INCREASING ON-TASK BEHAVIOR THROUGH MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITIES

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Abstract

This report describes a program designed to increase students' on-task behavior. The students in the sample population consisted of kindergarten, first, and fifth graders. These classrooms are located in a community in northern Illinois. The problem of student behavior adversely affecting on-task behavior was well documented through a review of existing literature.

There were many reasons for students exhibiting off-task behavior. Among these reasons were poor social interaction abilities, no clear concept of what is acceptable, and lack of consistent discipline.

Probable solutions were: lessons to strengthen listening skills, incorporation of cooperative learning, and utilization of motivational activities to improve on-task behavior.

As a result of our action research, the targeted classes increased their listening skills and on-task behavior.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTENT

General Statement of the Problem

Students in the targeted kindergarten, first, and fifth grade classes exhibited several off-task behaviors. Evidence for the existence of the problem included disruptive behavior, incomplete work, inability to follow directions, and lack of student motivation as observed by teachers.

Immediate Problem Context

The research took place at two sites located within the same Northern Illinois school district. Site A contained three of the classrooms used in the research. Site B housed the fourth classroom.

Site A School Setting

Building Description

Site A is the only primary grade level attendance center within a pre-K to eighth grade district. Site A is handicapped accessible, and has 27 rooms. Thirteen of the rooms house kindergarten through second grades with an average of 25 students per classroom. Three rooms house preschool programs for children with special needs. Another room is used for a before and after school care program. Three rooms house Title I reading programs. One room is shared between the school counselor and reading specialist. Students and staff have access to a library and a computer lab. The special education teacher uses one classroom. Speech and ESL teachers share another room. The music teacher has a room as well. The all purpose room is used for physical education classes and as a cafeteria for the students. Site A has two offices for the principal and support staff.

Student Population

According to the School Improvement Plan (Site A SIP, 2006-2007), Site A has a total enrollment of 370 students. White students make up 67.4% of the population while 19.8% are Hispanic, 0.8% are Black, and 0.5% are either Native American or Asian. Multi-Racial students account for 11.5% of the school population. Students with limited English proficiency make up 4.1% of the population. Of the total number of students enrolled, 72.2% qualify for free or reduced lunch. Students have an attendance rate of 95.3% with no students chronically truant. The mobility rate, which was as high as 33% in the 1999-2000 school year, is 25.4%.

Staff Population

The teaching staff at Site A includes 28 teachers, six classroom aides, a school counselor, and a bilingual assistant. There are a total of 36 staff members at Site A, and 35 of these are white females. The kindergarten and second grade sections each have four teachers. The first grade section has eight teachers within five classrooms. Two first grade classrooms have full time teachers while the other three classrooms each have a team of two teachers. Each team teacher teaches half time in the classroom, and half time in the Reading Recovery®. According to the School Report Card (Site A 2006), the teachers in this district have an average teaching experience of 18.0 years. A Master's degree or above has been earned by 63.1% of the teachers in the district. The average teacher's salary for the district is \$53,321, and the average administrator's salary is \$107,410(School Report Card 2005-2006).

<u>Instructional Setting and Programs</u>

The mission statement of Site A is "to provide opportunities for all children to be successful and impress upon them the power in choosing to do what is right" (Site A SIP 2006, p1). Site A offers many academic experiences. This site houses a before and after school program for students in kindergarten through fifth grade. Additionally, a breakfast program is offered to all kindergarten through fifth grade students. Three preschool programs are housed at this facility. Two of the programs are early childhood special education, and the other program is designed for at-risk children. A bilingual teacher assistant and two speech teachers are shared with the other schools in the district.

Reading Recovery is offered to first grade students who have low achievement in reading. For second grade students having difficulty with reading, Title I services are

available. Students receive instruction in physical education and music every other day. Site A has a Foster Grandparent program, and receives assistance from Americorp® volunteers. These assistants work with specific classroom teachers, and help students where needed.

Site B School Setting

Building Description

Site B is an intermediate building which houses third through fifth grade classes. The third, fourth, and fifth grade levels are all divided into four sections. Site B also houses two preschool classrooms as well as an early childhood lending library.

Site B has 28 rooms. Twelve of the rooms house third through fifth grade classrooms with an average of 24 students per classroom. There are three special education teachers who each have their own classrooms. One room houses the reading specialist, speech teachers, and ESL teacher. The music and physical education teachers and the school counselor each have a room. Site B also contains a separate cafeteria and multi-purpose room.

Student Population

According to the School Report Card (Site B 2006), Site B has a total enrollment of 346 students. White students make up 77.5% of the population while 17.3% are Hispanic, 2.6% are Black, and 1.4% are Asian or Pacific Islander. Native American students account for 0.3% of the population. Students with limited English proficiency make up 2.0% of the population. Of the total number of students enrolled, 59.0% qualify for free or reduced lunch. Students have an attendance rate of 96.1% with 2% chronically truant. The mobility rate is 10%.

Staff Population

The teaching staff at Site B includes 18 teachers and two classroom aides. All of the staff are white. The third through fifth grade sections each have four teachers. There are three special education teachers. One special education teacher works with each grade level. According to the School Report Card (Site B 2006), the average teaching experience in this district is 18 years. A Master's degree or above has been earned by 63.1% of the staff. The average salary for teachers was \$53,321, and the average administrator's salary was \$107,410.

<u>Instructional Setting and Programs</u>

Site B offers several programs to enhance students' academic experiences.

Services are provided by the reading specialist for the lowest achieving readers in all grade levels third through fifth. Site B also has a Foster Grandparent program to help students with basic skills.

Community Setting

Surrounding Community

Both Site A and B are located in the same town in Northwestern Illinois. The community is located 45 minutes from a major metropolitan area. A regional airport, state highways, and an interstate are all nearby. This community has five elementary (preschool through eighth grade) districts that feed into one high school district. One

private elementary school is also located in this town. A community college is within ten miles.

Historically, industry has been a major employer of the area. The closings and downsizing of many manufacturing plants in this community have had a severe negative impact on the community. Many people have either moved to other towns, or have greatly reduced income. This small town contains many community resources that provide food, clothing, and financial assistance.

This Northwestern Illinois community has a population of 9580. Of this number, 86.2% are White, 0.7% are Black, and 11.5% are Hispanic. Of the people who are 25 years or older, 39.3% have a high school diploma, 20.9% have some college education, 10.1% have either an associate or bachelor's degree, and 2.2% have a graduate degree. The median household income is \$34,442. (Census, 2000).

National Context of the Problem

The issue of off-task behavior is a problem in the educational setting. A great deal of time and energy has been devoted to researching this topic. "What is meant when one says that a particular child does not pay attention?" (Elkhatib, 1991 p. 161) Off-task behavior has been defined many ways. One study gave four basic student behaviors that are considered off-task. These are; talking out, inappropriate verbalizations, being out of one's seat, inactivity or not being engaged in the topic, or noncompliance (Mather & Goldstein, 2001). Another study labeled off-task behavior as interfering with others who are on-task, making remarks that are unrelated to the topic, smiling or laughing at off-task conversation, reading or note taking not related to class work, or looking away from the

teacher (Naturalistic Observations of Interaction Patterns in the Classroom, http://www.sonet.pdx.edu). Any of these behaviors can occur when a student is off-task.

On-task behavior has also been defined many different ways. These behaviors have been identified as commenting on class related topics, participating in class discussion, reading aloud, raising hands, working on assigned class activity, and making eye contact with the teacher (Naturalistic Observations of Interaction Patterns in the Classroom, http://www.sonet.pdx.edu). Chapman (2003) has stated, "Student engagement has been used to depict students' willingness to participate in routine school activities, such as attending classes, submitting required work, and following teachers' directions in class." (p. 2). The behaviors listed above give examples of ways to show that students are on-task. Although these definitions give a general description of on-task behaviors, it has been noted that teachers are the ones to ultimately decide what is considered on-task (At Task, http://jan.ucc.nau.edu). Behaviors that one teacher may consider on-task may be considered off-task by a different teacher. Each teacher must decide individually what on-task behaviors are important for his or her students to possess.

This research focused on improving three important classroom behaviors to increase student performance and engagement. The targeted behaviors include attention to task at hand, listening and following directions, and active participation. Research has shown these behaviors to be important factors that are essential to creating a learning environment which motivates students. Attention to the task at hand, refers to being able to focus on a designated activity. Thorpe and Borden (1985) stated that increased attention to task has been shown to result in increased learning. According to Day

(1999), students listening skills in class are decreasing because they are often inattentive and off-task. It is important to note that listening and hearing are not the same skills. Listening is an active process that must be taught, and is also an essential tool to be successful in school and life. (Listening Skills, http://clackamas.cc.or.us/os11class/ LearningSkills/listenskills.htm). Another factor, which has been shown to influence off-task behavior, is class participation. Numerous studies have shown that students who are engaged and actively participating show positive effects in their academic achievement. "Engagement is important for several reasons. It affects students academic achievement and social well being and is crucial for the development of life long learning skills and dispositions." (Murray & Mitchell, 2004, p.1)

Off-task behavior, or inattention, has been shown to negatively effect learning (Elkhatib, 1991). Conversely, research has also shown that students who are most engaged in activities have shown the most intellectual improvement (Jason & Kuchay, 2001). Due to the fact that attention does not increase with age, it is important to teach students how to pay attention as well as to what they should be attending (Elkhatib, 1991).

CHAPTER 2

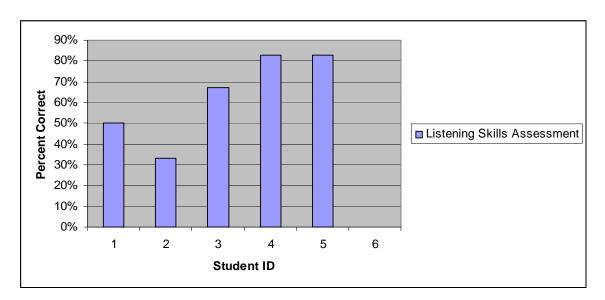
PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

Researchers at Site A and Site B worked with many students who had difficulty staying on-task. In order to assess the scope of this problem, a Listening Skills Assessment (Appendix A, B, C) and On-Task Behavior Checklist (Appendix D) were analyzed. The Listening Skills Assessment and On-Task Behavior Checklist were given to students in the targeted classrooms.

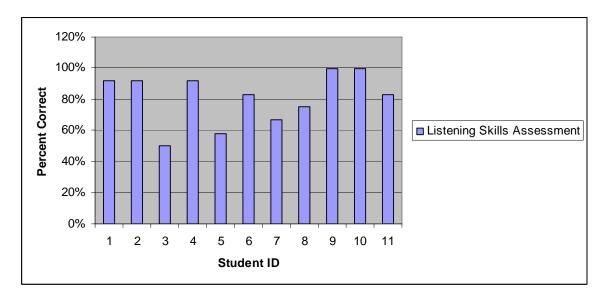
The Listening Skills Assessment was a teacher designed test used to analyze students' ability to listen and follow directions. The targeted students were randomly selected from the roster of each researcher's classroom. The Listening Skills Assessment

was developed to meet the needs of the various age groups. The kindergarten assessment consisted of six numbered squares with directions given so that each square was filled. The first grade assessment consisted of twelve numbered squares with directions given so that two of the squares were left blank. The fifth grade assessment also consisted of twelve squares. The squares were not numbered, but directions were given so that each square was filled. The targeted kindergarten students at Site A were given this assessment. The students' scores (Figure 1) were recorded, and the bars indicate each student's percentage correct. Of the six targeted students, one scored 0%, three scored below 70%, and two scored above 70%.



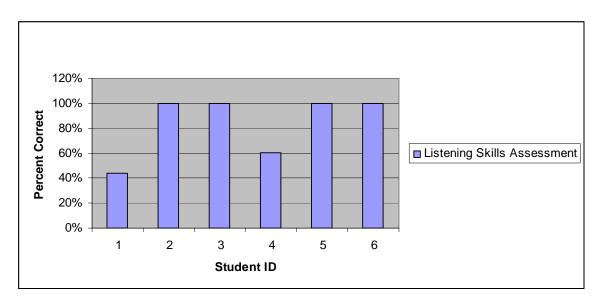
<u>Figure 1.</u> The scores of the targeted kindergarten students on the Listening Skills Assessment are represented above.

The targeted first grade students were from two classrooms at Site A. These students were given the Listening Skills Assessment as well. These scores are represented in Figure 2. Of the 11 students, 3 scored below 70%, 3 scored between 70%-90%, 3 scored 92%, and 2 scored 100%.



<u>Figure 2.</u> The scores of the targeted First Grade students on the Listening Skills Assessment are represented above.

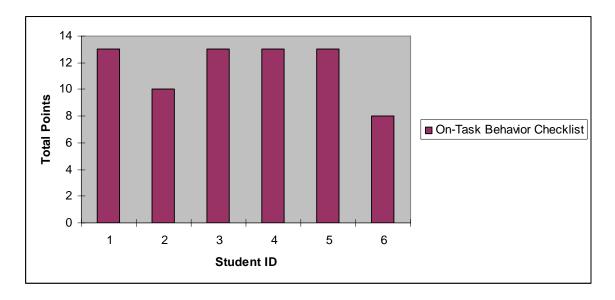
The targeted fifth grade students were also given the Listening Skills Assessment. These scores are shown in Figure 3. Of the six students tested, four scored 100%. One student scored 60%, and one student scored 44%.



<u>Figure 3.</u> The targeted Fifth Grade students' scores on the Listening Skills Assessment are shown above.

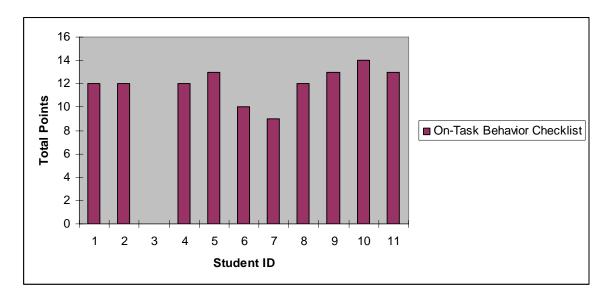
The students' strengths on the Listening Skills Assessment included the ability to follow one step directions and a willingness to work. The researchers observed that the students were able to follow simple one step directions without difficulty. They also were enthusiastic about the task, and anxious to complete each given direction. The students also exhibited several weaknesses during the assessment. These weaknesses included difficulty following two step directions, difficulty keeping up with the pace of the assessment, and inability to remain engaged in the activity throughout the assessment. The students were not able to remember and follow multiple step directions given in sequence. They were not able to keep up with the rest of the class when they had difficulty remembering all the steps in a given direction. The students demonstrated disengagement by talking to others, fidgeting, and copying answers from other students.

The On-Task Behavior Checklist was used to determine the level of on-task behavior exhibited by the targeted students. The checklist consisted of five categories to measure on-task behavior. Each category was scored using a Likert scale with three being the highest score possible in each category. Each of the targeted students was able to score a total of fifteen points on this checklist. It was administered by the researchers at Site A and Site B during the pre-intervention stage of this action research project. Figure 4 shows the scores of the targeted kindergarten students. Four students scored a total of 13 points, one scored ten points, and one scored eight points.



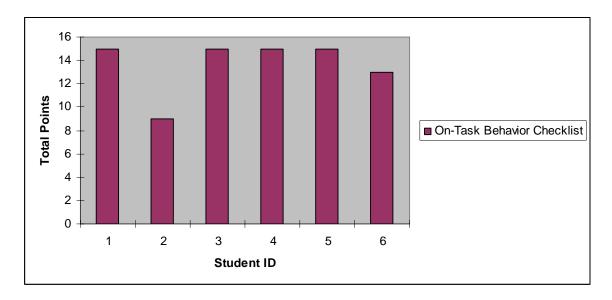
<u>Figure 4.</u> The total points for the targeted kindergarten students on the on-task behavior checklist.

The targeted first grade students were also evaluated using the On-Task Behavior Checklist (Figure 5). One student scored fourteen points, three scored thirteen points, four scored twelve points, one scored ten points, and one scored nine points. It should also be noted that one of the targeted first grade students was absent during the collection of this data.



<u>Figure 5.</u> The total points for the targeted First Grade students on the on-task behavior checklist.

The targeted fifth grade students were evaluated with the On-Task Behavior Checklist as well. Figure 6 represents the scores of those students. Four out of the six targeted students scored fifteen points. One student scored thirteen points, and one student scored nine points.



<u>Figure 6.</u> The total points on the on-task behavior checklist for the targeted Fifth Grade students.

According to the data from the pre-intervention On-Task Behavior Checklist, the students exhibited strengths and weaknesses. Strengths included completing work on time and getting to work immediately. The students were able to get to work on the activities quickly, and were able to complete work as expected. Weaknesses included time spent on-task, understanding directions, and disrupting others. The students often asked for the directions to be repeated, and had a difficult time focusing on their own work.

In order to achieve triangulation, the researchers chose to collect samples of student work. The work samples consisted of a variety of activities which were designed to promote listening skills. The samples were completed independently by the targeted students, and were collected during the pre-intervention stage of this research project. The artifacts were used to assess the students' ability to follow directions.

Probable Causes

Researchers are finding that students' are becoming disengaged or off-task early on in their school careers (Murray & Mitchell, 2004). This off-task behavior can lead to students' experiencing negative opinions regarding school throughout their lives (2004). According to the literature, lack of instruction in listening skills, students' self-esteem, instructional methods used, and a lack of breaks for students are suggested causes for students' off-task behaviors.

Listening and hearing are not the same (Listening Skills, http://dl.clackamas.cc.or.us/osl1class/LearningSkills/listenskills.htm, retrieved April 27, 2006). The skill of listening is one that must be taught, and requires a great deal of practice (Listening Skills). Students who exhibit off-task behaviors often are not

listening during class (Day, 1999). There are many reasons for poor listening.

Daydreaming and false attention are listening problems that virtually everyone displays (Listening Skills). Daydreaming occurs when a student becomes engaged in his or her own thoughts, and is not listening to the material being presented. False attention occurs when a student is not really interested in what is being discussed. (Listening Skills). The problem of poor listening skills can lead to problems learning in the classroom (Day, 1999). Students who lack listening skills can show off-task behaviors as well.

Another cause of off-task behavior in the classroom is students' self-esteem. Research has shown that approximately 20% of school children experience some kind of emotional or behavioral difficulty (Strategies for promoting good behavior in children with special needs, file://A:promoting%20good%behavior.htm, retrieved December 8, 2005). Students who have low self-esteem often times do not participate in class. They can be passive and give up easily when faced with learning tasks (Chapman, 2003). They may also be bored, depressed, and withdrawn from learning activities (2003). All of these behaviors can appear to teachers as off-task.

The instructional methods used by teachers can also cause off-task behavior. Engagement in classroom activities is important because it affects academic achievement and lifelong learning skills (Murray & Mitchell, 2004). Students sometimes show off-task behaviors because the level of instruction they are receiving is either too easy or too hard (Wright, 2005). Teachers who present lessons that are disorganized, unpredictable, or not motivating will find that they have more difficulty keeping students on-task (2005). Students who feel that what they are learning is either irrelevant or not enjoyable are more likely to be off-task (Peacock, 1998).

Finally, research has shown that students who are not given breaks throughout the day have a more difficult time staying on task (Silver,

http://www.additudemag.com/experts.asp, retrieved February 23, 2006). The lack of recess or downtime at intervals throughout the day can also cause a decrease in students' ability to recall information they have learned (Jarret, http://www.ericdigests.org/2003-02/recess.html, retrieved November 16, 2005). Sousa (2001), has shown that allowing a break or downtime can help students' retain what they have learned as well as apply that learning to new situations.

All of the causes of off-task behavior presented, lack of instruction in listening skills, students' self-esteem, the instructional methods used, and lack of recess or breaks, are tied together. Each of these causes can contribute to students' off-task behaviors in the classroom. The challenge is to determine ways of addressing these causes of off-task behaviors so that students can experience an optimal learning environment.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

The issue of off-task behavior is a problem in the educational setting. Across the United States everyday teachers deal with off-task behaviors such as talking out, inappropriate verbalizations, being out of one's seat, inactivity, or noncompliance (Mather & Goldstein, 2001).

Off-task behavior or inattention has been shown to negatively effect learning (Elkhatib, 1991). Teaching students the skills they need to become attentive and actively engaged in school is of the utmost importance. There are a myriad of theories for teaching students to stay on-task. Some of these are, behavior management, teaching listening skills, and motivational activities. Behavior management is a complex process which requires teachers to be clear, individualize strategies based on student needs, reflect on the effect of the program, and provide consequences (Shoen & Nolen, 2004).

Activities which motivate students to become engaged need to be challenging, authentic, and multidisciplinary (Meaningful, engaged learning,

http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/engaged.htm, retrieved 11/29/05). Some common ways of encouraging students to become and remain actively engaged are providing breaks, classroom seating arrangements, class size, teaching strategies, teaching listening skills, and positive reinforcement.

Recess and Breaks

Kids need a break (Silver, 2005). According to research, students are better able to focus when given breaks during the school day (2005). Over the past several years, schools have begun limiting or eliminating recess in order to allow more classroom time for academics. It has even been noted that principals and teachers feel more pressure to pack instruction into their school day (Jarret, 2003). However, research shows that breaks throughout the day are necessary for satisfaction and alertness (2003). Providing recess breaks allow the students time to process what they have learned, and can make the learning task more reinforcing (Wright, School-wide strategies for managing off-task/inattention, retrieved 11/30/05). Allowing students to have time throughout the day to take a break or have a recess will help them to be more on-task as well as help make their learning more effective.

Seating Arrangements

The arrangement of any given classroom plays a role in whether students are able to stay focused and on-task. Within the classroom setting, students may be grouped either in small groups or individually in rows. Research has shown that each seating arrangement is useful in different settings (Hastings & Schwieso, 1995). In their

research, Hastings & Schwieso found that group seating arrangements worked best for collaborative activities, and row arrangements were most conducive to individual activities. Some classroom teachers may also find the use of preferential seating useful for students who are easily distracted. Preferential seating is in basic terms being sure that students are seated in locations that avoid or minimize other distractions (Wright, School-wide strategies for managing off-task/inattention, retrieved 11/30/05). Students who are easily distracted may also benefit from a quiet work area to go to when they have more complex tasks to complete (School-wide strategies for managing off-task/inattention). In short, "attention to task appropriate seating arrangements can make an important contribution to improvement in behavior and academic performance." (Hastings & Schwieso, 1995, p.290).

Class Size

The issue of class size is often discussed in educational venues. Lowering class size may be one way to increase on-task behavior. Students who are in classes of less than 20 children are able to form positive relationships with their peers (Horner, 2000). This makes it more likely that they will become actively engaged in classroom activities (2000). Small class sizes seem to create changes in student and teacher behavior. Teachers are more able to meet with individual students in a class of 17 students than in a class of 28 students. This individual attention from teachers ensures that attention to learning will increase while disruptive and off-task behavior decreases (Class size: Counting students can count, retrieved 2/23/2006).

Teaching Strategies

"If you ask me what to do about a kid being 'off-task', my first response is going to be 'What's the task?'"(Powell, 2005, ¶2). Every day across the country teachers are looking for ways to fully engage students in learning activities. One way teachers have found to achieve this goal is to add to their teaching 'bag of tricks'. By learning new teaching strategies, teachers can help students stay on-task. One strategy is called F-MAP, or Fifteen-Minutes, Active Participation (2005). Using this model, teachers strive for active participation and switch activities every fifteen minutes to ensure variety (2005). For example, a teacher may have students actively participating in reading a story for ten minutes, and then may take a break to stretch before beginning another activity. This should allow the students to be actively involved in the reading lesson, and then allow time for the students to relax before the next activity begins. According to research, active participation not only increases on-task behavior, but also increases retention (Sousa, 2001). In general, learners retain approximately 5% of what they are taught through the lecture method, while learners retain 75% of what they are taught when allowed to practice skills with hands-on activities (2001). Teachers are constantly acquiring new strategies for keeping students on-task. Research studies have shown that implementation of these strategies will increase on-task behavior as well as increase learning.

<u>Listening Skills</u>

Students in today's classrooms need to be taught not only academics, but also need to be taught how to effectively listen. Listening is a communication skill which requires active processing and practice (Listening Skills,

http://dl.clackamas.cc.or.us/osl1class/LearningSkills/listenskills.htm, retrieved 4/27/2006). There are several behaviors that can be taught to improve listening skills (Smith & Ellis, ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED480895). Specific listening behaviors include, preparing to listen, keeping your eyes on the speaker, asking questions, and visualizing what is being said (Listening Skills,

http://dl.clackamas.cc.or.us/osl1class/LearningSkills/listenskills.htm, retrieved 4/27/2006, Smith& Ellis, ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED480895c). "Listening is an art and a gift." (Listening skills,

http://dl.clackamas.cc.or.us/osl1class/LearningSkills/listenskills.htm, retrieved 4/27/2006). Teachers can not only help increase on-task behavior by teaching listening skills, they can also teach students a vital lifelong skill.

Positive Reinforcement

The classroom setting contributes a great deal to student behavior, and managing behavior is one way to keep students on-task (Managing inappropriate behavior, ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED371506). The use of positive reinforcement is one way to manage student behavior. Goldstein (2001) found that strategies which involve the use of positive reinforcement are generally more effective than punishment. Teachers need to be aware of students' strengths, and allow occasions for each student to feel valued, special, and to help others (2001). Using positive reinforcement can help students feel good about themselves. There are several techniques for using positive reinforcement effectively. These include maintaining eye contact with the child, allowing the child to finish talking, labeling the behavior not the child, and beginning with a reinforcing statement (Using positive reinforcement,

http://life.familyeducation.com/communicatons/behavior-modification/29734.html, retrieved 9/20/2006). Using these techniques can help teachers build positive relationships with their students. These positive relationships can help students feel accepted, and thus increase their ability to remain engaged in learning activities.

In conclusion, on-task behavior can help students increase learning (Elkhatib, 1991). Teachers have many strategies and techniques available to help students become and remain on-task. The strategies and techniques discussed in this research include providing breaks, adapting classroom seating arrangements to meet the requirements of the task at hand, using teaching strategies which will be most effective for students, teaching listening skills, and using positive reinforcement. The researchers believe that by using these strategies and techniques within our individual classrooms we can stimulate our students to become and remain on-task more often.

Project Objective and Processes

As a result of the instruction and practice of listening skills and positive reinforcement during the period of September 2006 through December 2006, the targeted kindergarten, first, and fifth grade students will improve their on-task behavior skills as measured by the listening skills assessment and on-task behavior checklist.

In order to achieve the action research objective, the following process is necessary:

- Researchers will create a listening skills assessment.
- Materials facilitating the instruction of listening skills will be gathered.
- Learning activities reinforcing listening skills will be developed.
- An on-task behavior checklist will be developed for teacher use.

• Student artifacts will be collected.

Project Action Plan

Week 1: August 21-25, 2006

• Send parent letter and consent forms

Week 2: August 28-September 1, 2006

- Gather Pre-intervention data
- Collect student artifacts

Week 3: September 4-8, 2006

- On-task behavior checklist
- Collect student artifacts

Week 4: September 11-15, 2006

- Listening Skills Assessment
- Collect student artifacts

Week 5: September 18-22, 2006

- Introduce motivational reward system
- Complete a listening lesson
- Collect student artifacts

Week 6: September 25-29, 2006

- Introduce cooperative learning activities
- Complete a listening lesson
- Emphasize reward system
- Complete on-task behavior checklist

• Collect student artifacts

Week 7: October 2-6, 2006

- Complete a cooperative learning activity
- Complete a listening lesson
- Emphasize reward system
- Collect student artifacts

Week 8: October 9-13, 2006

- Complete a cooperative learning activity
- Complete a listening lesson
- Emphasize reward system
- Complete on-task behavior checklist
- Collect student artifacts

Week 9: October 16-20, 2006

- Complete a cooperative learning activity
- Complete a listening lesson
- Emphasize reward system
- Collect student artifacts

Week 10: October 23-27, 2006

- Complete a cooperative learning activity
- Complete a listening lesson
- Emphasize reward system
- Complete on-task behavior checklist
- Collect student artifacts

Week 11: October 30 – November 3, 2006

- Complete a cooperative learning activity
- Complete a listening lesson
- Emphasize reward system
- Collect student artifacts

Week 12: November 6-10, 2006

- Complete a cooperative learning activity
- Complete a listening lesson
- Emphasize reward system
- Complete on-task behavior checklist
- Collect student artifacts

Week 13: November 13-17, 2006

- Complete a cooperative learning activity
- Complete a listening lesson
- Emphasize reward system
- Collect student artifacts

Week 14: November 20-24, 2006

- Complete a cooperative learning activity
- Complete a listening lesson
- Emphasize reward system
- Complete on-task behavior checklist
- Collect student artifacts

Weeks 15-18: November 27-December 21, 2006

- Gather post-intervention data
- Re-administer listening skills assessment
- Collect student artifacts

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of the intervention, several methods will be used. A pre-intervention listening skills assessment will be administered to students in order to evaluate the amount of time spent on-task. An on-task behavior checklist will also be used as a pre-intervention data collection tool. This checklist will measure students' ability to begin work promptly, stay on-task, complete assignments on time, and follow directions. This data will be collected and analyzed to evaluate the students' current level of on-task behavior. The listening skills assessment will also be used as a post-intervention data collection tool. It will be used to examine the students' progress following intervention.

Student artifacts will be collected, organized, and analyzed before, during, and after intervention. This data will be used to monitor student growth and progress as it relates to targeted on-task behavior. Teachers will document the areas of on-task behavior where students show strengths and weaknesses.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of Intervention

This intervention took place in two sites within the same Northern Illinois school district. The intervention took place in a kindergarten, two first grades, and one fifth grade classroom. The targeted students in each classroom were chosen randomly. The objective of this intervention was to increase on-task behavior of students in kindergarten, first, and fifth grade through the use of focused instruction in listening skills, following directions, as well as motivational reward systems. In order to achieve this objective, the researchers modeled and practiced the desired on-task behaviors.

The researchers started collecting data during the week of August 21, 2006 by sending home parent consent forms. During the following two weeks, the researchers

administered a listening skills assessment (Appendix A, B, C), an on-task behavior checklist (Appendix D), and collected samples of student work.

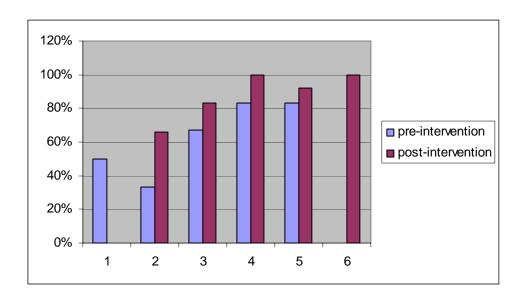
During weeks four through fourteen, the following strategies were implemented: cooperative learning, motivational rewards, and teaching of listening skills. The teachers in the targeted classrooms at Site A and Site B used whole group instruction to model and teach the strategies. Small group instruction and cooperative groups were used to enhance students' use of the strategies.

Throughout the ten weeks of intervention, students completed listening lessons and cooperative learning activities. The kindergarten, first and fifth grade teachers administered an on-task behavior checklist every other week. Pre- and post- measures given to all the targeted students included a listening skills assessment, and an on-task behavior checklist. Samples of student work were also collected prior to and after intervention. The pre- measures were administered in August, the first two weeks of the intervention. The post- measures were administered in December, the last two weeks of the intervention. The researchers followed the action plan that was constructed before the intervention began.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

The listening skills assessment was given to the targeted kindergarten and first grade students at Site A, and to the targeted fifth grade students at Site B. The pre-intervention scores were compared to the post-intervention scores. The same form was given for both pre- and post-intervention assessments.

The targeted kindergarten students at Site A were given the listening skills assessment. The students' post-intervention scores were compared with the pre-intervention scores (Figure 7). The bars indicate the percentage correct each student received. Two students scored 100%, one scored 92%, one scored 83%, one scored 66%, and one student was unable to complete the post-intervention listening skills assessment due to illness. Each of the targeted kindergarten students showed an increase in their scores on the listening skills assessment. The greatest increase was shown by student 6 who showed an increase of 100%.

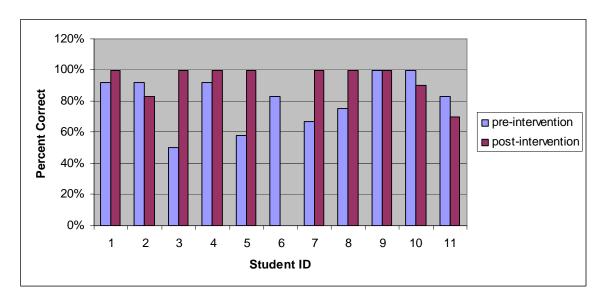


<u>Figure 7.</u> The post-intervention scores for the targeted kindergarten students on the listening skills assessment.

The targeted first grade students at Site A were also given the listening skills assessment. The post-intervention scores were compared with the pre-intervention scores in Figure 8. The bars indicate the percentage correct each of the targeted students received. Seven students scored 100%, one scored 90%, one scored 83%, one scored

70%, and one student did not complete the listening skills assessment because he moved out of the district. There were eleven first grade students targeted in this research. Six of those students showed an increase in their scores on the listening skills assessment.

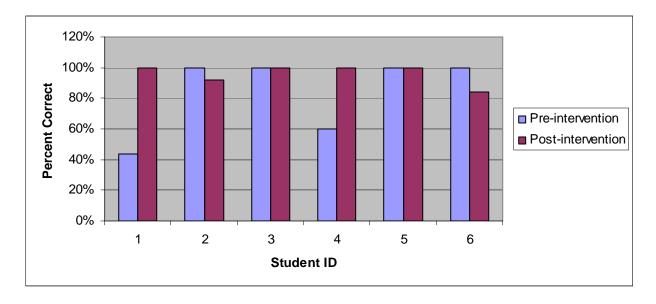
Three students showed a decrease, one student showed no change, and one student moved during the research. The greatest increase shown was by student 3 whose score on the listening skills assessment increased by 50%.



<u>Figure 8.</u> The post-intervention scores for the targeted first grade students on the listening skills assessment.

The targeted fifth grade students at Site B were also given the listening skills assessment. The pre-intervention and post-intervention scores were compared in Figure 9. The bars indicate the percentage correct each student scored on the post-intervention assessment. Four of the targeted fifth grade students scored 100%, one scored 92%, and one scored 84% on the post-intervention listening skills assessment. Three of the targeted fifth grade students' scores on the listening skills assessment increased, two of

the students' scores decreased, and one student's score remained the same. The largest increase was seen in student 1 whose score increased by 66%.

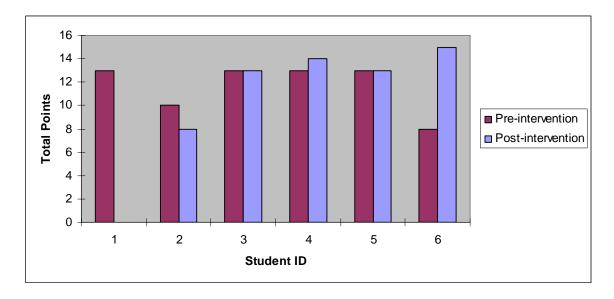


<u>Figure 9.</u> The targeted fifth grade students' scores on the listening skills assessment.

The targeted kindergarten and first grade students at Site A, and the targeted fifth grade students at Site B were also given an on-task behavior checklist. The students were assessed in the areas of time spent on-task, beginning work promptly, following directions, completing work on time, and talking when appropriate. Each student's score was totaled, and the total score was recorded. The pre-intervention and post-intervention scores were compared. The same form was used for each assessment.

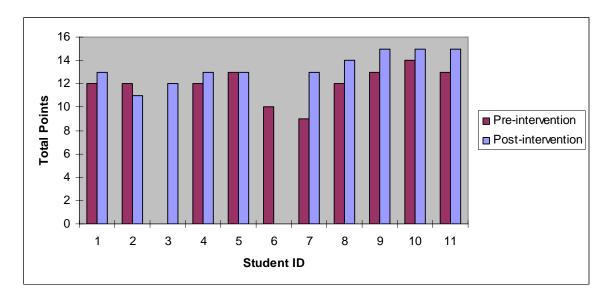
The targeted kindergarten students at Site A were given the on-task behavior checklist. The pre- and post-intervention scores are compared in Figure 10. One student received the maximum of fifteen points, one student received fourteen points, two students received 13 points, one student received 8 points, and one student did not receive this assessment due to illness. Two of the targeted kindergarten students' scores

increased, one decreased, two stayed the same, and one student did not have a postintervention score. The largest increase in points was seen in student 6 whose score increased seven points.



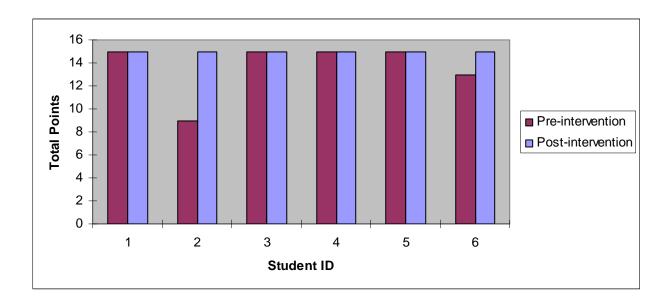
<u>Figure 10.</u> The total points received by the targeted kindergarten students on the on-task behavior checklist.

The targeted first grade students at Site A also received the on-task behavior checklist. The pre- and post-intervention scores are compared in Figure 11. Of the eleven students, three scored 15 points, one scored 14 points, four scored 13 points, one scored 12 points, one scored 11 points, and one student was unable to complete the on-task behavior checklist due to the fact that he moved out of the district. Seven of the targeted first grade students' scores on the on-task behavior checklist increased, one student's score decreased, one student's score remained the same, and two students' scores were not included in this analysis due to the fact that they were not able to participate in both pre and post-intervention measures. The largest increase in points was shown by student 7 whose score increased four points.



<u>Figure 11.</u> The total points scored on the on-task behavior checklist by the targeted first grade students.

The targeted fifth grade students were also given the on-task behavior checklist. The pre- and post-intervention scores are compared in Figure 12. All six of the targeted students scored a total of 15 points on the post-intervention on-task behavior checklist. Four of the targeted fifth grade students had no change in their pre- and post-intervention scores. The largest increase in points scored was seen in student 2 who showed a six point increase on his post-intervention on-task behavior checklist.



<u>Figure 12.</u> The total scores for the targeted fifth grade students on the on-task behavior checklist.

In order to achieve triangulation, student work samples were collected. These samples consisted of work the students had completed during the direct instruction of listening skills. These samples were collected prior to, during, and following the intervention. The researchers compared pre- and post-intervention samples of student work. It was found that most students showed an improvement in their work during the listening skills lessons. The post-intervention student work samples showed that the students were more able to follow directions and complete work in a timely manner.

After reviewing the research, the researchers found that students who improved on the listening skills assessment also showed an improvement in their work samples. However, that did not necessarily mean that they showed improvement on the on-task behavior checklist. Students were observed using the listening skills that were taught in

other areas of the curriculum. There was carryover of these skills into the students' daily routine. The researchers found that the students were motivated to stay on-task by the reward system, but their listening skills were not necessarily better when they were rewarded.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the presentation and the analysis of the data, the students showed an improvement in listening skills and on-task behavior. Researchers observed students applying the listening skills that were taught. Reflections from teachers on a weekly basis helped to show increased use of listening skills.

The listening lessons and collection of students work were one of the strengths in improving listening skills. Directly teaching the students how to listen, and what listening looks like helped the students to become aware of the researchers expectations. The collection of student work was also valuable in that it allowed the researchers to note the students' growth over time. If the researchers were to do this type of intervention again, they would not only collect student work, but would also conduct conferences with individual students regarding their progress in the use of listening skills.

The listening skills assessment was also successful. This tool was organized well, and adapted appropriately for each grade level. The listening skills assessment allowed us to compare our students' growth in using listening skills. If this research were to be repeated, the researchers would definitely use this tool again.

The on-task behavior checklist was also useful. This tool was quick to administer. It gave the researchers a quick overview of the students' on-task behavior

during certain activities. The researchers found that students were most on-task during cooperative learning activities. If this research were to be repeated, the researchers would suggest creating a checklist, which would be more comprehensive. In order to make the checklist more comprehensive, the researchers would change the rating scale to include a broader range of behaviors. Also, the researchers would break some of the categories down into individual activities. Creating a different checklist for each grade level was also considered to take into account the different abilities among the students. Doing this would allow for a more in-depth look at how well students were staying ontask.

A reward system was also implemented. In the kindergarten and first grade classrooms, dollars were used to reward students who were listening and remaining ontask. In the fifth grade room, a system of points was used. The students in the fifth grade class were broken into teams, and points were given to teams based on the performance of both individual students and the team as a whole. The researchers found that using two different systems was necessary to meet the needs of the students. The researchers also found that the fifth grade students were more motivated by the reward system than the kindergarten or first grade students. The fifth grade students were required to work individually and cooperatively to gain points, and this created more peer motivation for these students. The kindergarten and first grade students had very little if any peer motivation. It was also found that the kindergarten and first grade students needed more objective reasons to receive rewards. The students needed to know exactly what was expected for them to receive a reward. Although the students responded well to this intervention initially, as the intervention progressed they became less motivated by the

reward systems. The researchers would change a few things about this intervention if it were repeated. First, the students would have benefited from beginning the reward system on the first day of school. It was difficult to implement after our classroom routines had been established. Second, the researchers would attempt to reward the desired behaviors with more frequency and immediacy. The researchers believe that the reward system was a minor factor in their research, but was very motivational for some students.

Overall, the researchers were pleased with their results. Students were better listeners, and remained on-task more often. Although the researchers found some areas where changes might be advantageous, the overall percentage of on-task behavior increased which was the goal of the project. The researchers have learned that developing listening skills and on-task behaviors in their classrooms can be challenging, but very beneficial for their students.

Reflections

I have been teaching in the same district for the last ten years. This is my fifth year teaching at the kindergarten level. During the last five years, my class size has more than doubled which has created a greater need for the students to be better listeners and stay on-task.

Our research group was composed based on our concerns that our students lacked the listening skills they need to learn. We created listening lessons that would teach our students how to be better listeners. As a group, we worked well together. Each member of our group had different ideas and strengths that the brought to the group. We have become a close knit group and stronger educators based on this experience.

The strengths of this research project were the weekly listening lessons, the monetary reward system, and the cooperative learning activities. The weekly listening lessons were important because in kindergarten I am setting the stage for the students' academic careers. I think that my students greatly benefited from being taught to give full attention when someone is speaking. The monetary reward system gave my students motivation to stay on-task, and to follow directions. They could not wait to count the money, and most of them saved their money to have extra computer time or to eat lunch with the teacher. The cooperative learning lessons were ideal for keeping their attention. The students enjoyed working in small groups, and were successful in their lessons.

Overall, my class's listening skills improved, and our classroom has greatly benefited from this experience.

I have been teaching first grade for eight years. Over the years, I have noticed a decline in my students' ability to listen and stay on-task. Together, my colleagues and I decided to create an action research project with the goal of improving both listening skills and on-task behavior. After completing my research, I found that most of my students improved these skills.

I believe that the two most powerful portions of our research in my classroom were; the direct instruction of listening skills and the monetary reward system. I realize now that I need to directly teach my students how to be good listeners. I cannot expect my students to know how to do this. Also, the monetary reward system was very motivational for my students. Keeping the students motivated seemed to be the key to keeping them on-task.

This action research project has taught me a great deal. I feel that I have broadened my horizons, and become a more effective teacher. In the long run, I truly believe that this project will help my students to strengthen their skills in other areas as well as listening and remaining on-task.

I am a first grade teacher with three and one-half years of experience. I have taught first grade and Reading Recovery© for all of my years of teaching. It has become very clear that many students are easily distracted, and struggle with listening skills. Students have to learn and be aware of how important it is to stay on-task, and be a good listener.

I gained a great deal from this action research project. It was proven through my research that positive reinforcement improves listening skills as well as time on-task.

During my three years of teaching, I have always believed that if students are motivated, they will succeed! This project was a wonderful opportunity not only for my students, but also for me as an educator. I have learned the value of having goals and reaching them for both the students and myself!

This is my thirty-first year of teaching, and my fourteenth year teaching fifth grade. I feel that the topic of our research was perfect for my students in fifth grade because throughout my years of experience I have noticed a problem with the students' listening skills. My colleagues and I shared the same thoughts that our students could improve their listening skills, and as a result, could become better students. We tried different incentives to help motivate students to become improved listeners. As a result, the class showed improvement from the pre-intervention to the post-intervention.

Overall, my class's listening skills have improved, and they have become better students from this experience. As a result, I will continue to use these incentives in the future.

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APPENDICIES

Appendix A

Kindergarten Pre and Post-Intervention Listening Skills Assessment

In square number one, write your name using a crayon.

In square number six, draw a blue circle.

Color square number four yellow.

Put a smiley face in square number five.

In square three, draw a picture of yourself.

Appendix B

First Grade Pre and Post-Intervention Listening Skills Assessment

In square number one, draw three blue triangles.

In square number four, draw two green circles.

In square number five, draw an orange line.

Leave square number six blank.

Color square number two yellow.

In square number eight, write your name.

Make two purple flowers in square number ten.

Draw a picture of yourself in square number twelve.

In square number seven, draw a blue square.

In square number eleven, make a yellow sun.

Pre and Post-Intervention Listening Skills Assessment for Kindergarten and First Grade

1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	9
10	11	12

Appendix C

Pre and Post-Intervention Listening Skills Assessment for Fifth Grade

In the upper left hand box, place the number 99.

In the upper right hand box, print your first name.

In the bottom box of the second column, draw a square.

Above the square, draw a circle in the box.

One box to the right of the circle, print your last name.

Two boxes to the left of your last name, write your favorite color.

In the lower left hand box, write the month you were born.

In the top of the second column, draw a triangle.

Move down one box from the triangle, and write your age.

Move one box to the left, and write what grade you are in.

From your grade box, move over two columns to the right, and print the name of your school.

In the last box, print your favorite food.

Pre and Post-Intervention Listening Skills Assessment for Fifth Grade

Appendix D

Pre and Post-Intervention On-Task Behavior Checklist for Kindergarten, First, and Fifth Grade

On-Task Behavior Checklist

	Most of the	Some of the	Not at all
	time	time	1
	3	2	
Time is spent on task.			
Student gets right to work (name on paper, materials, etc.)			
Student understands directions (didn't ask for repeats)			
Student has work completed on time.			
Student talks when appropriate, not disrupting others.			

Total	Points:	

Comments: