36/98 sometimes engaged in independent work.
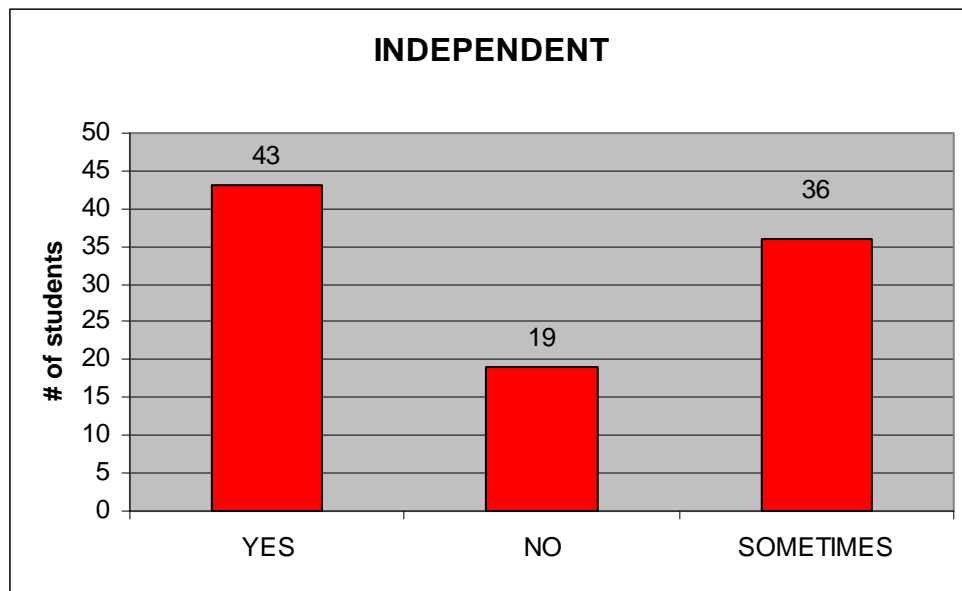

Figure 5: Observation checklist -independent

The final category on the checklist observed whether the students were actively participating in classroom activities. According to teacher observations, a majority of the students (49/98) participated in class and 39/98 sometimes participated.
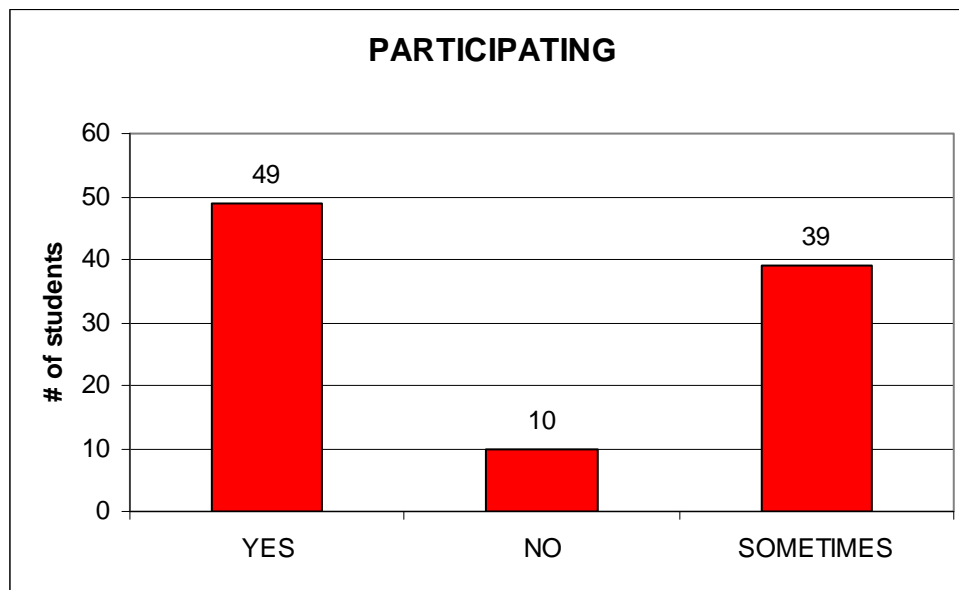
PARTICIPATING

Figure 6: Observation checklist – participation

Student Survey

The Student Survey, made up of 10 questions, was designed to assess the students' overall perspectives on their motivation to participate, to work in groups, to complete homework, and to perform on tests. The survey was administered to 120 seventh grade students in physical education, science, and reading during the week September 22, 2008 to gather baseline data.

In question one, the students were asked on a scale of 1-10 how much they enjoyed school. According to the student surveys, 29/98 students ranked their enjoyment of school as an 8, with 10 being the highest.

On a scale of 1-10, 10 being the best, how much do I enjoy school?

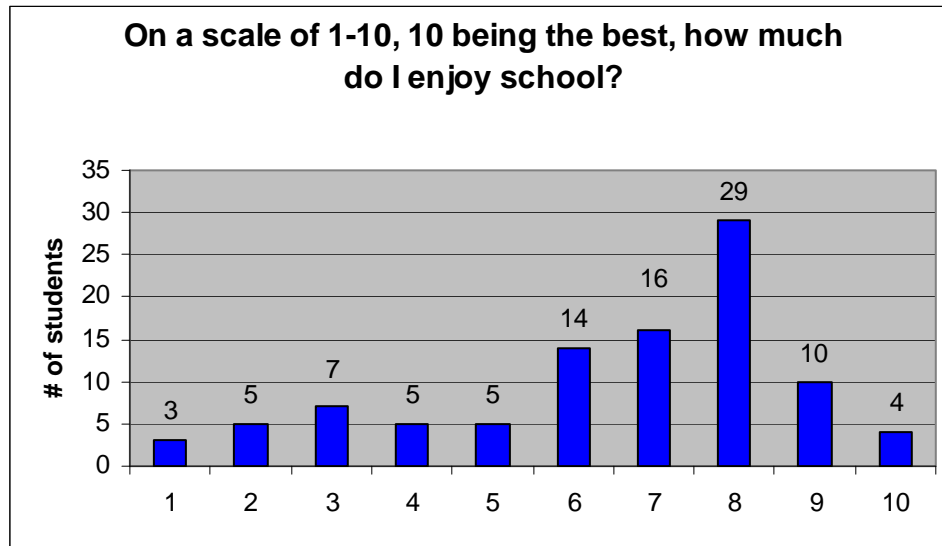
Figure 7: Student Survey – On a scale of 1-10, 10 being the best, how much do I enjoy class?

In question two, the students were asked how often they participate in class by circling never, sometimes, or always. According to the student surveys, 50% of students (49/98) stated that they sometimes participated in class. The other half of students (49/98) said they always participated in class.
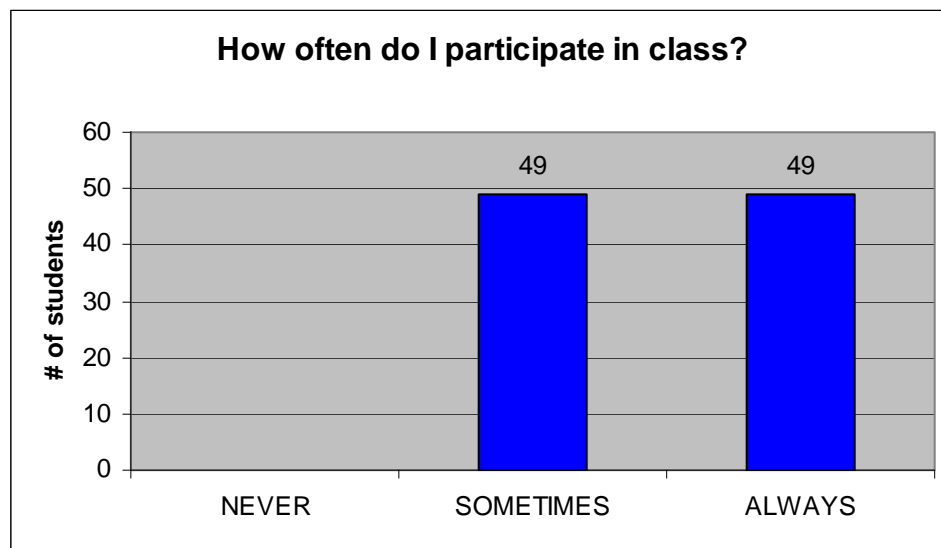
Figure 8 – Student Survey – How often do I participate in class?

In question four, the students were asked if their participation depends on their interest in the subject by circling yes or no. According to the student surveys, an overwhelming number of students (82/98) reported that their amount of participation depended on their interest in the subject.

Does my participation depend on my interest of the subject?
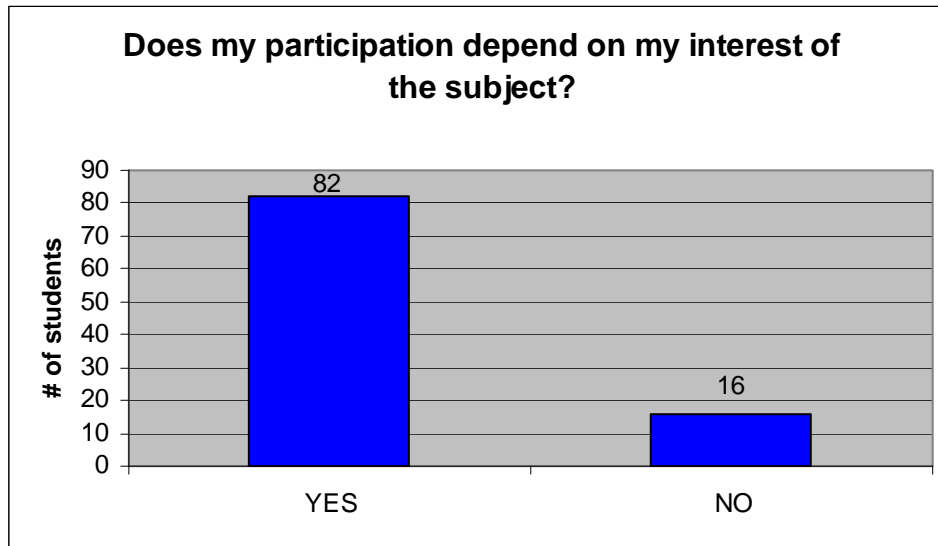
Figure 9 – Student Survey – Does my participation depend on my interest of the subject?

In question five, the students were asked if they feel that they are offered choices about what and how they learn in the classroom by circling rarely, sometimes, often or always. According to the student surveys, students (51/98) sometimes felt that they were offered choices about what they learn in the classroom.
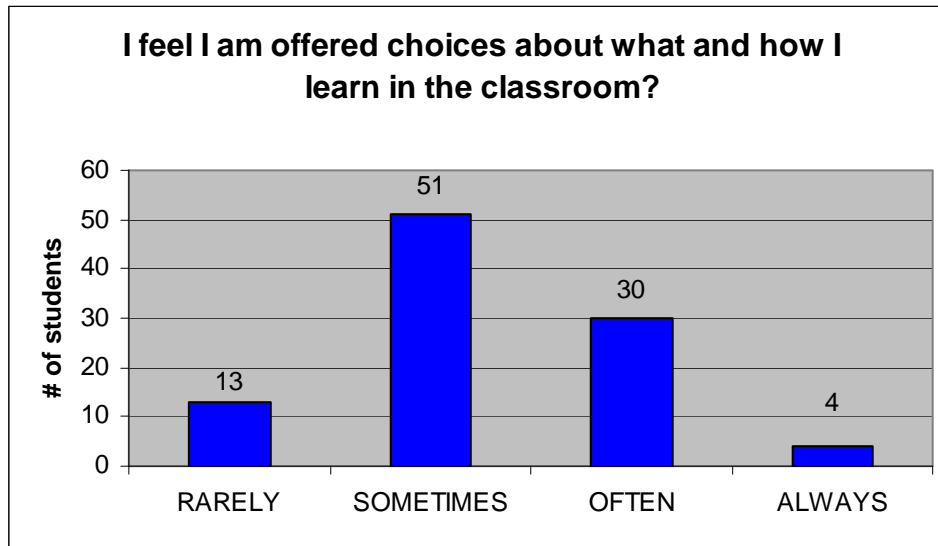
Figure 10: Student Survey – I feel I am offered choices about what and how I learn in the classroom?

In question six, the students were asked if they work better in groups or independently by circling groups or independently. According to the student surveys, a marked number of students (69/98) felt they worked better in groups rather than independently.

Do I work better in groups or independently?
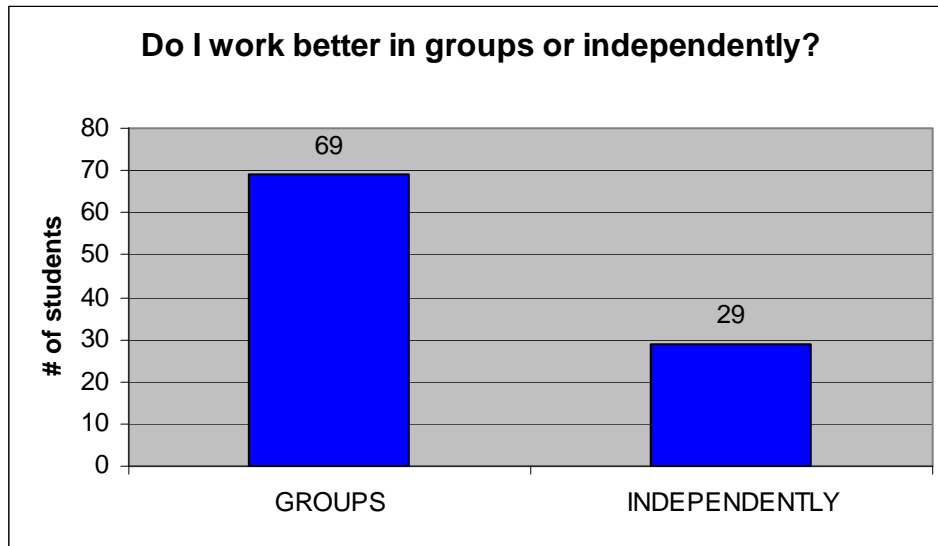
Figure 11: Student Survey – Do I work better in groups or independently?

In question seven, the students were asked how they choose groups by circling one of the following choices: friends, ability levels, or anyone. According to the student surveys, a large majority of students (74/98) like to choose groups according to their friends.
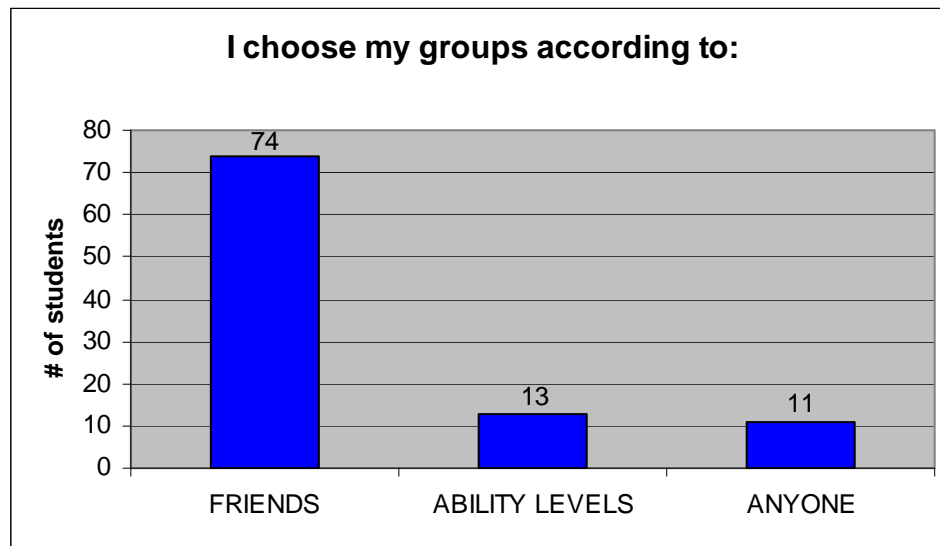
Figure 12: Student Survey – I choose my groups according to:

In question eight, the students were asked how often they choose to turn in completed homework by circling sometimes, often, or always. According to the student surveys, students (72/98) said they often turn in completed homework while 22/98 sometimes turn in their homework.

How often do I turn in completed homework?
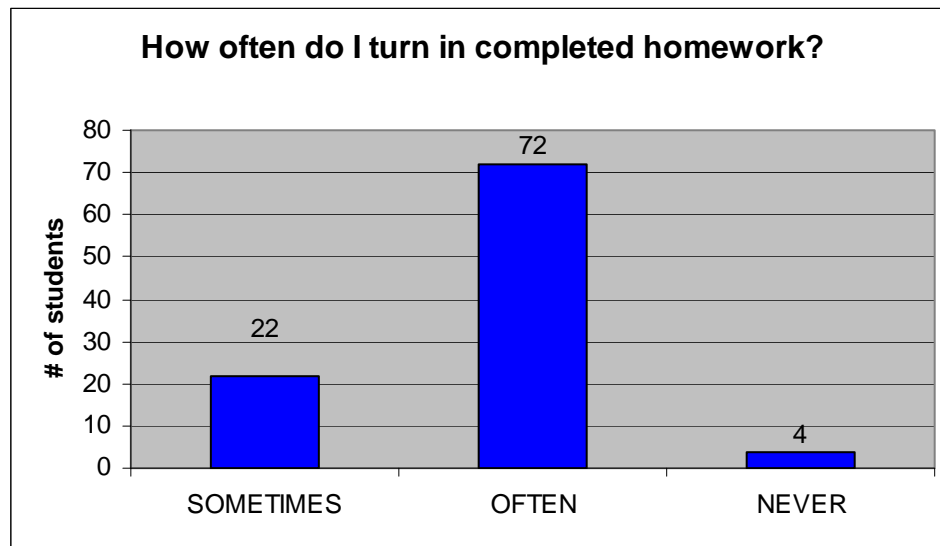
Figure 13: Student Survey – How often do I turn in completed homework?

In question nine, the students were asked why they complete their homework by circling all that apply. Their choices were because it is easy, interesting, challenging, or expected. According to student surveys, students (66/98) reported that they complete their homework because they are expected to do it.

I complete my homework because:
(circle all that apply)
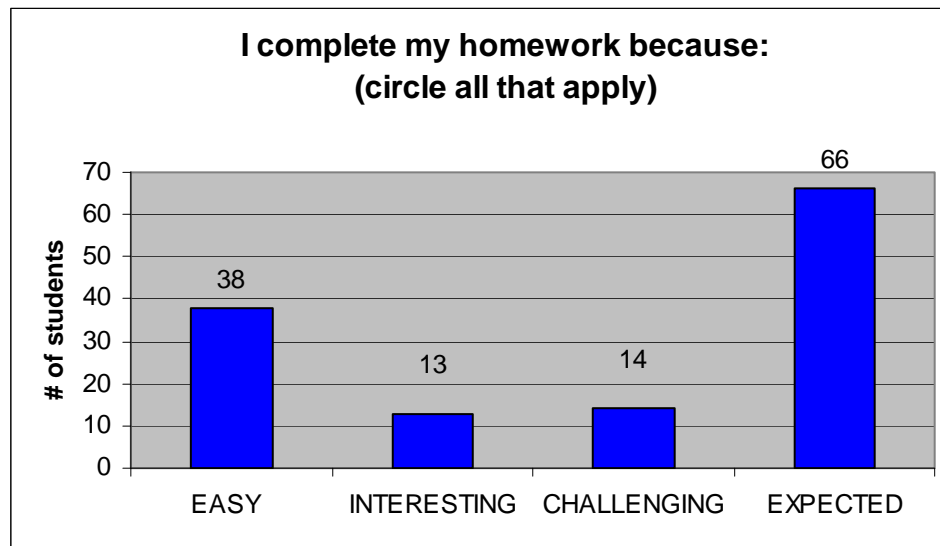
Figure 14: Student Survey – I complete my homework because:

In question ten, the students were asked if they had a choice, would they prefer to take tests that are multiple choice, essay, short answer, true/false, or matching by circling all that apply. According to the student surveys, the top three types of assessments favored were multiple choice (83/98), matching (62/98), and true/false (58/98).
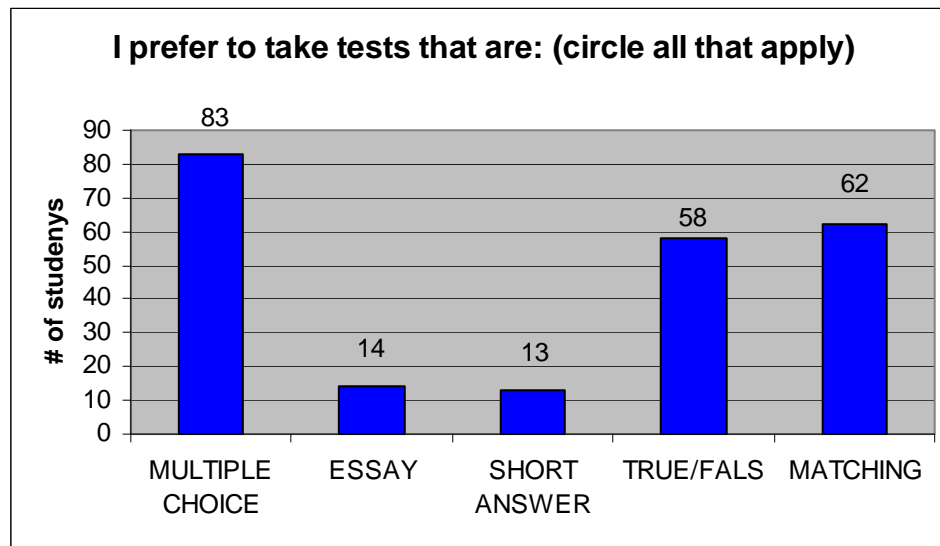
Figure 15: Student Survey – I prefer to take tests that are:

Reflection Questions

Before each intervention strategy, 120 seventh grade students in physical education, science, and reading were asked to reflect on journal questions pertaining to the intervention strategies before they were administered.

The first reflection question referring to curriculum intervention strategies asked the students to reflect on their feelings about being offered a choice of what they were learning. Of the 98 students involved, the common themes that emerged from the students' responses were the following: 50% chose their curriculum based on personal strengths, 17% of the students decided their curriculum on what they were interested in, 13% were basing their decision on their freedom of choice, 13% chose curriculum based on personal enjoyment, 4% said they chose based on their success rate, and finally 3% of students said they would rather be told what curriculum to learn.

Curriculum Pre-intervention Reflection Question #1 Responses

- Strengths
- Interest
- Freedom
- Enjoyment
- Success
- Rather Be Told
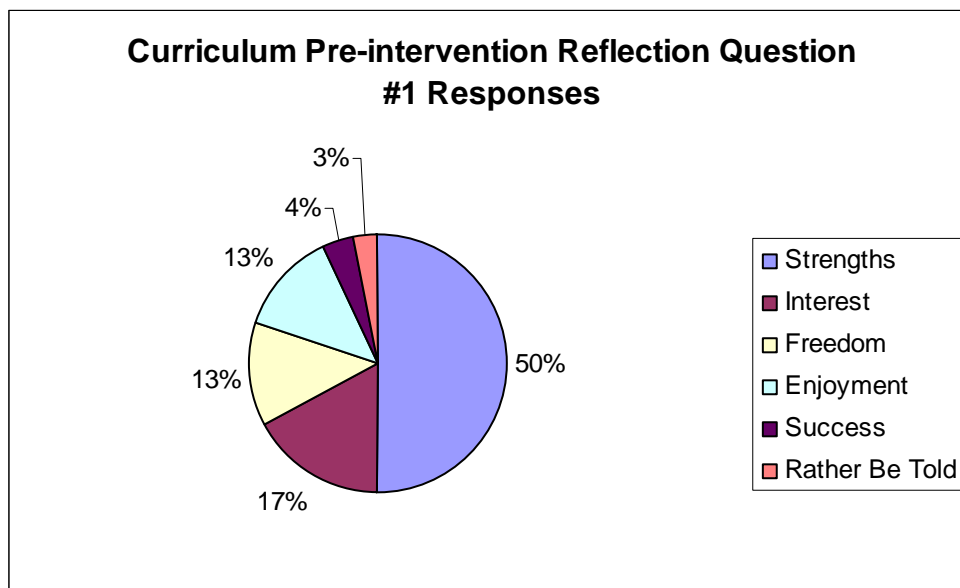
Figure 16: Student Reflection Question- Curriculum #1

The second reflection question referring to curriculum asked the students if they felt more motivated to learn when they worked within a subject they chose. An overwhelming 92% of the 98 students agreed that they were more motivated to learn when they enjoyed the subject, while only 8% felt they were not more motivated.

Curriculum Pre-intervention Reflection Question #2 Responses

8%

92%

Yes
No
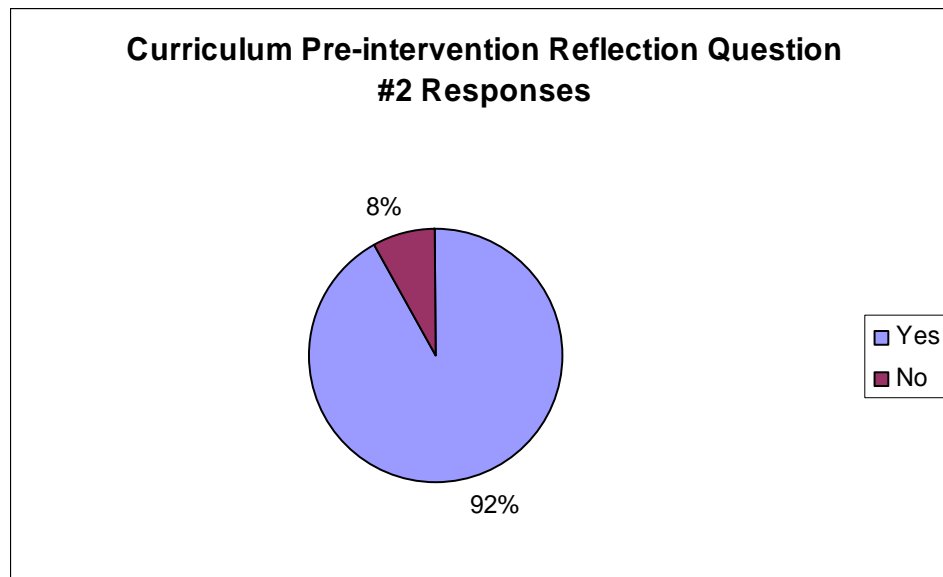
Figure 17: Student Reflection Question- Curriculum #2

The reflection questions referring to the group work intervention strategies asked the students to reflect on how they think they should select group members to work with and what makes a group work well together to accomplish the task. The first question on group selection showed that the majority of the 98 students chose their groups based solely on friendship. 5% chose their groups based on their peers' intelligence level, and another 5% on their peers responsibility, trustworthiness, and work ethic. The final 4% of students based their groups on a diversity of strengths.

Group Pre-intervention Reflection Question #1 Responses

- Friends
- Intelligence Level
- Diversity of Strengths
- Responsible / Trustworthy / Hard Working

4% 5% 5% 86%
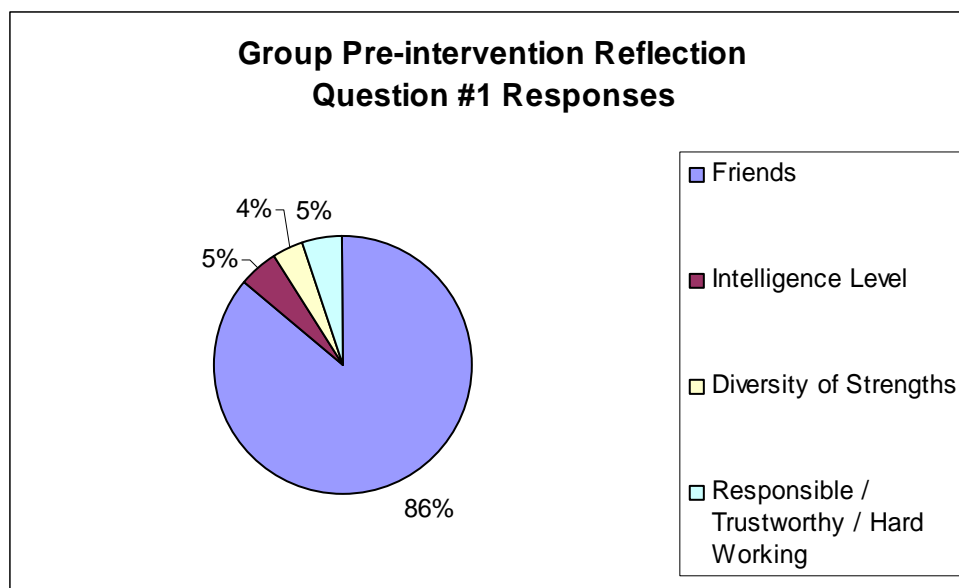
Figure 18: Student Reflection Question- Grouping #1

The second reflection question on grouping asked the students' what characteristics they felt made a group work well together. Of the 98 students involved 57% felt that cooperation was important, 20% said participation of group members was an attribute, 13% based their decision on their peers intelligence level, 5% decided that good communication is necessary, 3% felt that hard work ethics was important, and finally 2% based their group decisions on trust.

Group Pre-intervention Reflection Question #2 Responses

- Cooperation
- Participation
- Smart
- Trust
- Works Hard
- Good Communication

3%
5%
2%
13%
20%
57%
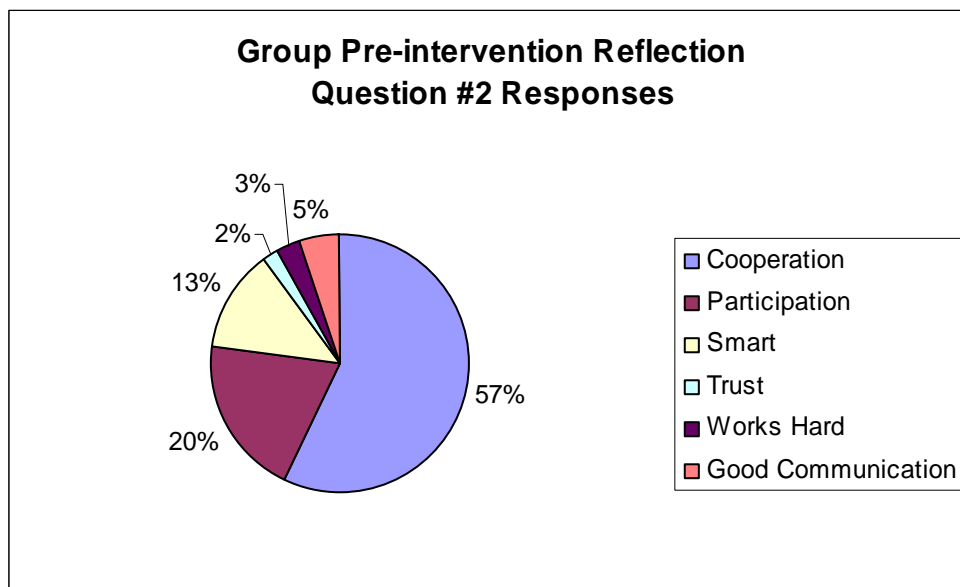
Figure 19: Student Reflection Question- Grouping #2

The reflection questions referring to homework assignments asked the students to reflect on how they choose a specific homework assignment when given an option and what they feel are the advantages in being allowed to choose a homework assignment. The following common themes emerged when asked how they would choose specific homework assignments when given an option: 35% would choose the easiest assignment, 21% would choose homework that they would be good at, 18% based their decision on interest, 10% chose an assignment that would be appropriate to their ability level, 9% would choose a challenging assignment, and finally 7% would choose the shortest assignment.

Homework Pre-intervention Reflection Question #1 Responses

- Easiest
- Shortest
- Interesting
- Challenging
- Approprriate Level
- Good At / Know More About

35%
21%
10%
9%
18%
7%
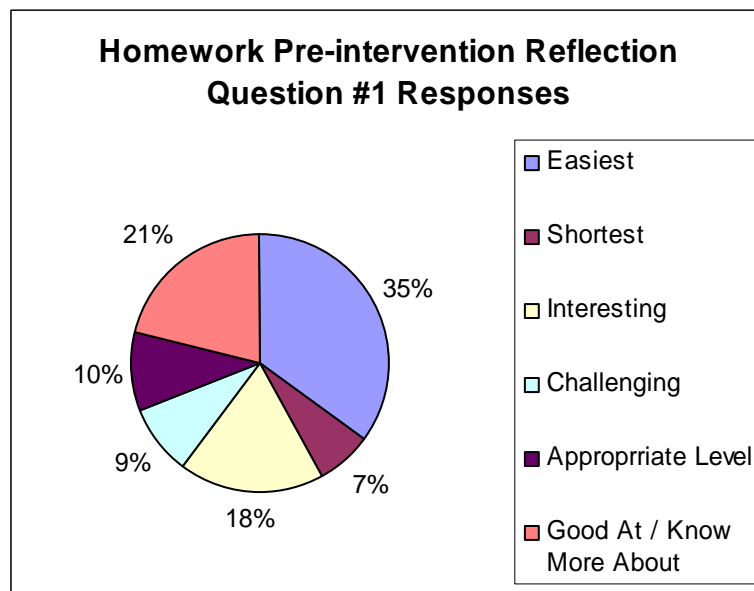
Figure 20: Student Reflection Question- Homework #1

The second reflection question asked what the advantages would be if able to choose their homework assignment. The advantages were the following: 25% could choose by ability level, 18% thought that being able to choose homework was an advantage, 16% of students believed it would result in good grades, 15% felt an advantage of choosing what interests them, 11% believe it would result in less homework, 8% of the students felt they would invest more time in their homework if they could choose, while 7% felt that an advantage would be knowing what to expect with the assignment.

Homework Pre-intervention Reflection Question #2 Responses

- Own Interest
- Ability Level
- Good Grades
- Less Work
- Choice
- More Investment of Time
- Know What to Expect
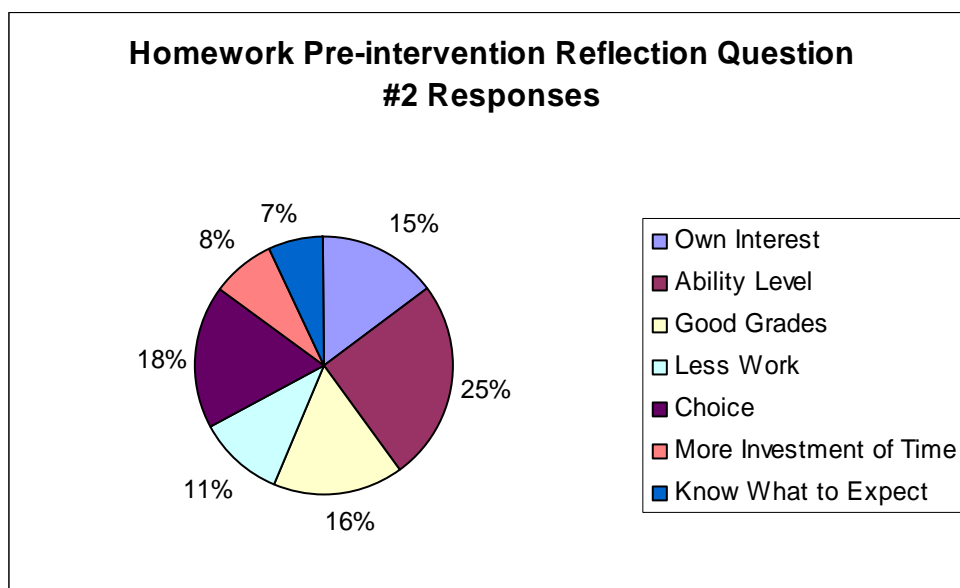
Figure 21: Student Reflection Question- Homework #2

The reflection questions referring to the assessment intervention strategies asked the students to reflect on what they feel the advantages are in choosing the type of test they take and if they were given an option the type of test, would they choose the same option every time. The common themes that emerged from the first reflection question were the following: 37% of the students felt they would be more successful if they could choose the type of test they could take, 36% of the students thought the test would be easier if they could choose, 15% believed they would be better prepared, and finally 12% thought that they would be less nervous.

Assessment Pre-intervention Reflection Question #1 Responses

- Easy
- Successful
- Not Nervous
- Prepared/Learning Style

15%
12%
36%
37%
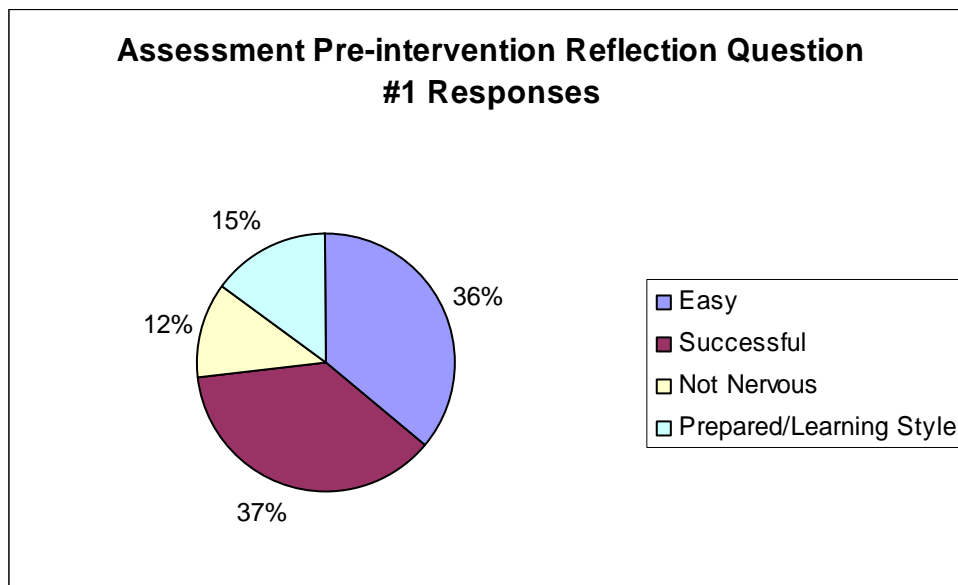
Figure 22: Student Reflection Question- Assessment #1

The second question asked the students if given the choice, would they take the same type of test every time. Of 98 students, 81% said they would take the same test, and 19% said they would not.

Assessment Pre-intervention Reflection Question #2 Responses

19%

81%

■ Yes / Easier
■ No / Unsuccessful
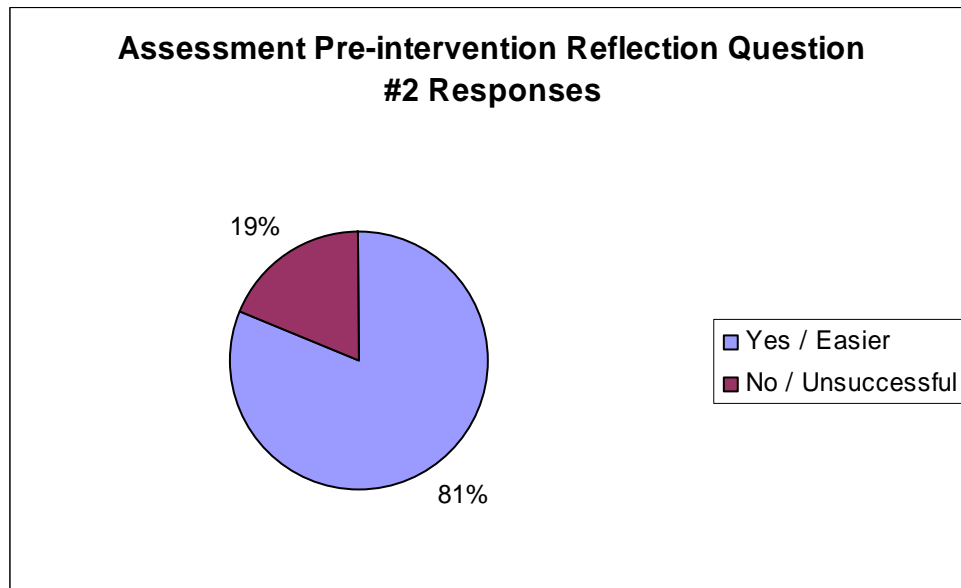
Figure 23: Student Reflection Question: Assessment #2

Summary

After reviewing the pre-intervention data, we inferred that the lack of motivation in the classroom was related to the students' ownership in what and how they learn. If curriculum and homework are chosen by the students based on their interests and ability levels, they feel they will be more successful. If students are able to choose their own type of assessment, students feel there will be less test anxiety because they will be more prepared. Students feel that a group works well together if everyone cooperates, participates, works hard, and communicates, which can be achieved if they are allowed to choose their own groups.

Reflection

Overall we, as teacher researchers, looking back at our observation checklist (Figures 1-6) feel the majority of our students were attentive, on task, cooperative, able to work independently, and participated regularly. Therefore, there is little room for improvement in the before mentioned areas. Looking back at our student reflection questions (Figures 16-22) there seemed to be a trend on students choosing the easier assignment, assessment, and curriculum choice. It seemed that the majority of students would choose their group members based on friendship. We believe that if students are given the opportunity of choice, we not only hope to engage the small percentage of students who lack motivation, but also challenge those who are already self-motivated.

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

The literature revealed a number of explanations for why students lack the motivation to succeed in school. These include the lack of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation in students refers to a quality in a student who is not motivated from within and cannot engage himself or herself in learning out of curiosity, interest, or enjoyment. In other words, this type of student would most likely need a type of reward or incentive to complete the task. They would not be willing to complete a task for the pure enjoyment and challenging nature of it. A student who lacks extrinsic motivation will not complete a task even if there is a reward, or he or she can avoid punishment. Stickers, candy, certificates, public recognition, or punishment will not motivate a student to complete a task (Brewster & Fager, 2000). Students who lack extrinsic motivation also have poor relationships between themselves and their teachers

and their other peers. These students with low extrinsic motivation do not value the rewards that they can get from their relationships (Ravitch, 1992).

Intrinsic Motivation

Students who lack intrinsic motivation do not possess the ability to set high goals for themselves because they don't have the self-esteem to believe they can achieve at a higher level of learning. Students with this mindset "believe that intelligence is fixed, that each person has a certain amount and that's that" (Dweck, 2008, para. 5). Researchers refer to this as a fixed mindset, which makes it difficult for a student to accept challenges because they fear that mistakes would reflect poorly on what they believe is their fixed mindset (Dweck, 2008).

Students who lack self-esteem often don't have positive beliefs about themselves as learners, doubt their ability to learn, and give up quickly when they are faced with challenges. For example, a student who does not believe they are a good reader will hold negative beliefs about their ability to read. As a result, they are not motivated to read on their own and end up disliking reading all together (Mcpherson, 2007). Erika A. Patall, Harris Cooper, and Jorgianne C. Robinson support this belief when they state, "intrinsic motivation has been operationalized as the degree to which participants report enjoying the activity, finding the activity interesting, or being willing to engage in the activity again" (Cooper, Patall, &Robinson, 2008, para. 8). It is not surprising then that children who have low intrinsic motivation will not enjoy the activity because they hold a negative belief about it.

Extrinsic Motivation

      Students who lack extrinsic motivation often do not have a positive relationship with one or more of their teachers. Often times, students may do well in one class and very poorly in another class. An explanation for this occurrence is that the relationship a student has with his or her teacher can affect the overall achievement and effort in the class. If a student does not like his or her teacher, they will not have the motivation to want to please him or her by doing well in the classroom. Gregory P. Montalvo and Eric A. Mansfield support the belief that disliking the teacher can have negative consequences on a student's performance when they state that "Contemporary theories of motivation suggest that the varying levels of effort and persistence observed in different classes and subsequent achievement are, in part, due to internal purposes students have for doing academic activities, and their perceived ability" (Mansfield & Montalvo, 2007, para. 1).

      Students often express the importance and need to have a caring and approachable teacher who provides positive feedback, outside assistance, and shows an interest in students' outside lives. Students are aware of certain teacher characteristics that will benefit them as a learner. Mansfield and Montalvo also note "that caring teachers are in a better position than non-caring teachers to maintain student interest and cooperation in school, and that a student's perception of the teacher as caring or uncaring influences his or her level of engagement in school and their persistence in seeking help" (Mansfield & Montalvo, 2007, para. 2). An individual teacher's whole classroom approach can impair enthusiasm and enjoyment in the classroom if he or she does not create an atmosphere which is conducive to learning (Phillips & Lindsay, 2006). On the other hand, some

teachers do spark student motivation but fumble at maintaining it because they do not have the power to promote long-term learning (Bartholomew, 2008).

In U.S. society, the school system rewards the students who produce high scores on tests and report cards. Ravitch (1992) says that unfortunately the students who get lower grades, but put forth extensive effort, often goes unrecognized. As a result, these students become less motivated and more frustrated. They tend to give up earlier because the work they put in does not get recognized, and they set lower goals for themselves (Ravitch, 1992).

The social relationships in students can also have a detrimental effect on their motivational levels. As students get older their need to belong to a group intensifies, and the peer pressure they encounter can discourage their effort and achievement in the classroom. By the time students become teenagers, the group they associate themselves can also influence the stance they take towards academic achievement. If one particular group frowns upon receiving high grades, then they often discourage each other from getting good grades. Students who do aspire to get good grades are often the source of peer ridicule and are considered to be outcasts in the student culture (Ravitch, 1992). Social reinforcement from peers often plays a role in how a student will act in the future. Achievement beliefs and behaviors that are discouraged by the group will often cause an individual to not repeat the behavior negatively received. Students feel that they receive peer pressure involving the school environment which becomes correlated with their own beliefs and actions (Ryan, 2001). When looking at the level of a student's motivation, researchers tend to explore the interactions the student has with their peers, teachers, and

even parents since the two are often associated with one another (Anderman & Kaplan, 2008).

Along with the relationships students have with their peers, the influence of media and societal changes can also impact the motivation a student has towards school. Linda Lumsden states, "What may have held students' attention forty years ago is not necessarily going to keep today's students interested and engaged in classroom learning…" (Lumsden, 2005, para. 1). Adolescents live in a multi-media society and constantly come into contact with new technology that stimulates their brains. Television, computers, video games, and cell phones are what students are accustomed to seeing and using in their everyday lives. Worksheets and writing on the chalkboard are not going to gain students' attention anymore (Lumsden, 2005).

Overall, students who are more intrinsically motivated achieve more throughout their educational experience. Lumsden argued, "There are many factors that contribute to students' interest and level of engagement in learning, and teachers have little control over many of those factors" (as cited in Brewster & Fager, 2000, para. 2). Anderman argues that, "…research has shown that teachers can influence student motivation; that certain practices do work to increase time spent on task; and that there are ways to make assigned work more engaging and more effective for students at all levels" (as cited in Brewster & Fager, 2000, para. 2). Brooks argued, "Whether the decrease in student engagement is the result of unmotivated students or of school practices that fail to sufficiently interest and engage all learners, an ample body of research suggests that the situation can be changed" (as cited in Brewster & Fager, 2000, para. 6).

CHAPTER 3
THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Review of the Literature

A review of the literature offered six different strategies that can be used to promote student motivation in the classroom. The six strategies focused on are positive feedback, appropriate challenge levels, atmosphere, teacher's role, cooperative learning, and student choice. The most frequently utilized strategies include changes in teaching style, including focus in the classroom on increasing both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Positive Feedback

Giving positive feedback is a successful tool used to increase intrinsic motivation in students who especially have issues with low self-esteem and self-doubt, according to several authors. Barbara Gross Davis (1993) supports this idea when she states that teachers should "give frequent, early, positive feedback that supports students' beliefs that they can do well" (Davis, 1993, para. 3). In fact, not only should teachers emphasize the positive aspect of the work done by the students, but they should also give the students their feedback as soon as possible. Obviously both positive and negative comments need to be addressed, but more research reveals that the positive feedback has a greater affect on students' self motivation (Davis, 1993). Lumsden (2005) believes that when grading students' papers the number right should always be put over the total because it boosts their morale when they recognize how many answers they got correct instead of seeing how many they got wrong. It is also a good idea for teachers to let the rest of the class know when an individual student did well and to share that student's accomplishments with them, according to Davis (1993).

Appropriate Challenge Levels

Intrinsic motivation can also be increased when teachers make sure they offer appropriate levels of challenges for the students in their classes. Teachers need to encourage their students to choose the level of challenge that is most appropriate for his or her own individual learning. David Suarez (2007) explains that "choosing tasks that were too hard or too easy would lead to less than ideal stress levels: Tasks that were just challenging enough would make learning interesting but not overwhelming" (para. 7). A basic learning principle states that success is more predictably motivating than failure. If a task is too challenging for a student then their stress level increases and their motivation to complete it decreases often resulting in failure for the student. Most often it is important for a teacher to recognize the level an individual student is at and to create realistic goals for him or her. As the student works to reach those goals, the teacher needs to provide informative feedback along the way (Weller, 2005).

Atmosphere

The atmosphere that a teacher creates in the classroom plays a significant role in both the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation that is possessed by the student. The teacher's enthusiasm, organization of the class, active involvement of the students, and rapport with the students can all create a positive learning environment. Even the physical environment of the classroom can encourage learning. For example, a classroom with bright colored signs, student work, and manipulatives all over the room invites exploration, conveys high expectations, and portrays the teacher's love for his or her subject matter (Lumsden, 2005).

Teacher's Role

Besides the physical atmosphere of the classroom, the role of the teacher also has

an effect on a student's motivational level. Since the country has turned into a technology

advanced society that creates brain stimulating devises, students need to be stimulated in

the same way in the classroom. Teachers need to present material through a variety of

sensory modalities in order to reach all students in the class and capture their attention in

an active way. Students want and need work that stimulates their curiosity and arouses

their desire for deep understanding (Lumsden, 2005).

The teacher's rapport with his or her students can impact the amount of effort they

put forth in the class. Many studies indicate that when a student has a good relationship

with the teacher, they are more motivated to learn. Mansfield, Miller, and Montalvo

(2007) stated that the characteristics that teachers possessed that led their students to have

a higher level of motivation were reported to have:

> (1) gone out of their way to help, (2) provided positive, confidence-building
>
> feedback, (3) done unnecessary things to be nice, (4) respected and trusted
>
> students and (5) spaced the workload so students did not feel overwhelmed. The
>
> researchers also found that students indicate that peers behaved similarly for
>
> teachers they like and teachers they dislike, but that effort and quality of work
>
> changed. When students like the teacher their effort and quality of work improves.
>
> (p. 145)

Cooperative Learning

Many researchers agree that using cooperative learning in the classroom can

benefit all students in the classroom, whether the student is gifted, low-achieving, or a

student with special needs (Augustine, Gruber, & Hanson, 1989/ 1990). Performance in the classroom is increased because students are provided with more opportunities for interactions with their peers, experiences that allow students to work with the material hands-on, and physical movement, which many teachers feel is a successful motivational strategy (Hootstein, 1994). Middle school students, in particular, feel most comfortable when they are interacting with their peers. Anytime social interaction is incorporated into the classroom, the students' motivational levels increase. The students are more willing to participate and show their intelligence when they are working within a small group rather than when they are individually singled out (Willis, 2007).

Student Choice

Finally, teachers can encourage student engagement and motivation for learning in the classroom through the use of student choice. There are many benefits to allowing students to make their own choices, especially with middle school students. Students find that making their own choices is motivating because they are given the opportunity to make their own decisions. Choice has a powerful motivating effect because students are more likely to be engaged in the activity if they believe they had chosen it (Patall, Cooper & Robinson, 2008). For example, if a student is able to pick an interest-based reading book, their intrinsic motivation for reading is most likely going to increase, which would positively affect their reading comprehension (Guthrie, et al, 2006).

When they make their own decisions, they are also learning the important skill of reflecting on their choices and personal learning, so they can adjust tasks accordingly to meet their needs (Suarez, 2007). Amy Robinson, Harvey F. Silver, and Richard Strong (1995) state:

People who are engaged in their work are driven by four essential goals, each of

which satisfies a particular need: (a) success (the need for mastery), (b) curiosity

(the need for understanding), (c) originality (the need for self-expression), (d)

relationships (the need for involvement with others), and (e) energy. (pg. 95)

Wasserstein (1995) says that students crave the ability to pursue their own areas of

interest on more enlightening and challenging tasks because the victory of finishing it

empowers them

When giving authentic assessments to students, teachers need to allow student

choice by offering different options of questions that can be completed. When students

see these options, they can apply their strengths and specific learning styles and answer

the questions that best suit them. Every student has a different learning modality, and if

the teacher creates a test that fits his or her style of learning, then every student has a

chance to be a successful learner. Students can also be given a wide variety of ways to

demonstrate what they know and in a manner they are most comfortable with when

taking an assessment (Burke, 2005).

The six strategies mentioned have been found to increase both intrinsic and

extrinsic motivation. Student choice along with cooperative learning, the teacher's role in

the classroom, positive feedback, appropriate level of challenges, and atmosphere are all

tools that can be utilized to positively enhance student motivation in the classroom.

Project Objective and Processing Statements

As a result of giving students choices in the following areas: curriculum, assignment, assessment, and grouping strategies, during the periods of October 6, 2008 through December 12, 2008, the teacher researchers hope their middle school students will increase their motivation in homework completion and participation, as measured by surveys, observations, and reflections,.

The following task had to be accomplished before the implementation of the interventions:

- Develop a unit that allows for student choice on curricular assignments, group work, and assessment.

Project Action Plan

September

15-19 Week 1	Prior intervention: consent forms
22-26 Week 2	Pre-interventions: baseline data
29-3 Week 3	1. participation checklist
	2. reflections
	3. surveys
	4. analysis

October

6-10 Week 4	Group choice/ reflect
13-17 Week 5	Curriculum and Assignment choice/ reflect
20-24 Week 6	Assessment choice/ reflect
27-31 Week 7	Group choice/ reflect

November

3-7 Week 8	Curriculum and Assignment choice/ reflect
10-14 Week 9	Assessment choice/ reflect
17-21 Week 10	Group choice/ reflect
24-28 Week 11	Curriculum and Assignment choice/ reflect

December
1-5 Week 12   Assessment choice/ reflect

8-12 Week 13   Student surveys and reflections
January
Week 14-16   Post-intervention:
                                                   1. Compile data
                                                   2. Analyze data
                                                   3. Make recommendations

Methods of Assessment

Prior to the implementation of the interventions on October 6, 2008 through

December 5, 2008, the teacher researchers at the Middle School gathered baseline data

through the use of surveys, student reflections, and participation checklists. The teacher

researchers analyzed the data that demonstrated the students' pre-intervention level of

motivation in the classroom. Teacher researchers used participation checklists to tally the

amount of participation in a given period.

In addition, the teacher researchers used reflective questions during the time

period of October 6, 2008 to December 5, 2008. After allowing student choice on

curriculum, grouping, and assessment, students reflected on a question based on student

choice.

The student post-intervention surveys, student reflections, and participation

checklist was re-administered on December 12, 2008 in order to compare to the pre-

intervention data and determine if any changes had been made.

CHAPTER 4
PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

This research project was designed to increase motivation in 101 seventh- grade students. The need to increase student motivation was based on low test scores, lack of participation in classroom activities, incomplete homework assignments, and disinterest in becoming independent learners. To accomplish this objective, the researchers gave the students choice in four different areas: curriculum, group work, homework, and assessment. The interventions were implemented for a ten week period, September 15, 2008, through January 9, 2009.

To establish the existence of the problem, the researchers developed a participation checklist that was charted pre and post intervention. A student survey was given to determine the students' perceptions on their motivation to participate, to work in groups, to complete homework, and to perform on tests. Before and after the intervention strategies, the students were given reflection questions that referred to choice in curriculum, choice on homework, choice on group work, and choice on assessment.

Before beginning the interventions, we prepared a participation checklist, student survey, and reflection questions. While observing the students in a fifty-minute class period, we used the participation checklist to record student behaviors. We also gave the students a student survey to complete which gave us an understanding of the different areas a student can be motivated in the classroom. After gathering the results of the checklist and survey, we were given a better idea on which specific behaviors needed to be addressed in order to improve student motivation.

During the week of October 6th, we had the students answer reflective questions regarding their thoughts on group choice. Once we collected and reviewed their responses, we allowed them to work with whoever they wanted for a specific activity. After the activity and intervention was completed, the students were given the same reflection questions to answer. The data was collected and reviewed.

The following week, the students completed reflective questions that asked about curriculum and assignment choices. We allowed our classes to choose the subject matter they would want to participate in. The students were then able to choose their assignment they wanted to complete which was geared towards the subject. After the subjects were studied and completed in our classes, we administered the same reflection questions to the students. The data was collected and reviewed.

The last intervention we implemented took place during the week of October 27th. The students completed the last set of reflection questions regarding their feeling of choice on assessment. The students were given the option of completing either a multiple choice or essay test. After the students finished the test, they again answered the same reflection questions to see if their thoughts on assessment changed. The data was collected and reviewed.

Finally, we re-administered the student survey and compiled the data to determine if there were any changes in the students' answers. We also observed our class after the interventions and completed a participation checklist.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

Observation Checklist

The Observation Checklist was used to informally observe 98 seventh grade students in physical education, science, and reading on the following behaviors: attentiveness, off task behavior, cooperation, disruptiveness, independent work, and participation.
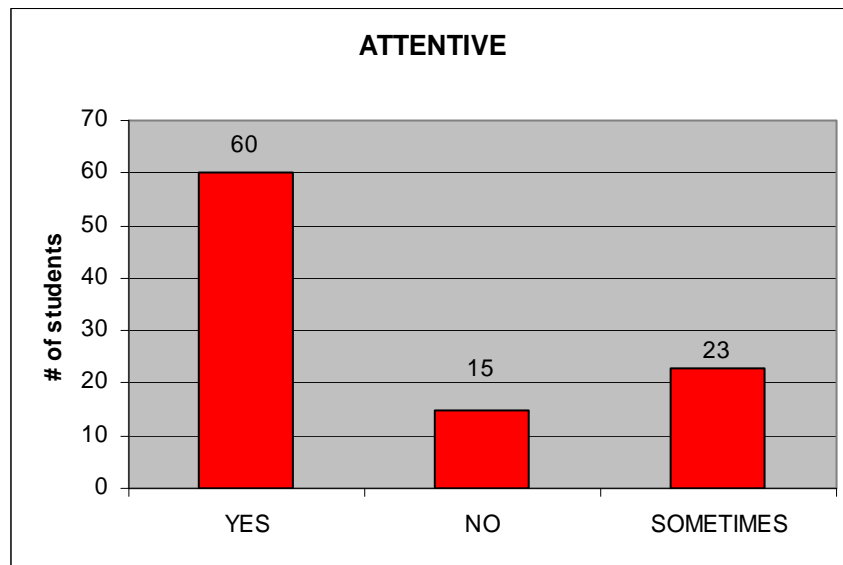
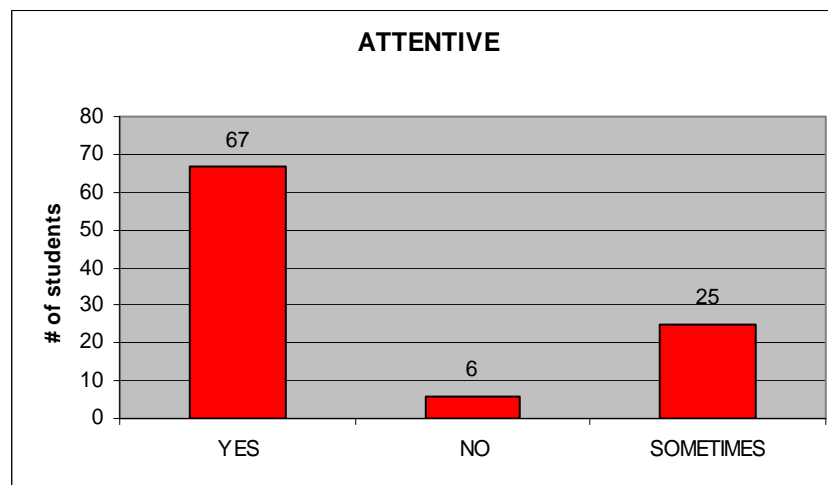*Figure 24: Pre-intervention, observation checklist – attentive*

Figure 25: Post-intervention, observation checklist – attentive

Figures 24 and 25 showed that the number of students who were attentive during the

class activity rose by seven after the interventions were implemented. More importantly,

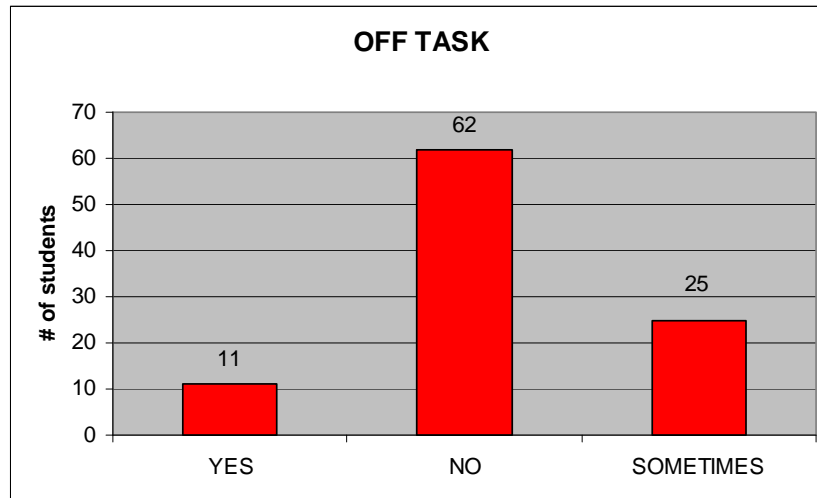the number of students who were not attentive decreased.

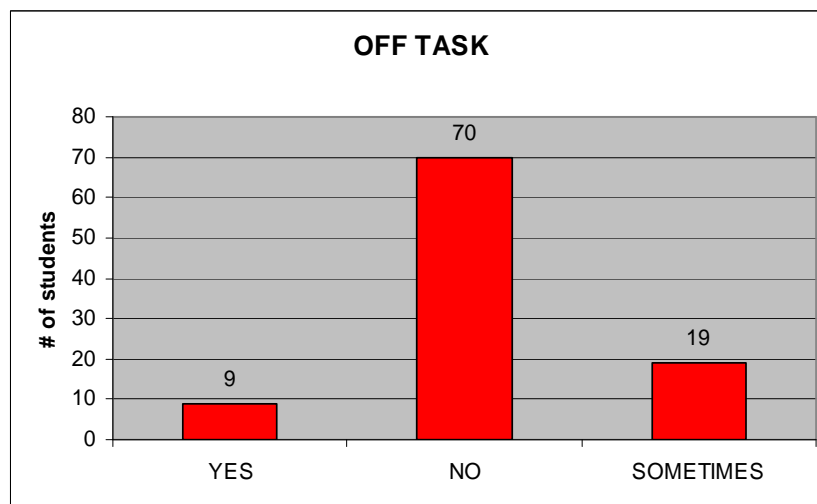*Figure 26: Pre-intervention, observation checklist – off task*

Figure 27: Post-intervention, observation checklist – off task

The results concerning off-task behavior reveal that the students who were not off-task increased by eight students after the interventions were implemented. Moreover, the students that were sometimes off-task decreased by six.
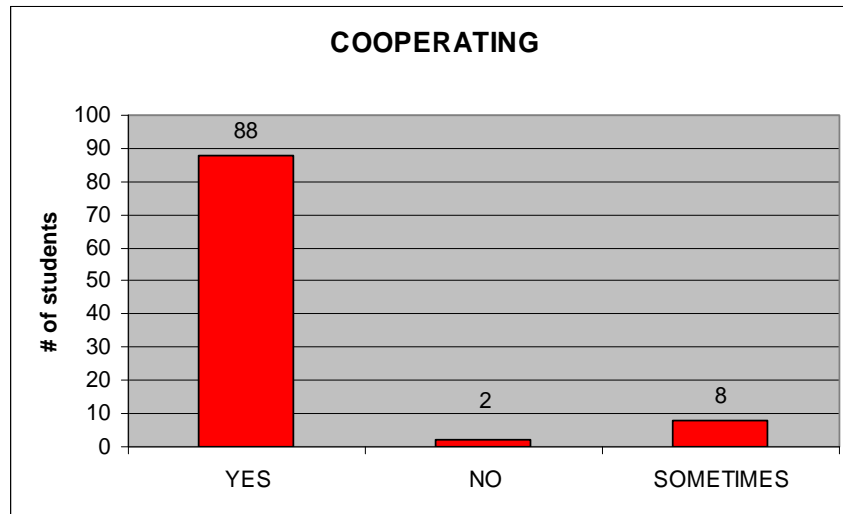
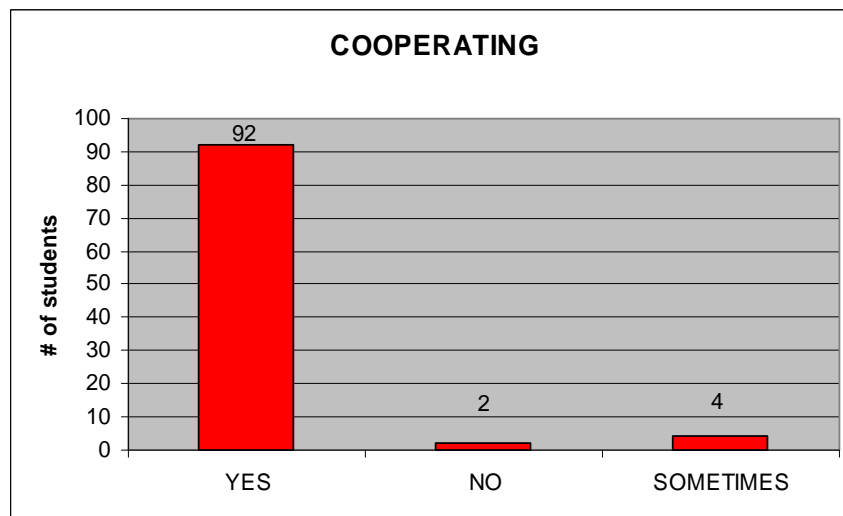*Figure 28: Pre-intervention, observation checklist – cooperating*

Figure 29: Post-intervention, observation checklist – cooperating

The above results show that the number of students cooperating on a task post-intervention increased by 4 students. The number of students who did not cooperate stayed the same.
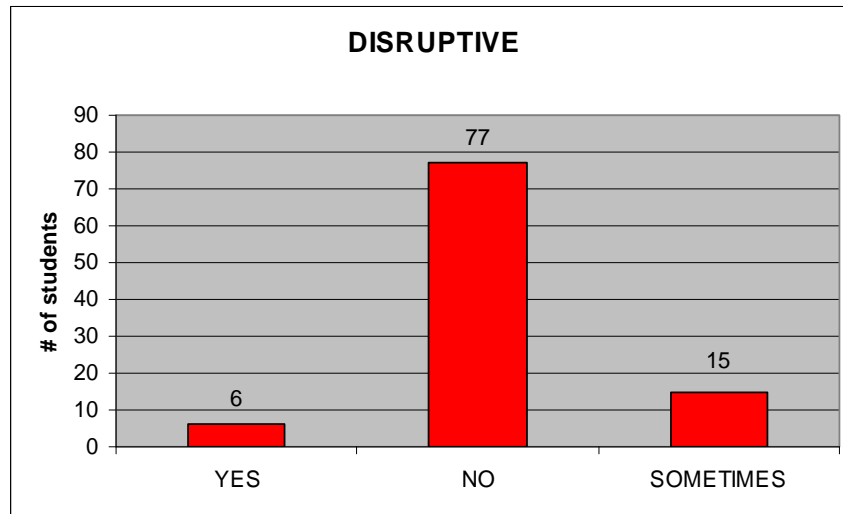
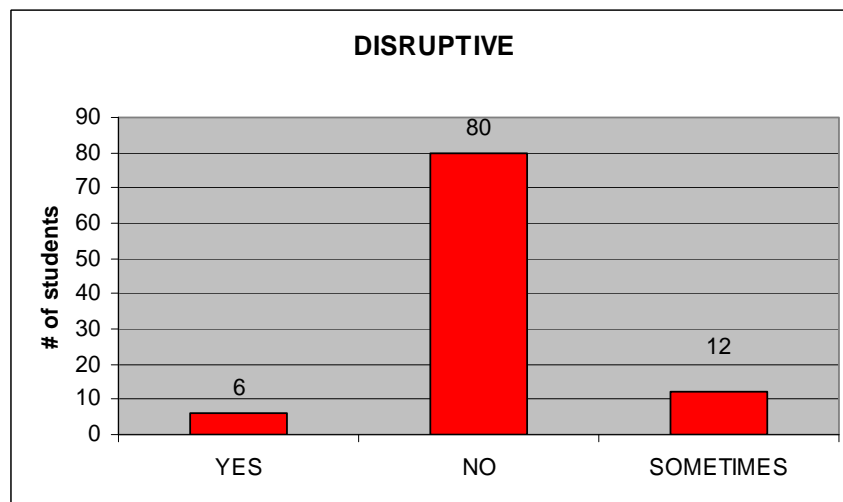*Figure 30: Pre-intervention, observation checklist – disruptive*

Figure 31: Post-intervention, observation checklist – disruptive

The results concerning disruptive behavior in class revealed that 3 more students were not disruptive after the interventions. The number of students who were disruptive in class stayed the same at six.
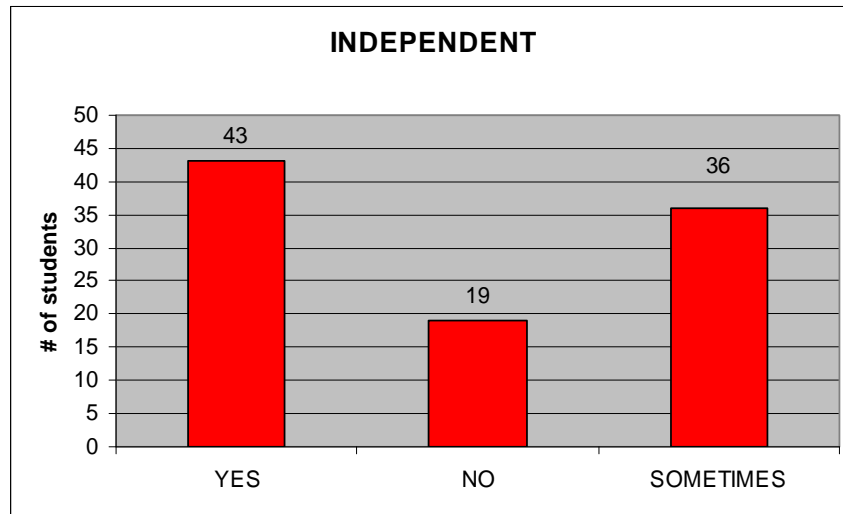
Figure 32: Pre-intervention, observation checklist – independent

Figure 33: Post-intervention, observation checklist – independent

It is important to note that the results in the figure above demonstrate that the number of students who were able to work independently post interventions increased by 25 students. A significant decrease in the number of students who sometimes worked independently (n= 23) and did not work independently (n=12) was observed post interventions
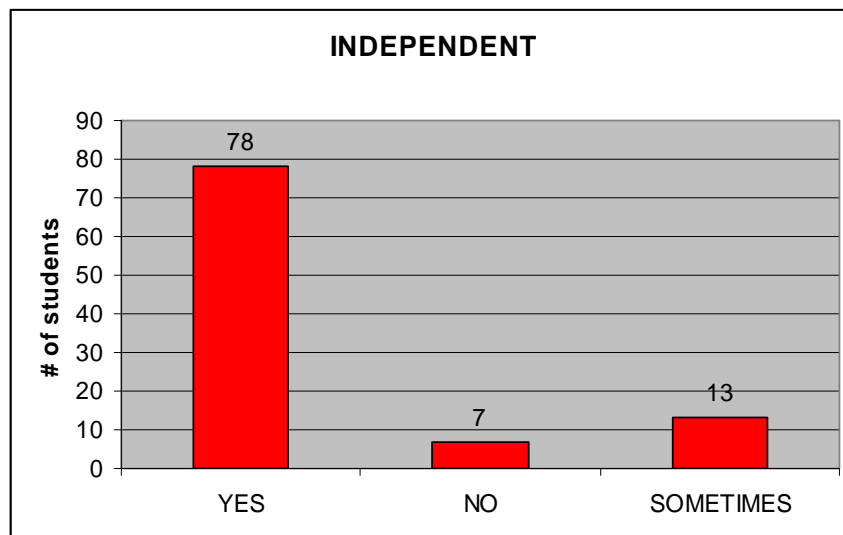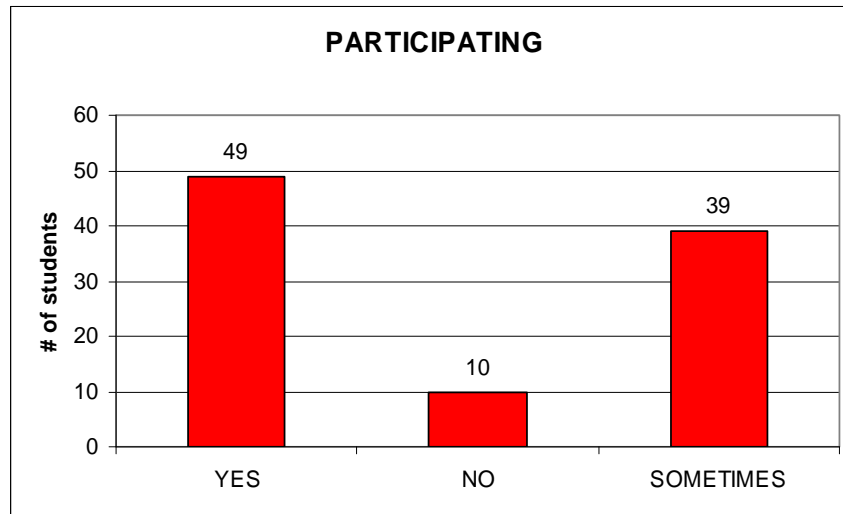
Figure 34: Pre-intervention, observation checklist – participating
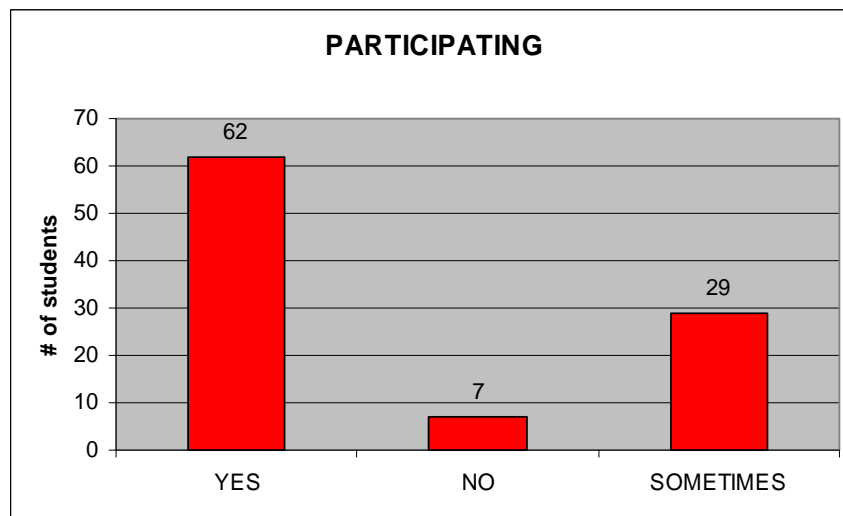
Figure 35: Post-intervention, observation checklist – participating

Following the implementation of interventions, it was observed that 13 more students were actively participating in classroom activities and the number of students who now sometimes participated in class rose by 10, while those not participating decreased by 3.

Student Survey

The Student Survey, made up of 10 questions, was designed to assess the students'

overall perspectives on their motivation to participate, to work in groups, to complete

homework, and to perform on tests. The survey was administered to 120 seventh grade

students in physical education, science, and reading.

On a scale of 1-10, 10 being the best, how much do I enjoy school?
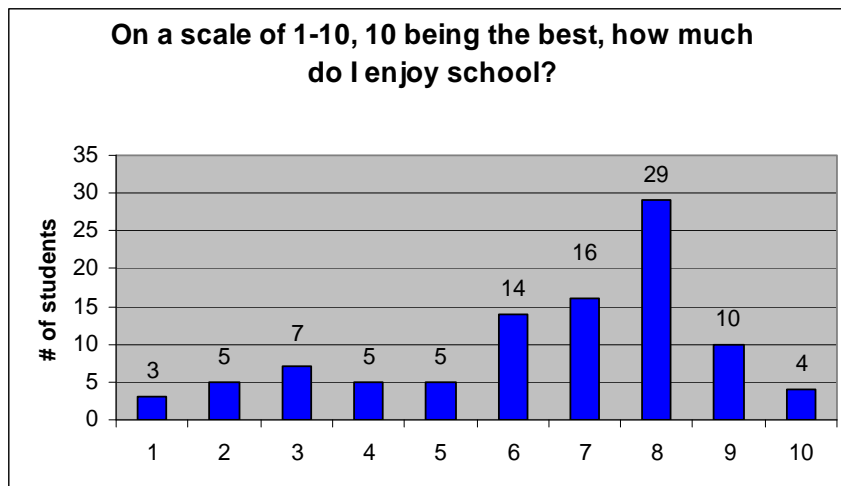
Figure 36: Pre-intervention student survey – On a scale of 1-10, 10 being the best, how much do I enjoy class?

On a scale of 1 - 10, 10 being the best, how much do I enjoy school?
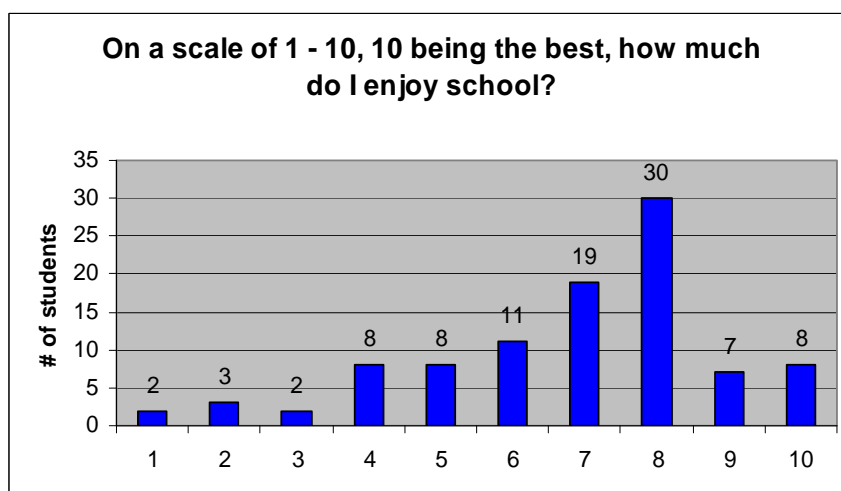
Figure 37: Post-intervention student survey – On a scale of 1-10, 10 being the best, how much do I enjoy class?

In figures 36 and 37, students responded to Question One which asked them to rate on a scale from 1-10, 10 being the best, how much they enjoy school. According to the pre and post-intervention student surveys the majority of students reported enjoying school at about an eight. The number of students who rated their enjoyment of school on a level of 6-10, compared to the students who rated it on a level of 1-5 increased by 2 students.
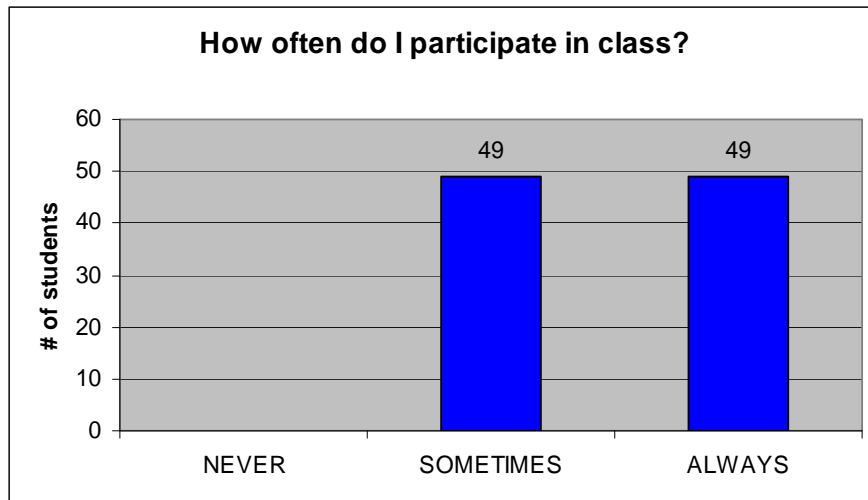
Figure 38: Pre-intervention student survey – How often do I participate in class?
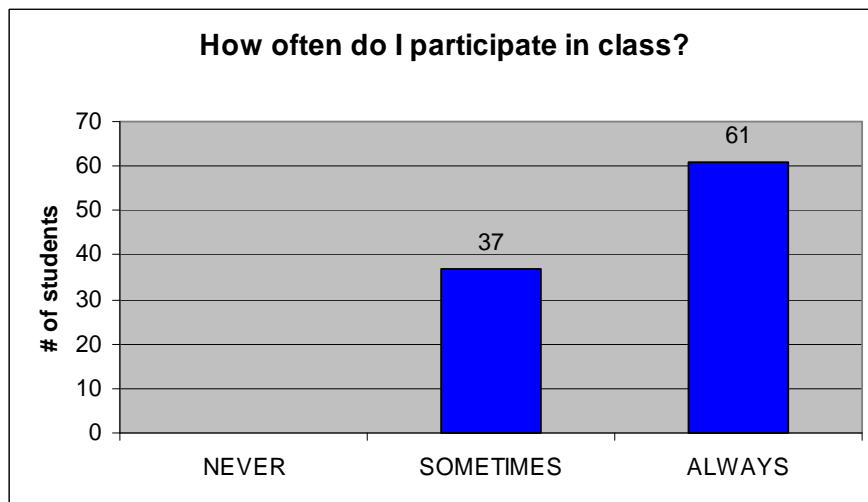
Figure 39: Post-intervention student survey – How often do I participate in class?

In figures 38 and 39, students responded to Question Two which asked them how often they participated in class. Prior to the interventions, the same number of students reported sometimes and always participating in class. Both the pre and post-intervention surveys found no students reporting never participating in class.

Does my participation depend on my interest of the subject?
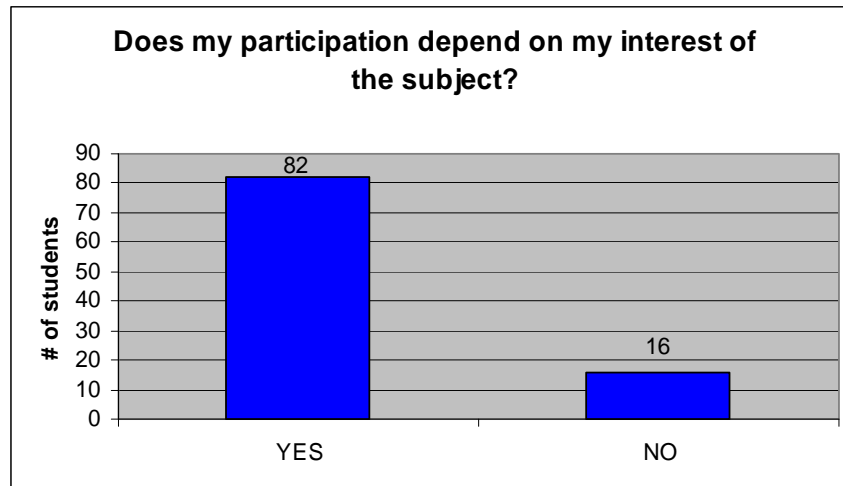
Figure 40: Pre-intervention student survey – Does my participation depend on my interest of the subject?

Does my participation in class depend on my interest of the subject area?
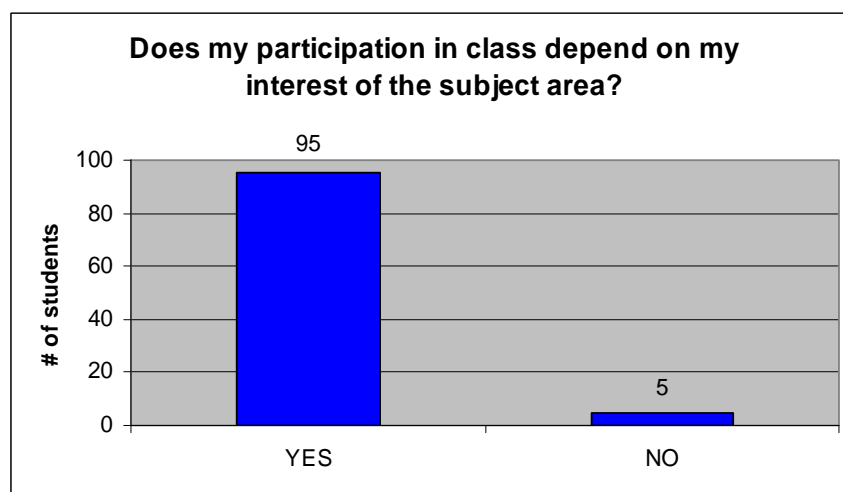
Figure 41: Post-intervention student survey – Does my participation depend on my interest of the subject?

In figures 40 and 41, the students responded to Question Three which asked them if their participation in class is dependent on their interest of the subject area. The post-intervention surveys marked a slight decrease in the number of students whose participation in class did not depend upon their interest of the subject area, while 13 more students reported that their participation in class did depend on their interest level of the subject area.

I feel I am offered choices about what and how I learn in the classroom?
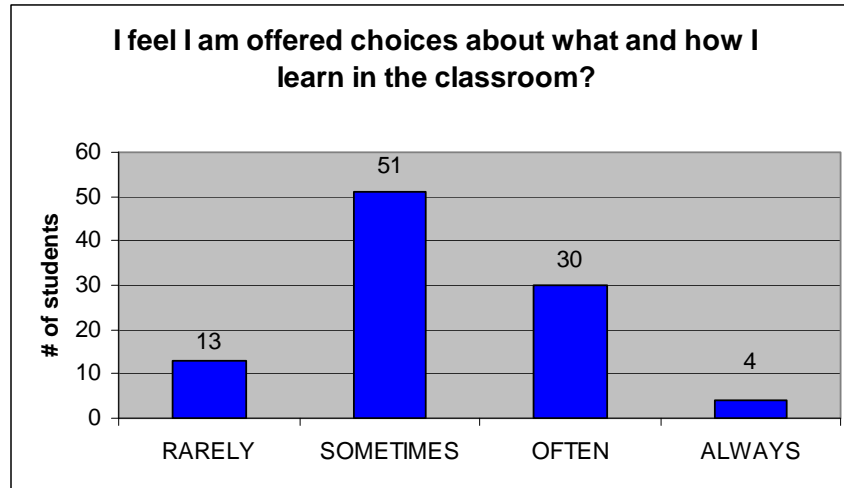
Figure 42: Pre-intervention survey – I feel I am offered choice about what and how I learn in the classroom?

I feel I am offered choices about what and how I learn in the classroom
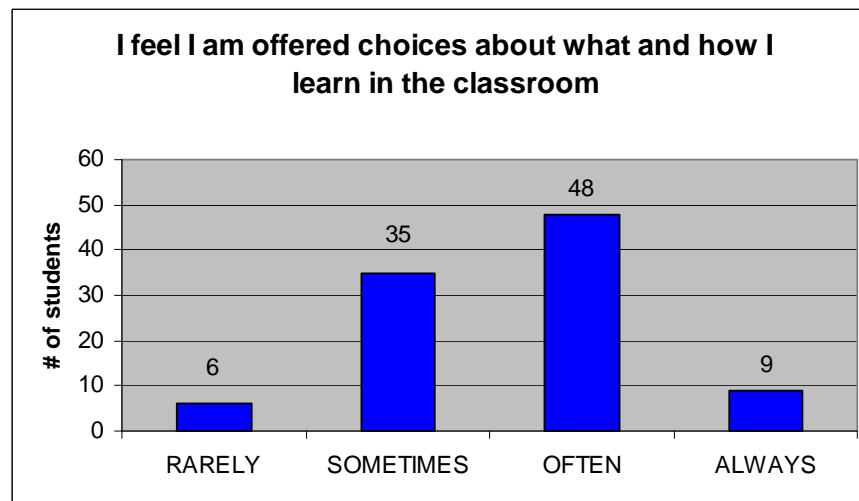
Figure 43: Post-intervention survey – I feel I am offered choice about what and how I learn in the classroom?

In figures 42 and 43, the students responded to Question Four which asked if they felt they were offered choice in the classroom. The post-intervention survey showed that the students who felt they were often and always offered choice increased from 34 to 57, while the students who felt they sometimes and rarely were given a choice decreased from 64 to 41.

Do I work better in groups or independently?

```
# of students
80 ┤              69
70 ┤           ┌──────┐
60 ┤           │      │
50 ┤           │      │
40 ┤           │      │        29
30 ┤           │      │     ┌──────┐
20 ┤           │      │     │      │
10 ┤           │      │     │      │
 0 ┴───────────┴──────┴─────┴──────┴──
              GROUPS       INDEPENDENTLY
```
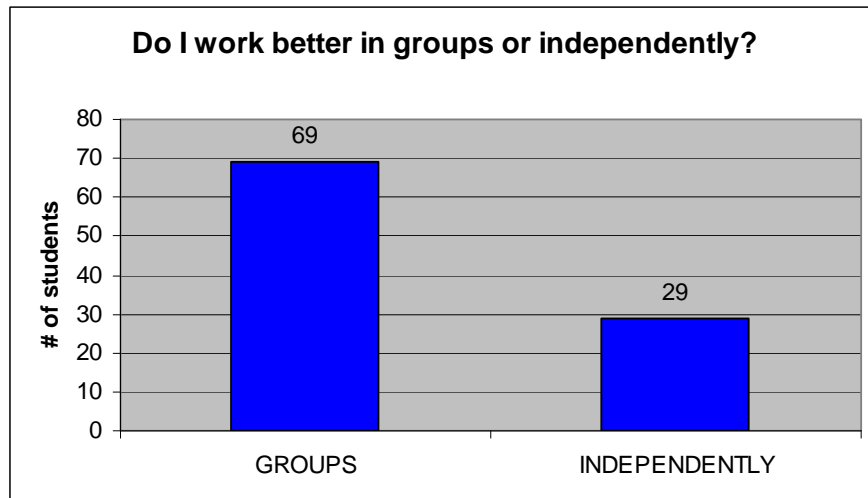
Figure 44: Pre-intervention student survey – Do I work better in groups or independently?

Do I work better in groups or independently?

```
# of students
100 ┤
 90 ┤              87
 80 ┤           ┌──────┐
 70 ┤           │      │
 60 ┤           │      │
 50 ┤           │      │
 40 ┤           │      │
 30 ┤           │      │
 20 ┤           │      │        11
 10 ┤           │      │     ┌──────┐
  0 ┴───────────┴──────┴─────┴──────┴──
               GROUPS       INDEPENDENTLY
```
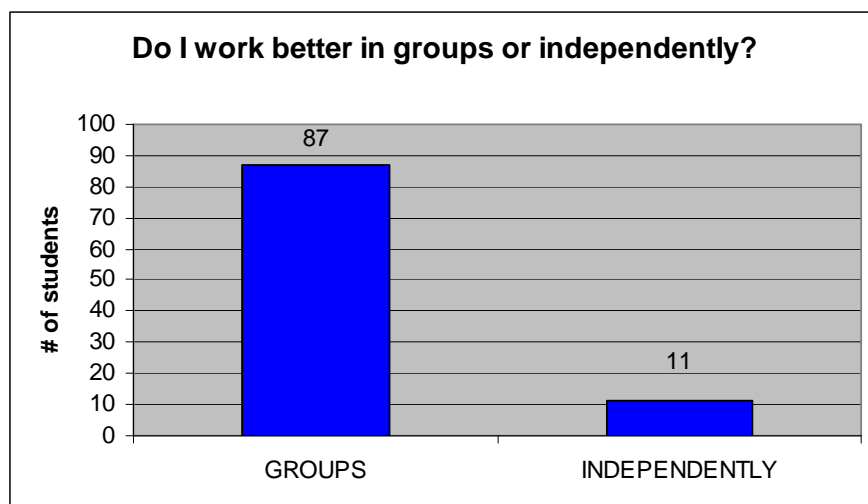
Figure 45: Post-intervention student survey – Do I work better in groups or independently?

In figures 44 and 45, the students responded to Question Five which asked if they work better in groups or independently. After observing the results of the post-observation student survey, the amount of students who felt they work better in groups significantly rose by 18 from 69 to 87 students.

I choose my groups according to:
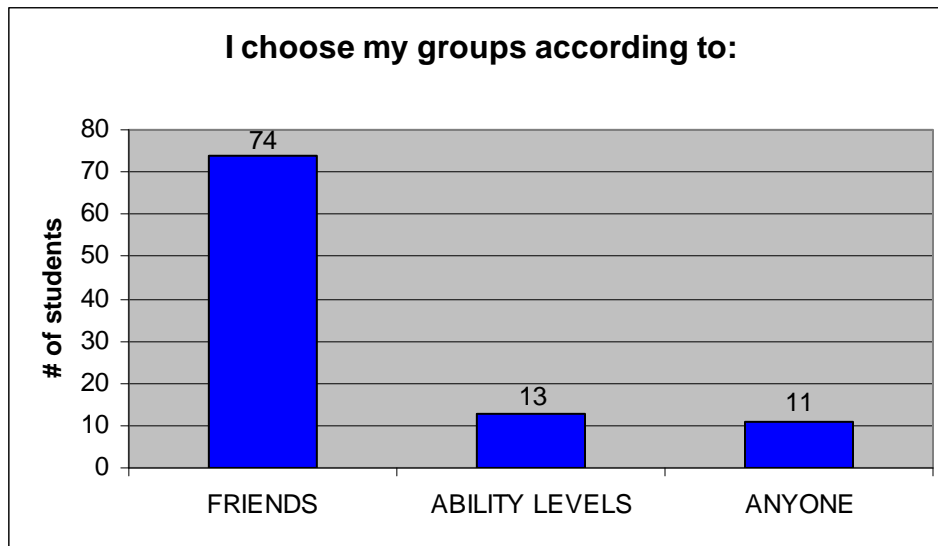
Figure 46: Pre-intervention survey – I choose my groups according to...

I choose my groups according to:
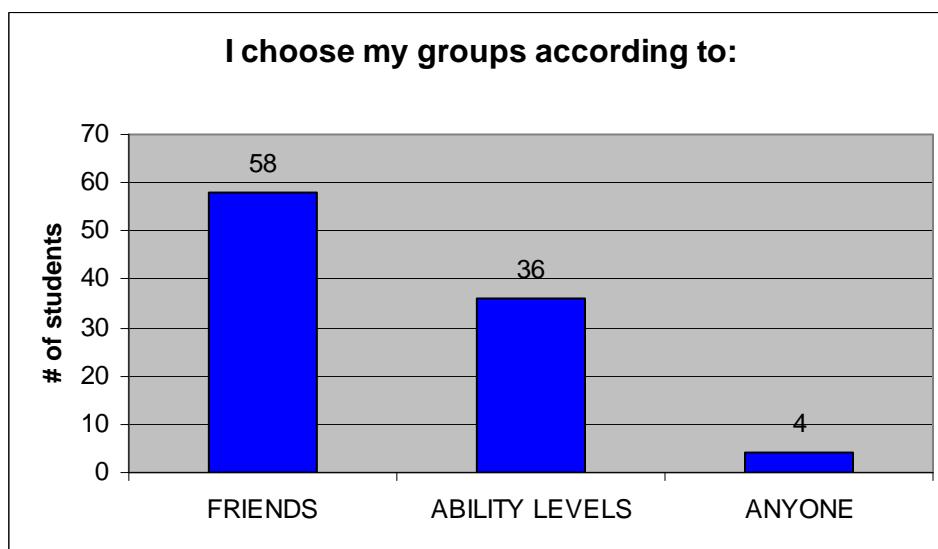
Figure 47: Post-intervention survey – I choose my groups according to...

In figures 46 and 47, the students responded to Question Six which asked them how they usually chose their groups. After the interventions, the students who said they chose their groups according to their friends decreased by 16 from 74 to 58. Conversely, the students who said they chose their groups by ability level rose by 23 from 13 to 36.
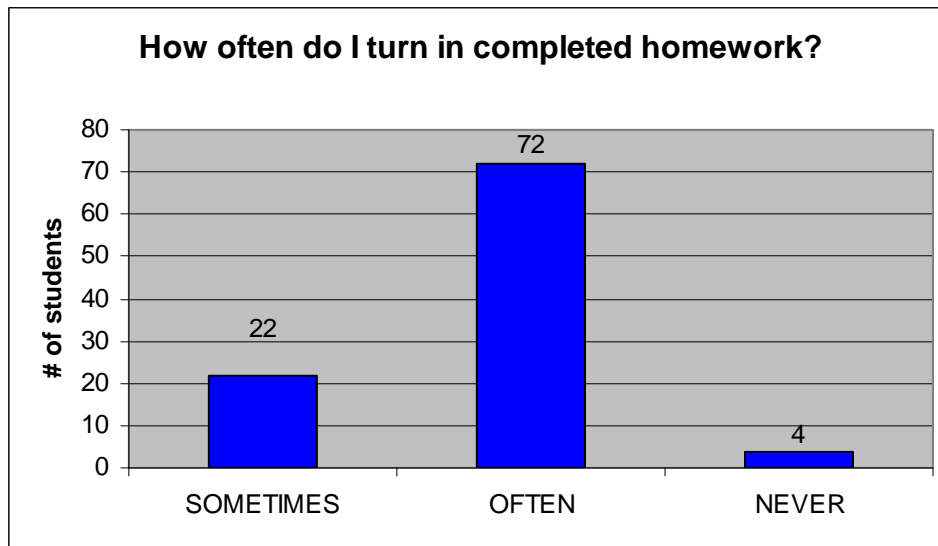
Figure 48: Pre-intervention survey – How often do I turn in completed homework?
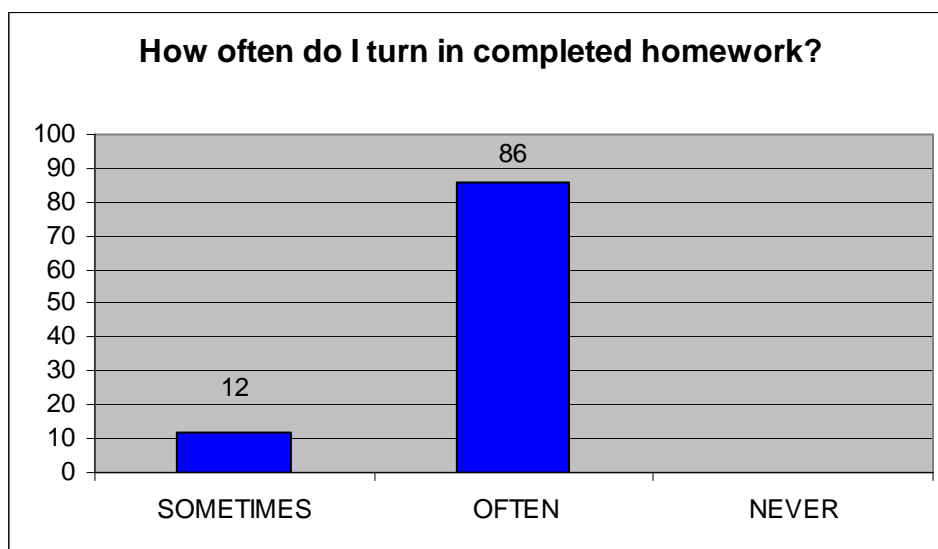
Figure 49: Post-intervention survey – How often do I turn in homework?

In figures 48 and 49, the students responded to Question Seven which asked how often they felt they turned in their homework. The post-observation survey revealed that the number of students who often turned in their homework increased from 72 to 86, while the number of students who never turned in their homework decreased from 4 to 0.

I complete my homework because:
(circle all that apply)
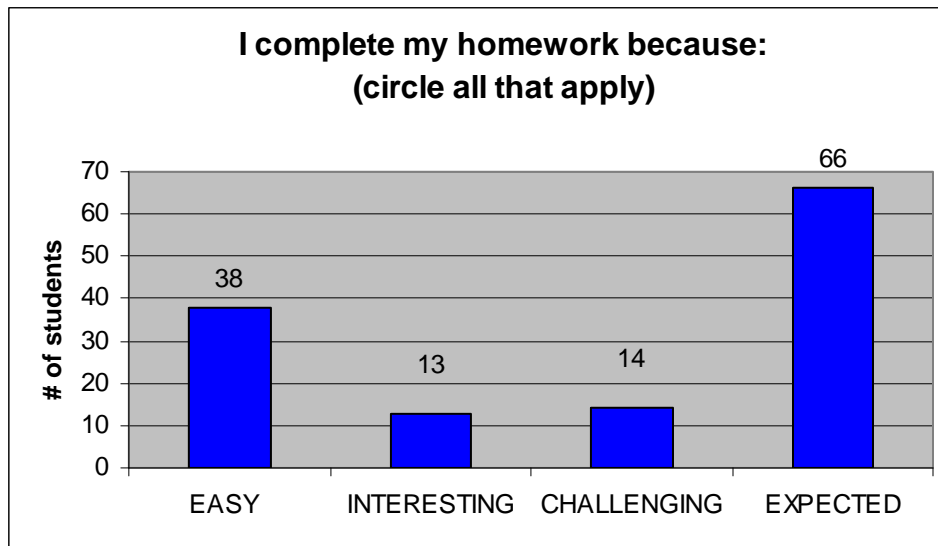
Figure 50: Pre-intervention survey – I complete my homework because…

I complete my homework because:
(circle all that apply)
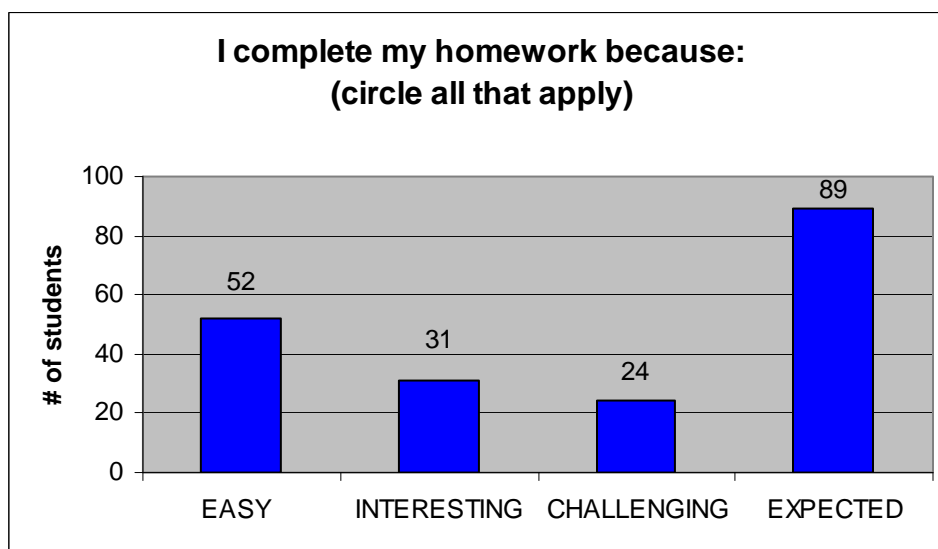
Figure 51: Post-intervention survey – I complete my homework because…

In figures 50 and 51, the students responded to Question Eight which asked the students why they feel they completed their homework. An increase was noted in each of the four given reasons for completing homework post- interventions. The majority of students completed homework because it was expected before and after interventions.

I prefer to take tests that are: (circle all that apply)

83

58

62

14

13

# of studenys

MULTIPLE CHOICE ESSAY SHORT ANSWER TRUE/FALSE MATCHING
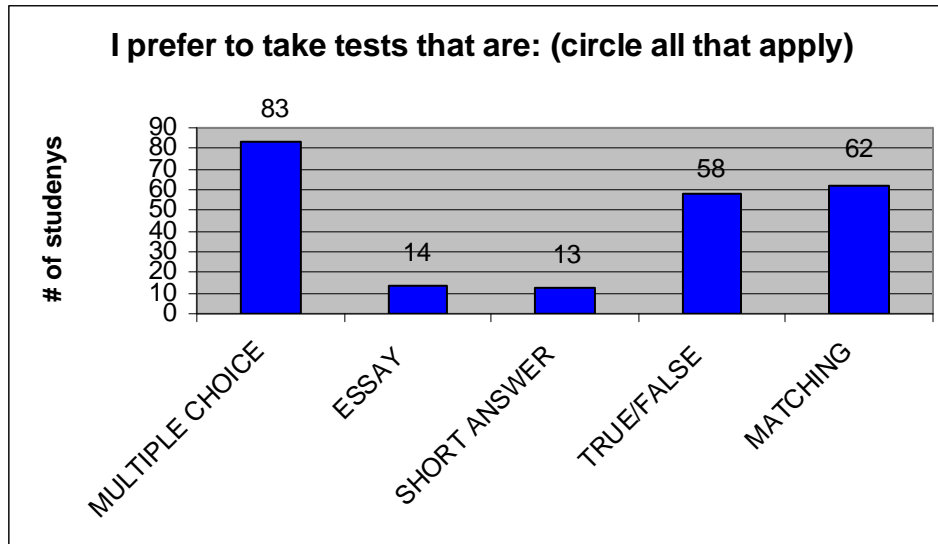
Figure 52: Pre-intervention survey – I prefer to take tests that are…

I prefer to take tests that are: (circle all that aply)

92

55

60

37

21

# of students

MULTIPLE CHOICE ESSAY SHORT ANSWER TRUE/FALSE MATCHING
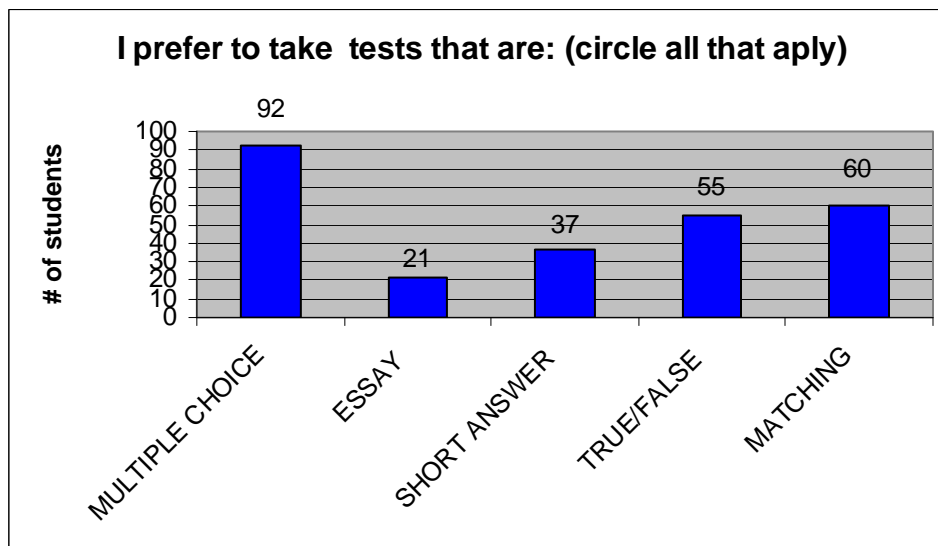
Figure 53: Post-intervention survey – I prefer to take tests that are…

In figures 52 and 53, the students responded to Question Nine which asked them if they

preferred tests that were multiple choice, essay, short answer, true/false, or matching.

After the interventions were implemented, the number of students wanting multiple

choice, essay and short answer tests increased, and the number of students wanting

true/false and matching decreased.

Reflection Questions

Before each intervention strategy, 120 seventh grade students in physical education, science, and reading were asked to reflect on journal questions pertaining to the intervention strategies in the areas of curriculum, grouping, homework, and assessment.

Curriculum Pre-intervention Reflection Question #1 Responses

3%
4%
13%
13%
50%
17%

Strengths
Interest
Freedom
Enjoyment
Success
Rather Be Told
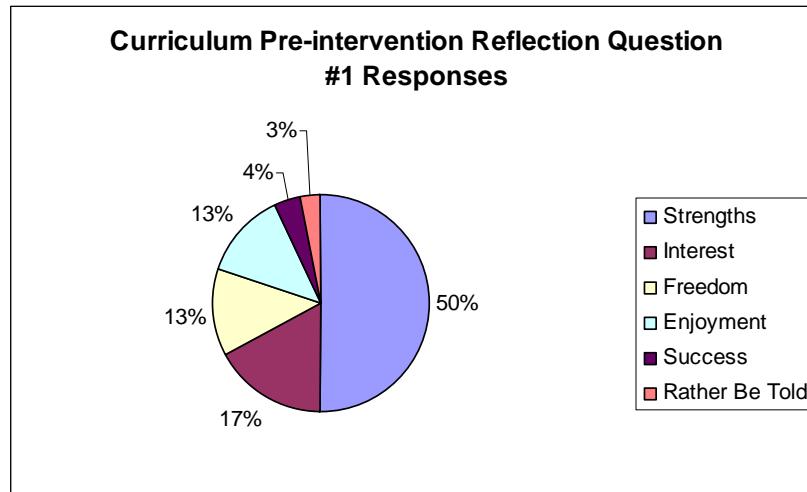
Figure 54: Pre-intervention reflection questions – Curriculum #1

Curriculum Post-intervention Reflection Question #1 Responses

12%
1%
24%
38%
8%
17%

Strengths
Interest
Freedom
Enjoyment
Success
Rather Be Told

Figure 55: Post-intervention reflection questions – Curriculum #1

In figures 54 and 55, the students were asked in the first curriculum reflection question to describe their feelings on being offered a choice of what they were learning. The amount of students who chose their subject matter based on their strengths or what they felt they were good at decreased by 12%. However, students who chose their subject matter based on enjoyment or success increased by 11% and 8% respectively.

Curriculum Pre-intervention Reflection Question #2 Responses

8%

Yes
No

92%
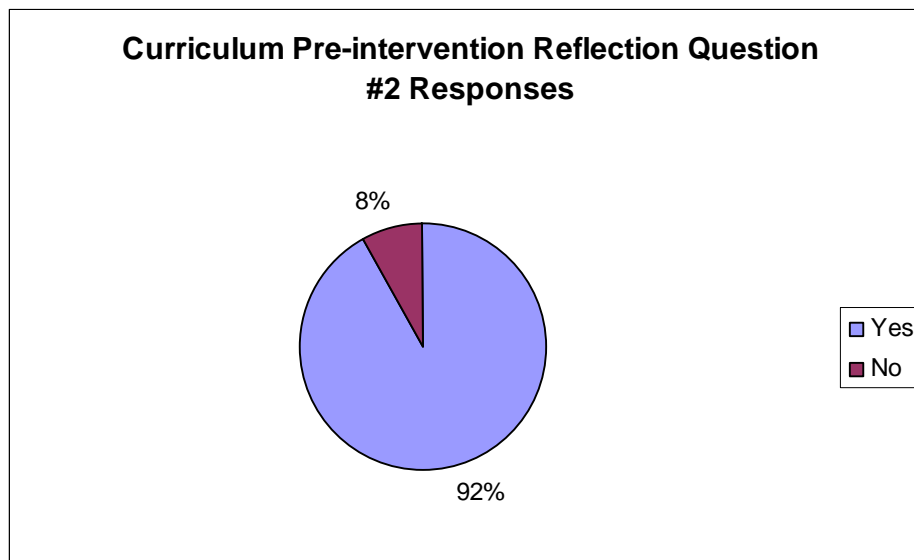
Figure 56: Pre-intervention reflection questions – Curriculum #2

Curriculum Post-intervention Reflection Question #2 Responses

6%

Yes
No

94%
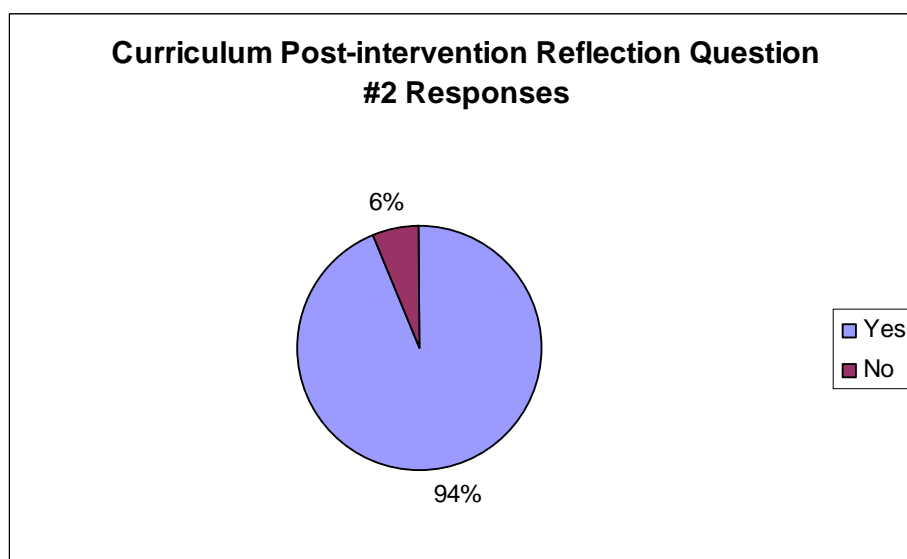
Figure 57: Post-intervention reflection questions – Curriculum #2

In figures 56 and 57, the students were asked in the second reflection question regarding curriculum if they feel they are more motivated to learn within a subject they pick. An overwhelming 92% of students who replied "yes" prior to interventions increased by 2% after interventions.

Group Pre-intervention Reflection Question #1 Responses

Friends
Intelligence Level
Diversity of Strengths
Responsible / Trustworthy / Hard Working

4% 5%
5%
86%
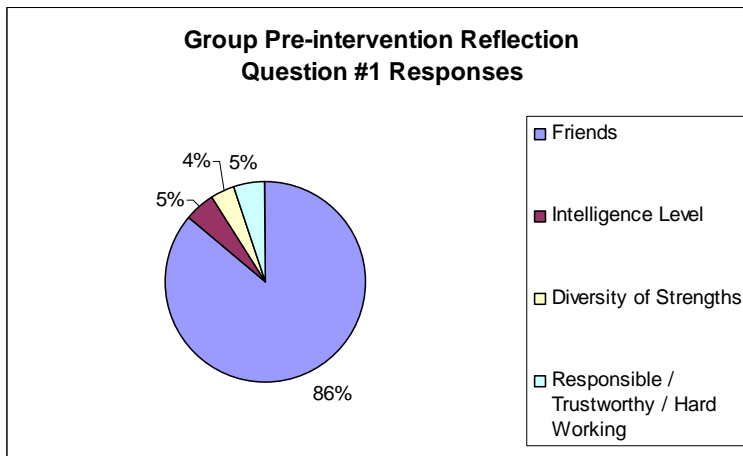
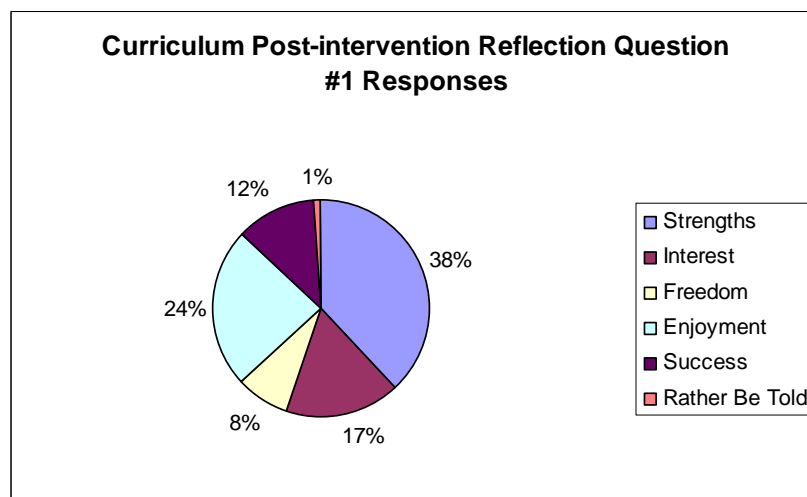*Figure 58: Pre-intervention reflection questions – Group #1*

Group Post-intervention Reflection Question #1 Responses

24%
4%
72%

Friends
Intelligence Level
Diversity of Strengths

Figure 59: Post-intervention reflection questions – Group #1

In figures 58 and 59, the students responded to the first reflection question inquiring about the choice of groups which asked them how they select group members to work with. Before interventions, a majority of students, 86%, stated that they choose groups according to their friends. After interventions, the number of students who choose groups according to their friends decreased by 14%, while the number of students who choose their groups based on the diversity of strengths increased by 20%.

**Group Pre-intervention Reflection
Question #2 Responses**

3%
5%
2%
13%
57%
20%

- Cooperation
- Participation
- Smart
- Trust
- Works Hard
- Good Communication

Figure 60: Pre-intervention reflection questions – Group #2

**Group Post-intervention Reflection Question #2
Responses**

5%
9%
48%
38%

- Cooperation
- Participation
- Smart
- Good Communication

Figure 61: Post-intervention reflection questions – Group #2

In figures 60 and 61, the students responded to the second reflection question regarding

group choice which asked them which characteristics they feel make a group work well

together. After interventions, fewer students felt that cooperation made a group work well

together. The number of students, 20%, who felt active participation by students, was an

important component of group work jumped by 18% after interventions.

Homework Pre-intervention Reflection Question #1 Responses

- Easiest — 35%
- Shortest — 7%
- Interesting — 18%
- Challenging — 9%
- Appropriate Level — 10%
- Good At / Know More About — 21%
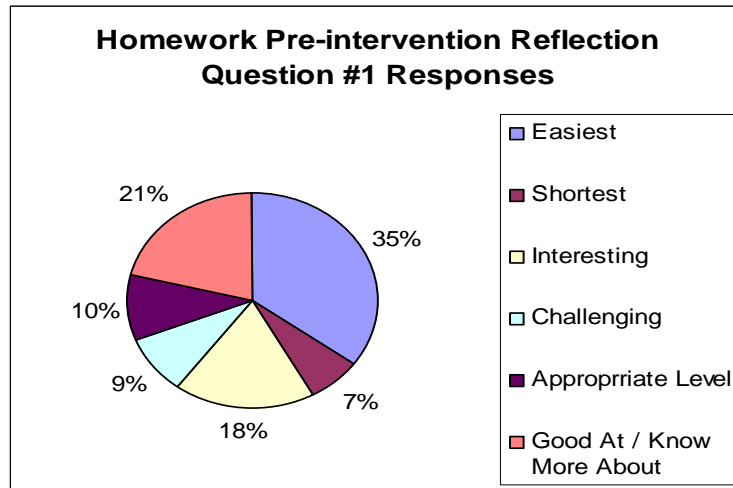
Figure 62: Pre-intervention reflection questions – Homework #1

Homework Post-intervention Reflection Question #1 Responses

- Easiest — 29%
- Shortest — 5%
- Interesting — 21%
- Challenge — 19%
- Appropriate Level — 15%
- Good At / Know More About — 11%

Figure 63: Post-intervention reflection questions – Homework #1

In figures 62 and 63, the students responded to the first reflection question regarding student choice on homework which asked them if they were given options on their assignments, how they would go about choosing the right one. After interventions, fewer students stated that they would choose homework that was easier, shorter, or that they were good at. Instead, more students stated they would choose homework that was interesting, challenging, and at their appropriate level.
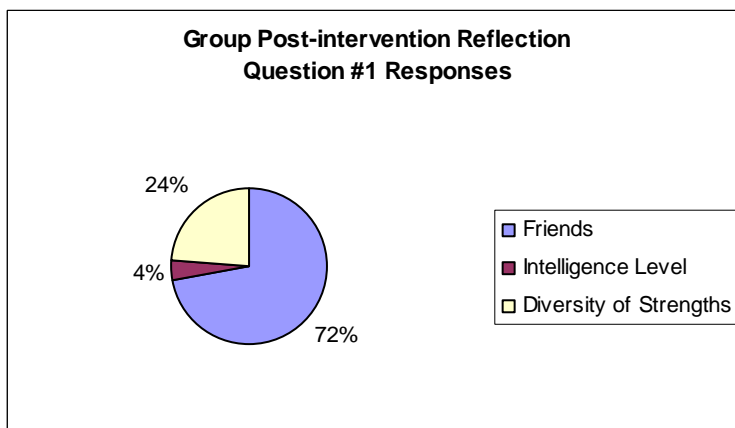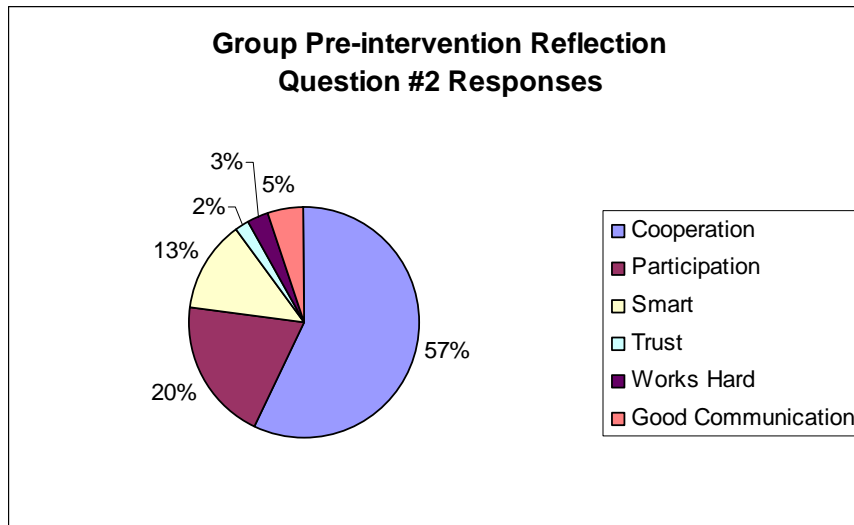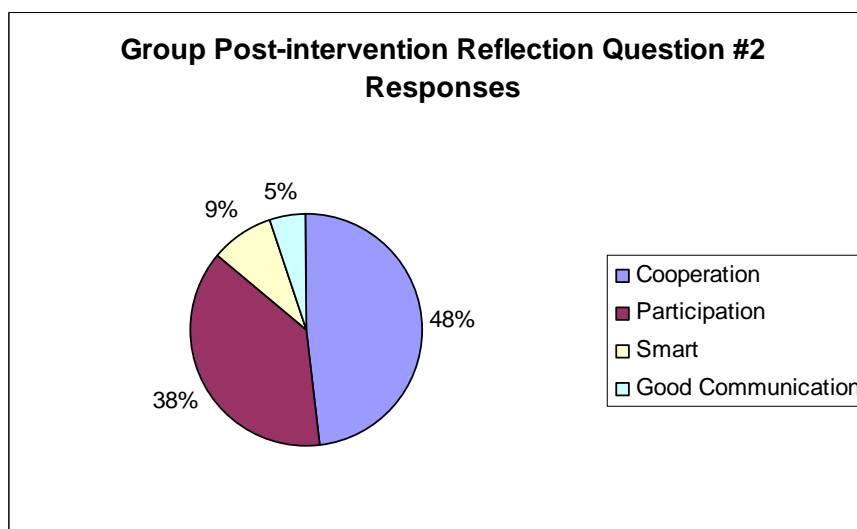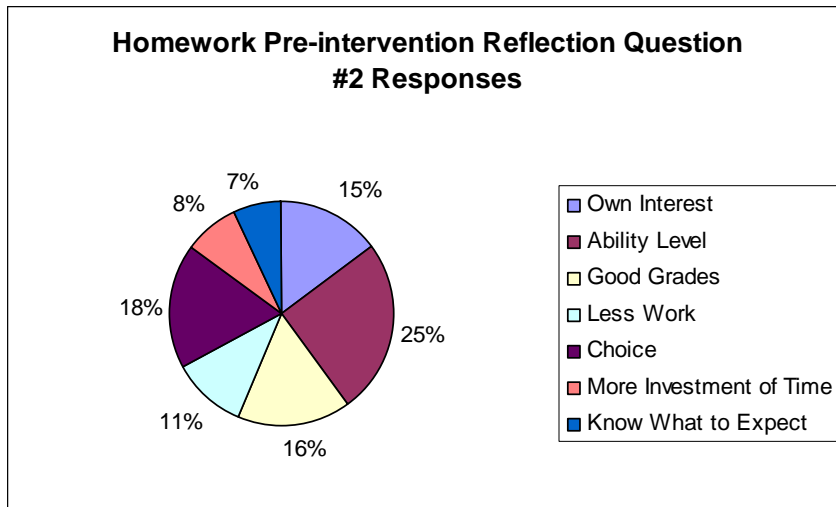
Figure 64: Pre-intervention reflection questions – Homework #2
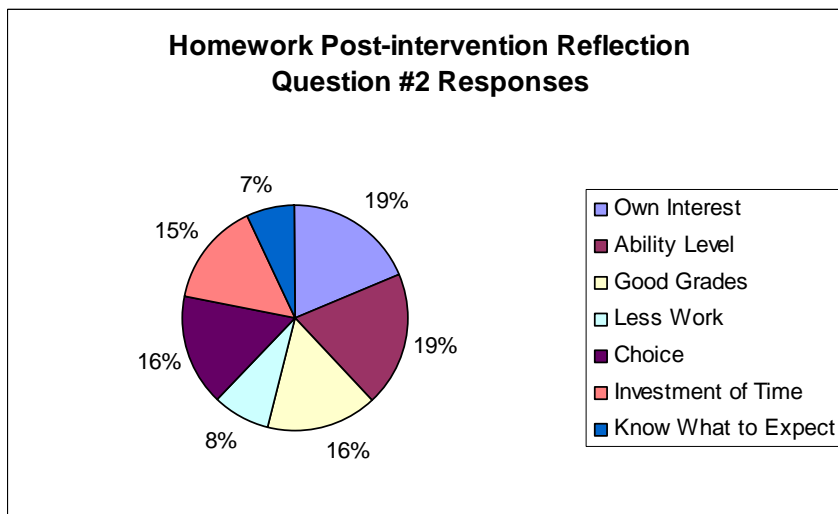
Figure 65: Post-intervention reflection questions – Homework #2

In figures 64 and 65, the students responded to the second question about choice on homework which asked them what the advantages are in being allowed to choose a homework assignment. After interventions, the results showed that 4% more students felt an advantage to choosing their homework assignments based on their interests, as well as a 7% increase in investment of time.

**Assessment Pre-intervention Reflection Question
#1 Responses**

15%

36%

12%

☐ Easy
■ Successful
☐ Not Nervous
☐ Prepared/Learning Style

37%
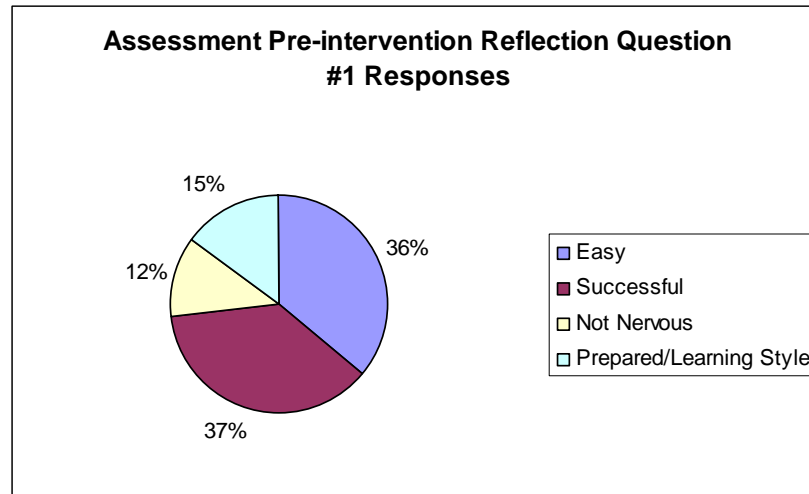
Figure 66: Pre-intervention reflection questions – Assessment #1

**Assessment Post-intervention Reflection
Question #1 Responses**

19%

37%

11%

☐ Easy
■ Successful
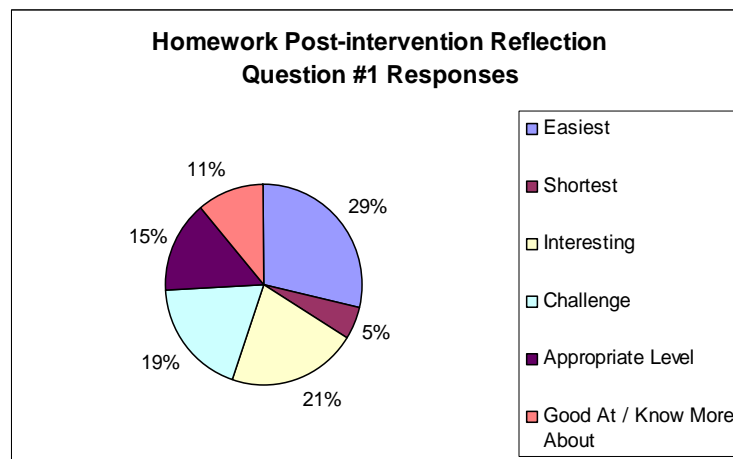☐ Not Nervous
☐ Prepared/Learning Style

33%

Figure 67: Post-intervention reflection questions – Assessment #1

In figures 66 and 67, the students responded to the first reflection question regarding

choice on assessment which asked them what they felt were the advantages to choosing

the type of test they take. Some students, 36% pre-intervention and 37% post-

intervention, felt that a major advantage is that the test would be easier. Other students,

37% pre-intervention and 33% post-intervention, felt that choosing the type of test would

make them more successful.

Assessment Pre-intervention Reflection Question #2 Responses

19%

81%

- Yes / Easier
- No / Unsuccessful
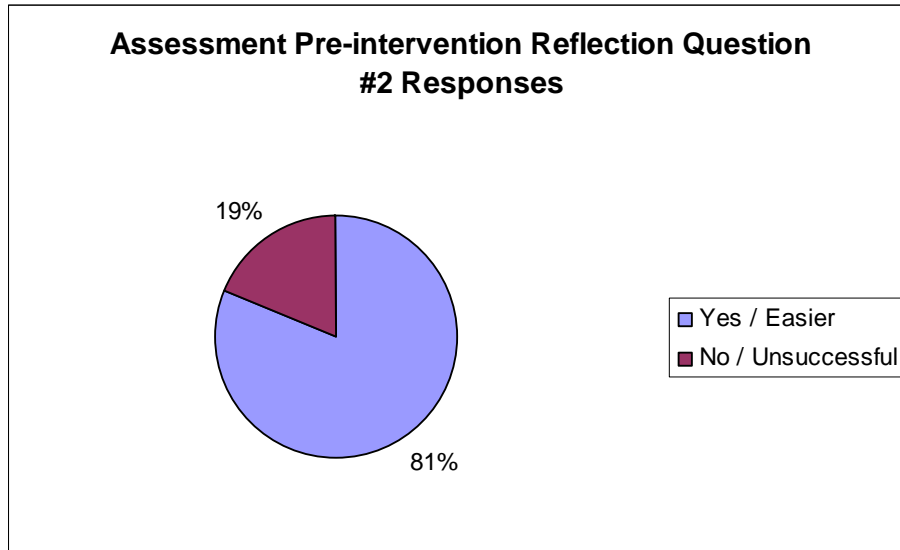
Figure 68: Pre-intervention reflection questions – Assessment #2

Assessment Post-intervention Reflection Question #2 Responses

34%

66%

- Yes / Easier
- No / Unsuccessful

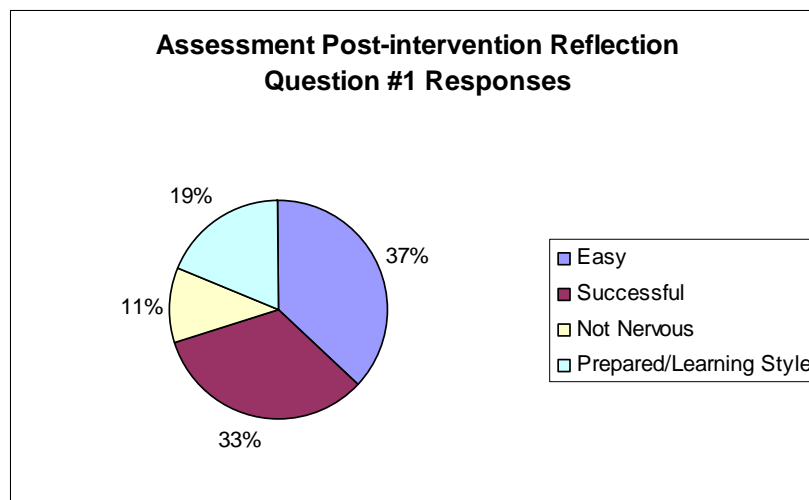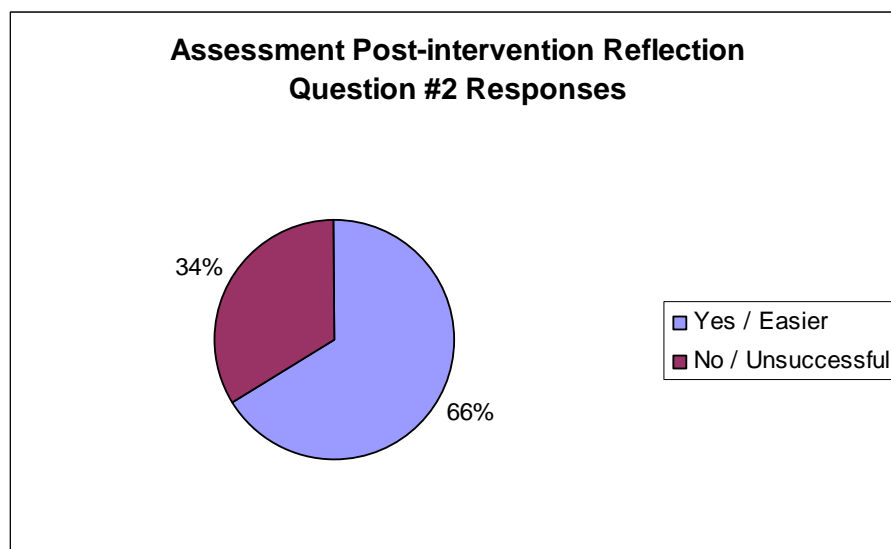*Figure 69: Post-intervention reflection questions – Assessment #2*

In figures 68 and 69, the students responded to the second reflection question about assessment which asked them whether they would choose the same type of test every time and why they felt this way. Pre-intervention 81% of students stated "yes" because it would be easier, but decreased by 15% post-intervention.

Reflections

      I, Teacher Researcher A, enjoyed the process of this research project. I wanted to know if students could be more motivated to learn if given a choice of curriculum, assessment, and grouping. Of the four teacher researchers in this group, there were three different subject areas that our interventions were implemented in. For my specific subject area, motivation is a key factor in participation and movement. I am pleased to report that the biggest increase in motivation for my class was in the area of choosing what curriculum they wanted to learn. Students that had previously been less motivated have shown great interest and initiative in choosing the activity, as well as actively participating in it. I noticed the overall atmosphere of the classroom and attitude of the students were more positive, with less distractions or off-task behaviors. I did find it interesting that when offered a choice of assessment, a number of the students varied the tests they would take each time. This showed me that they might not be as confident in themselves taking the same type of test every time, if offered a choice. When students were given a choice of group for a particular task, an overwhelming number chose their friends to work with. I was surprised to find out that, although they were working with their friends, they were still actively engaged in the game or activity, even more so if they had not been with their friends. It seemed to me that peer interaction among friends increased motivation and participation levels.

      Overall, the strategies that I implemented in my class to increase motivation, seemed to have a positive effect on the areas researched. It has made me realize that it is important to give students responsibility in their own learning process. I have learned that students who are given a choice of anything, school related or otherwise, are more

excited and motivated to do things, rather than always being told what to do. This research project has made me a better educator and I will take what I have learned during this process into the future years of my teaching career.

I, Teacher Researcher B, felt that the implementation of our research paper benefited my students and me. This process has given me insight and knowledge of the different possibilities that I can utilize to increase motivation in my classroom. Middle school students all possess their own interests and often dislike or are resistant to ideas that are not part of their interests. Allowing them to choose their types of assignments, curriculum, assessment, and groups allowed them to choose people or ideas that match their interests.

By implementing choice into my classroom, I felt was able to step away from my role as the "one in charge" and give the students the opportunity to take ownership of their own learning. By taking ownership of their learning, my students felt that what they were doing was more important to them and, therefore, were more motivated to complete it well.

Overall, my students had a good work ethic and were motivated to complete their work pre-intervention. However, by implementing our interventions in my class, I was able to reach those few who rarely did their work on a daily basis. In the future, I think offering choice in my classroom sporadically will really reach the unmotivated student and hopefully encourage him or her. Most importantly, I practiced a different teaching method that I found to be successful and can share with my colleagues that are also having trouble with an unmotivated student.

I, Teacher Researcher C, found the process of research in my classroom extremely helpful. I feel that students, especially in middle school, struggle with self-motivation. We decided to implement four different interventions in our classrooms to see if offering choice would increase student motivation. We decided to offer choice in the areas of curriculum, grouping, homework, and assessment. I implemented these changes in my reading class. I was pleased to discover that most of my students were positively affected by the choices given to them throughout the weeks the interventions were implemented. I was not surprised that most of my students based their decisions for curriculum and homework on what was easiest for them because they base their success rate on external components. My students also tended to pick the same assessments every time they were offered a choice. I realized that most of my students were not risk takers and chose types of tests they knew they would be successful in taking. I also was not surprised that most of the students picked their friends to work with during group projects; however, they seemed to work well and were self-motivated.

Overall, the students this year started out with relatively high self-motivating skills, however, I was pleased to note a change in their motivation level after all the interventions were implemented. I believe this action research project has made me a better educator. It has made me more aware of how my students react to choice and the benefits choice brings to the classroom. I will be taking what I have learned throughout this action research project and applying it in the years to come.

I, Teacher Researcher D, feel that taking a role as an action researcher in my classroom has not only been beneficial for my students, but for me as an educator. Motivation of students is a challenge many teachers encounter in the middle school

setting. I have personally struggled with how to address this issue since coming back to teaching 3 years ago. On a whole, after analyzing our pre-intervention data, I concluded I am only dealing with mild motivational issues. The majority of my students seemed to already be somewhat motivated to succeed academically and enjoy school. I looked to my interventions to really increase the motivation of the small percentage of students whom I seem to not be engaging. Giving my students choice on some curriculum, groupings, assignments, and assessments did work to improve student efforts. I did witness an increased awareness of their behavior patterns and self-efficacy. They did strive to become better students, which in turn helped me become a better teacher. Having to implement the intervention strategies laid out in our action research plan forced me to reflect on my teaching style and fostered creativity. Middle school aged students are craving independence and freedom. Offering them choices helps validate these feelings and provides a much needed tool to assist them in taking ownership in the classroom. My most problematic students, who have not seemed fazed by many of the other interventions I've tried, did improve academically through the use of choice. Creative lesson planning, including choice in curriculum, grouping, assignment, and assessment is definitely not always easy to implement, but if used correctly, and the students are willing and receptive, it seemed to motivate them to value their education more. It is with this in mind that I will continue to work to use student choice as an intervention to impact my future students.

Conclusions and Recommendations

After reviewing the results of the interventions implemented, conclusions were made

regarding choice in the areas of curriculum, groups, homework, and assessment.

Curriculum

Based on the student survey and the curriculum reflection questions, 48% of students felt

they were given a choice more often about what they learned in the classroom after

interventions were implemented (Figure 41). Since the students were given more choices

on the curriculum, 38% of the students felt they were able to utilize their strengths

(Figure 53), which also created more success and enjoyment in the classroom (Figure

53). Initially we experienced a high number of students (92%) who responded they are

more motivated to learn when given a choice of curriculum (Figure 54). Implementing

the intervention of choice persuaded an additional 2% to feel the same way (Figure 55).

Groups

The results of the student surveys and journal reflections on the choice of groups

indicated that more students felt they worked better in groups after the interventions were

implemented (Figure 43). Pre-intervention, 74 students said they chose their groups based

on their friends and 13 chose their groups according to ability levels (Figure 44).

However, post-intervention only 58 students said they chose groups according to friends,

and 36 chose their groups based on ability levels (Figure 45). This research tells us that

more students were less concerned with social acceptance and felt academic performance

was more important after interventions. Post-intervention, a majority of students also

responded in their journal questions that they felt participation and cooperation were two

main characteristics that make a group work together (Figure 59). This reveals that

students are more likely going to choose group members who possess these traits instead of just their friends.

Homework

Homework completion seemed to be an issue in three of the four Teacher Researcher's classrooms. Pre-interventions it was observed that only about 73% (Figure 46) of the students completed their homework often. The main reason students stated they completed homework was because it was expected of them (Figure 66). Students initially reported that if given a choice of options on assignments they would choose the easier and/or shorter option that was interesting (Figure 60). The students revealed they would appreciate the chance to choose an assignment based on their own interest and ability level because they thought it would help them get good grades (Figure 62). The intervention of choice on assignments proved to motivate the students to complete their homework (Figure 47). Students still completed homework because it was expected of them, but the number of students who completed homework because it was interesting and/or challenging increased (Figures 49 and 61). Overall, after the intervention students were more apt to invest time in homework and be self-motivated to work towards good grades if a choice of assignment was given that they were interested in (Figure 63).

Assessment

Both pre and post-interventions, after reflecting the students discovered that having a choice on and/or in an assessment helped to ease their nerves because they thought it would be easier for them. They also figured they would be better prepared for an assessment that catered to their learning style, in turn helping them be more successful (Figure 64 and 65). Overall, it was concluded that the majority of students prefer to take multiple choice tests, followed by matching and true and false assessments (Figure 50 and 51). However, post-intervention there was an increase in the number of students

looking to take assessments that involved short answers and essays (Figure 51). There was also a noted decrease in the percentage of students who replied that they would choose to take the same type of assessment every time a choice was given (Figure67). This marked an increase in the students' motivation to attempt new challenges while reaching for academic success.

Behavior

Through the use of the four interventions: offering choice of curriculum, grouping, assignments, and assessments, the desired increase in motivation was achieved. The most observable changes that were noted were discovered in the students' behaviors that demonstrated self-motivation while successfully completing an assigned task. After the interventions were implemented there was an increase in the students attentiveness (Figure 23), cooperation (Figure 27), participation (Figure 33 and 37), and ability to work productively independently (Figure 31). Furthermore, the negative behaviors that did not exhibit self-motivation, off task (Figure 25) and disruptiveness (Figure 29), showed a marked decrease.

After analyzing the pre and post intervention data it seems clear that the interventions involving choice were effective in motivating the students to some degree. It is our recommendation to continue using the knowledge gained through this project to continue improving student motivation in the middle school. We realize that due to school districts' curriculum constraints, the intervention of choice in the area of curriculum may not always be possible, but we feel the sporadic use of this technique will help increase student accomplishments. We discovered each of the interventions on their own helped to improve students' positive behaviors and self-motivation, but would be

curious to find out the affect of using them simultaneously. Our hope is that when

teachers plan a lesson or unit, and these strategies are effectively put into place, that they

and their students will obtain great rewards.

REFERENCES

Anderman, L. H., & Kaplan, A. (2008). The role of interpersonal relationships and student motivation: introduction to the special issue. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, *76*(2), 115-119.

Augustine, D. K., Gruber, K. D., & Hanson, L. R. (December1989/January 1990). Cooperation works. *Educational Leadership*, 4-7.

Barbosa, P., Guthrie, J. T., Humenick, N. M., Perencevich, K. C., Taboada, A., & Wigfield, A. (2006). Influence of stimulating tasks on reading motivation and comprehension. *The Journal of Educational Research*, *99*(4), 232-246.

Bartholomew, B. (2008, March). Sustaining the fire. *Educational Leadership*, *65*(6), para 1.

Bowman, R. F. (2007, November/December). How can students be motivated: A misplaced question? *The Clearing House*, 81-86.

Brewster, C. & Fager, J. (2000, October). *Increasing Student Engagement and Motivation: From Time-on-Task to Homework*. Oregon: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

Burke, K. (2005). *How to Assess Authentic Learning*. California: Corwin Press.

Collopy, R. B. & Green, T. (1995). Using motivational theory with at-risk children. *Educational Leadership*, *53*, 37-40.

Cooper, H., Patall, E. A., & Robinson, C. (2008). The effects of choice on intrinsic motivation and related outcomes: a meta-analysis of research findings. *Psychological Bulletin*, *134*(2), 270-300.

Corpus, J. H., Iyengar, S. S., & Lepper, N. R. (2005). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivational orientations in the classroom: Age differences and academic correlates. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *97*(2), 184-196.

Davis, B. G. (1993). *Tools for Teaching: Motivating Students*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Dweck, C. S. (2008). Brainology transforming students' motivation to learn. *Independent School*, *67*(2), par 5.

Fuchs, D. & Morgan, P. L. (2007). Is there a bidirectional relationship between children's reading skills and reading motivation? *Council for Exceptional Children*, *73*(2), 165-183.

Fulk, B. M. & Montgomery-Grymes, D. J. (1994). Strategies to improve student motivation. *Interventions in School and Clinic*, *30*(1), 28-33.

Hootstein, E.W. (1994, May). Motivating middle school students to learn. *The Clearing House*, *67*(4), 213-216.

Lumsden, L. (2005). Motivating today's students: The same old stuff just doesn't work. *Portraits of Success*, *1*(2), pars 1-13.

Mansfield, E. A., Miller, R. B., & Montalvo, G. P. (2007). Liking or disliking the teacher: student motivation, engagement and achievement. *Evaluation and Research in Education*, *20*(3), 144-157.

Manzo, K. K. (2008). Motivating students in the middle years. *Education Week*, *27*(28), para 6.

Mcpherson, K. (2007, April). Harry Potter and the goblet of motivation. *Teacher Librarian, 34*(4), 71-73.

Ntoumanis, N., & Taylor, I. M. (2007, November). Teacher motivation strategies in student self-determination in physical education. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *99*(4).

Ornstein, A. C. (1995, December/January). Motivation and learning. *The High School Journal*, 105-110.

Phillips, N., & Lindsay, G. (2006, June). Motivation in gifted students. *High Ability Studies*, *17*(1), 57-73.

Pill, S. (2006, July). Physical education in the middle school. *Primary & Middle Years Educator*, *4*(2).

Ravitch, D. (1992, June). *Hard work and high expectations: motivating students to learn*. Retrieved December 3, 2007, from http://www.kidsource.com/kidssource/ content3/work.expectations.k12.4.html.

Ryan, A. M. (2001, July/August). The peer group as a context for the development of young adolescent motivation and achievement. *Child Development*, *72*(4), 1135-1150.

Strong, R., Silver, H. F., & Robinson, A. (1995). What do students want (and what really motivates them)? *Educational Leadership*, *53*, 8-12.

Suarez, D. (2007, November). When students choose the challenge. Educational Leadership, *65*(3), pars 6-8.

Wasserstein, P. (1995, September). What middle schoolers say about their schoolwork. *Educational Leadership*, *53*(1), 41-43.

Weller, M. (2005, March 14). General principles of motivation. *Los Angeles Business Journal*, pars 1-5.

Willis, J. (2007, March). Cooperative learning is a brain turn-on. *Middle School Journal*,

4-11.

APPENDIXES

Appendix A

Student ID #_____

Student Survey
Each Teacher Researcher will administer the survey during the pre and post intervention weeks. Students will complete the survey during class and collected by the teacher researcher to be analyzed.

1. On a scale of 1-10, 10 being the best, how much do I enjoy school?

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

2. How often do I participate in class?

   Never   Sometimes   Always

3. Does my participation in class depend on the teacher?

   Yes   No

4. Does my participation depend on my interest of the subject?

   Yes   No

5. I feel that I am offered choices about what and how I learn in the classroom?

   Rarely   Sometimes   Often   Always

6. Do I work better in groups or independently?

   Groups   Independently

7. I choose my groups according to:

   Friends   Ability levels   Anyone

8. How often do I choose to turn in completed homework?

Appendix A (cont.)

Sometimes   Often   Always

9. I choose to complete my homework because it is: (circle all that apply)

Easy   Interesting   Challenging   Expected

10. If I had a choice I would prefer to take tests that are: (circle all that apply)

Multiple Choice   Essay   Short Answer   True/False   Matching

Appendix B

<u>**Date:**</u> _____

<u>Participation Checklist</u>
Each teacher researcher will complete the participation checklist while observing student behavior during group activities in class. This checklist will be used for pre-intervention data. It will also be used as a tool for gathering data during group intervention strategies. The teacher researchers will observe these listed behaviors indicating with a Y for Yes, the behavior is being observed, N for No, the behavior is not being observed, and S for Sometimes the behavior is observed.

Y= Yes   **N= No**   **S= Sometimes**

Student ID #	Attentive	Off Task/ Wandering	Cooperating	Disruptive	Independent	Participating

Totals:

Appendix C

Pre/Post Reflection Journal Questions
Curriculum

Students will be given a journal question to reflect upon and answer based on each intervention strategy used. Each question will be given before and after each student choice.

Describe your feelings on being offered a choice of what you are learning?

Do you think you are more motivated to learn when working within a subject you pick?

Appendix D

Pre/Post Reflection Journal Questions
Group

Students will be given a journal question to reflect upon and answer based on each intervention strategy used. Each question will be given before and after each student choice.

What characteristics make a group work well together? Do you possess those qualities? Explain

How do you think you should select group members to work with?

Appendix E

Pre/Post Reflection Journal Questions
Homework

Students will be given a journal question to reflect upon and answer based on each intervention strategy used. Each question will be given before and after each student choice.

What are the advantages in being allowed to choose a homework assignment?

When given different options of homework assignments, how do you go about choosing the right one for you?

Appendix F

Pre/Post Reflection Journal Questions
Homework

Students will be given a journal question to reflect upon and answer based on each intervention strategy used. Each question will be given before and after each student choice.

What advantages are there in choosing the type of test you take?(Example: Multiple choice, short answer, True or False)

When given an option of the type of test you would take, would you choose the same one everytime? Why or Why not?