

DECREASING OFF-TASK BEHAVIOR THROUGH A DOT/POINT REWARD SYSTEM  
AND PORTFOLIO REFLECTION WITH SECOND, FIFTH, AND SIXTH GRADERS

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this action research project was to decrease off-task behavior through a dot/point reward system and portfolio reflections. Students involved in this research were in second, fifth, and sixth grade. There were a total of 85 student participants and 35 teacher participants. The dates of this research began on September 4, 2007 and ended on December 15, 2007.

There were seven specific off-task behaviors that helped define the problem. These behaviors included daydreaming, talking out of turn, touching others, fidgeting with objects, out of seat at inappropriate times, putting heads down on desks, and putting the safety of others at risk. The three tools that were chosen to document evidence of the problem were an observation checklist, a student survey and a teacher survey. In regards to pre-documentation, the researchers found that off-task behaviors were occurring in the classroom through the observation checklist. By administering the student survey during pre-documentation, the researchers concluded that some students were not aware that their behaviors and how it was affecting their work and performance. Through the teacher survey, the researchers concluded that they, too, found off-task behavior to be occurring in their classrooms regularly. Overall, the researchers added that organization largely affects the students' off-task behaviors.

As a means to decrease the chosen seven off-task behaviors, the researchers implemented a dot/point reward system and a portfolio reflection. Each week, a student received a dot chart. The student would receive a "dot" on their chart if they chose to engage in any of the targeted off-task behaviors. At the end of each week, the student would receive a reward or consequence based on the number of dots received. After the students earned their reward or consequence, they were to complete a portfolio reflection. Each student was required to analyze their dot chart in comparison with a selected piece of work that was completed in class that week. The students were required to find a correlation between their behavior and the success or failure of the selected assignment.

In the end, it should be noted that while the researchers did not feel that the study was a complete success, they learned that the interventions can be easily used and be very successful if used on an as needed, individual basis with selected students. Upon completion of the study talking out of turn was reduced by 19%. Also, while the seven behaviors that were targeted did occur frequently, the researchers felt that some of them could have been replaced. Other off-task behaviors that were not addressed could have been substituted. It should also be noted that the researchers felt that when these interventions are used in the future, they have the potential to be more successful given a longer period of time for completion.

## CHAPTER 1

## PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

## General Statement of the Problem

The major focus of research conducted in this study was to decrease off-task behavior in order to promote a better learning environment. Behaviors that contributed to this problem were daydreaming, head down on desk, touching others, fidgeting, putting the safety of others at risk, talking out of turn, and being out of seat. These behaviors were documented through the use of a teacher survey, student survey, and behavior observation checklist.

## Immediate Context of the Problem

Three teacher researchers conducted this research within the same school district. Site A teacher researcher teaches in a middle school, grades 6-8. The two teachers, from Site B, teach second and third grade at an elementary school. The following information is from the 2005 Illinois School Report unless otherwise noted.

Site A

Site A was a middle school where grades six through eight participated in a health education classroom setting. Table 1 below shows that the majority (45.4%) of the students were Caucasian closely followed by Hispanic students (41.1%).

Table 1

*Racial/Ethnic Background and Total Enrollment by Percentage*

<u>Caucasian</u>	<u>African American</u>	<u>Hispanic</u>	<u>Asian/Pacific Islander</u>	<u>Native American</u>	<u>Multiracial/ Ethnic</u>
45.4	2.0	41.1	9.5	0	1.9

Approximately 43% of the students were male, and 57% were female. Of the school's total population of 788, 345 (43.8%) were classified as low income and eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches.

Table 2 below indicates that there was a high attendance rate, some mobility, and low truancy at Site A.

Table 2

*Attendance, Mobility, and Chronic Truancy by Percentage*

<u>Attendance</u>	<u>Mobility</u>	<u>Chronic Truancy</u>
95.2	11.7	0.4

The district within which Sites A and B resided employed 324 full-time teachers, of which 265 (82%) were female and 59 (18%) were male. The ethnic background for these teachers included in Table 3 below.

Table 3

*Ethnic Background of Teachers in Sites A and B by Percentage*

<u>Caucasian</u>	<u>African American</u>	<u>Hispanic</u>	<u>Asian/Pacific Islander</u>
94.4	0.3	4.1	1.2

The average teacher salary in the district was \$58,301 annually with an average employment experience of 11.3 years. There was 50.7% (160) of the teaching population holding a bachelor's degree, 49.3% (155) with a master's degree and above, and 2.3% (3) with emergency or provisional certificates. Within Site A, the average class size for grade six was 25.6 and for grade eight was 28.1.

Each day, 45 minutes were spent on mathematics, science, and social studies. Ninety-five minutes were spent on English/language Arts. The gradation rate was 100%. On overall

performance of state tests, Site A had 70.3% of their students meeting or exceeding the Illinois Learning Standards.

Site A consisted of 47 full-time teachers, 1 half-time teacher, 8 teachers' aides, 6 traveling teachers, and several other members. Among these, 69 are female and 18 are male. The full-time and half-time teachers included eight for language arts/literacy, five for mathematics, and four each in science, social studies, and physical education. Five teachers were provided for the encore subjects including music, family and consumer sciences, industrial technology, art, and drama. There was one Spanish teacher. Site A also included 10 Special Education teachers and seven teachers for the English Language Learners (ELL) program. Other staff members included a principal and assistant principal, school psychologist, two secretaries, speech pathologist, Library Media Center (LMC) Specialist and her aide, one full-time and one traveling social worker, a traveling vision specialist, one health clerk with a traveling registered nurse for the district, and four custodians. A kitchen staff was employed by an outside company to prepare and serve the school lunches.

All students were provided with instruction in science, social studies, mathematics, language arts, literacy, physical education, visual fine arts, general music, industrial technology, family consumer sciences, and health. There were also opportunities available for Spanish, orchestra, and chorus. All students not taking Spanish class were also given a tutorial period in which opportunity was provided to reinforce core learning skills (SIP, 2006, p.17.)

Site A was originally constructed as a junior high school in 1953. In 1997 it became a middle school and sixth grade was added to Site A. An addition to the building was built in 2000. The addition included the construction of a new office and the creation of four new classrooms. Following the addition, spread among three levels, Site A consisted of 31 classrooms, one gymnasium, one cafeteria, and one library with desktop computers, an office housing the

secretaries, principal, and assistant principal. Each level also has access to carts of laptop computers.

### Site B

Site B was an elementary school where grades two and three participated in a regular education classroom setting. Table 4 below shows that 71% of students at Site B were Caucasian.

Table 4

#### *Racial/Ethnic Background and Total Enrollment by Percentage*

<u>Caucasian</u>	<u>African American</u>	<u>Hispanic</u>	<u>Asian/Pacific Islander</u>	<u>Native American</u>	<u>Multiracial/ Ethnic</u>
71	4	10.9	7.3	0	0.7

Approximately 52 % of the students were male, and 51 % were female. Of the school's total population of 275, 15.3% were classified as low income.

Table 5 below indicates that there was a high attendance rate, little mobility, and low truancy problems at Site B.

Table 5

#### *Attendance, Mobility, and Chronic Truancy by Percentage*

<u>Attendance</u>	<u>Mobility</u>	<u>Chronic Truancy</u>
95.7	7.3	0.4

The district within which Sites A and B resided employed 324 full-time teachers, of which 265 (82%) were female and 59 (18%) were male. The ethnic background for these teachers included in the table below.

Table 6

*Ethnic Background of Teachers in Sites A and B by Percentage*

<u>Caucasian</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>Hispanic</u>	<u>Asian/Pacific Islander</u>
94.4	0.3	4.1	1.2

The average teacher salary in the district was \$58,301 annually with an average employment experience of 11.3 years. There was 50.7% of the teaching population holding a bachelor's degree, 49.3% with a master's degree and above, and 2.3% with emergency or provisional certificates

Site B housed students in K - 5. The core-teaching subjects were English/ language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. English/language arts was taught 150 minutes per day, mathematics was taught 60 minutes per day and science and social studies was taught 30 minutes per day. The students also received art once a week for 45 minutes, music/ drama 3 times a week for 30 minutes, and physical education/ health three times a week for 30 minutes. On the Illinois State Assessment Test in 2005, 79.8% of students met or exceeded in reading, whereas 20.2 students did not meet. In mathematics, 91.0% of students met or exceeded, whereas nine students did not meet. Overall on the Illinois Measure of Annual Growth in English, 70.8% met standards in 2004-05.

The elementary school building of Site B employed a total of one principal, eight regular education teachers, one special education facilitator, one and a half resource teachers, two ELL teachers, one ELL assistant, and one social studies teacher. Support staff included one art teacher, one music teacher, one library media specialist who also ran our gifted program, one library media assistant, one speech pathologist, one psychologist, one social worker, one

occupational therapist, one health clerk, one nurse, one physical education teacher, one school secretary and three custodians and one lunch server.

The elementary school of Site B had a program housed in their school, Special Programs Arranged for Kids (SPARK). SPARK was a quality early childhood and school age program in a public school setting. Parents who had children who are at risk from the community could have requested to have their child put into this program.

Site B was a one-story elementary building that was also paired with a SPARK pre-school/at risk program. Site B was built in 1964 with 23 classrooms, with an addition built in 1971 that added 4 classrooms for a total of 27. Site B was 42,000 square feet and was maintained in excellent condition by two full time custodians and one part time custodian. There were three wings to Site B. Only one of these wings had classrooms occupied solely by students in grades K-5. The other two wings were a mixture between elementary students and the SPARK program. Site B had one computer laboratory that had 30 Macintosh laptops. There were also two laptop computer carts that housed 20 computers each. Students, with teacher supervision, had full access to these computers. There was a library media center and a gymnasium that also served as a cafeteria during the lunch hours. Site B had two main playgrounds with one separate small area that was designated for the pre-school children and also a separate playground for the kindergarten students.

The three teacher researchers felt that off-task behavior was not a direct result of the information presented at either Site A or Site B. The researchers felt the problem seemed to be a result of factors not including gender, ethnicity, and/or income.

### Local Context of the Problem

Sites A and B are located within the northwest suburbs of Illinois. Both sites reside within one district within close proximity of each other and Chicago's O'Hare International Airport.

Table 7 below illustrates the ethnic data of the city. The data does not represent the data presented by the Illinois School Report Cards. The Illinois School Report Cards show a much higher Hispanic population than is represented in the table below.

Table 7

#### *Ethnic Background of Residents*

<u>Ethnicity</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>Hispanic</u>	<u>Asian</u>	<u>Islander</u>	<u>Native</u>	<u>Other</u>
Number	49,586	594	8,229	4,492	13	151	2,726
Percent	84.44	1.01	14.01	7.65	0.02	0.26	4.64

Of the adults over age 25 who resided within the city, 81.4% were high school graduates and 24.7% had a bachelor's degree or higher.

The community in which Sites A and B resided had a population of 58,720 and an average of 2.58 people per household. There were a total of 22,362 households and the average family size was 3.21 residents (Targeted City website, 2006). Of the total population 1.98% (1,163) of the residents in the community aged 16 and over were unemployed. People that lived in the community of Sites A and B were employed mostly in management, professional, or related occupations. Manufacturing, production, transportation and material moving occupations, service occupations, construction, extraction and maintenance occupations, government workers, and farming, fishing and agricultural occupations were also among the employed (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

In terms of crime rate, the most reported crime in the community where Sites A and B were located was property theft with 847 incidents. The next most reported crime was property damage with 367 incidents. The next most reported crime was vehicle damage at 281 incidents. This is followed by burglary to houses and businesses, motor vehicle theft, aggravated assault and battery, criminal and sexual assault, robberies, arson, and lastly murder and manslaughter (Targeted City Police Department Annual Report, 2005).

The Potawatomi, Ottawa, and Chippewa Indians first occupied the city where the targeted schools were located. The first settlers from the east began to arrive during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Following the Treaty of Chicago in 1883 pioneers from New York and New England began farming the land that would eventually become the present day city. In the 1840s and 1850s a large number of German immigrants arrived in the area. German eventually became the second language in many homes and churches. In the 1850s, the present site of the city was determined by the Illinois and Wisconsin Land Company. This company was responsible for building the railroad from Chicago to Janesville, Wisconsin. When the railroad was built and the trains would stop in the downtown area and use the near by lake for water the city then truly began to grow. The city was even named after the station, which was located in the downtown area. The city was official organized in 1874 with the election of the first city board member. Following World War II and the development of a nearby airport the city had a great period of growth. The population had an amazing jump of pre-war nine thousand to post-war over then fifty thousand. The city has also grown industrially within the last two decades. Today, the city covers 15.85 square miles, has a population base of 56,945, and abundance of industries and businesses (Targeted City Web Site History, 2006).

The city has recently added many improvements to the downtown area. In 2000, the city opened its brand-new state of the art library. Also, the city has just finished its major construction of the downtown redevelopment project. The project includes a 40,000 square foot grocery store, 56,000 square feet of retail space, 22,000 square feet of office space, and 135 condominiums and loft units. In addition, the city has been developing condominiums and loft complexes all around the downtown area (Targeted City Web Site, 2006).

Two park districts and the Cook County Forest Preserve maintain approximately 700 acres of parks and open space for the city. There are 37 park sites, three swimming pools, a golf course, a miniature gold course, and a 73-acre lake. The lake is used for fishing, boating, picnicking, and golfing. The city also maintains a fitness center/ health club, senior and teen center, theater, aquatic center, ice-skating rink, and bike trails. There are 300 recreational programs and many special events held throughout the year (Targeted City Web Site Recreation, 2006).

The district of Sites A and B consisted of one school of choice as well as nine elementary schools that feed into two middle schools that feed into one high school. Sites A and B's mission statement is guided by the partnership with parents and the community to better equip students with the skills necessary for their success as responsible citizens, productive workers, and lifelong learners by providing the best possible educational climate, curriculum, resources, and staff (Targeted City's School Website, 2006). There was one superintendent that oversees the nine elementary schools that feed into two middle schools, and one school of choice.

The district of Sites A and B passed an education referendum in February of 2006. This was the first passed referendum in over 20 years. The district has Equalized Assessed Valuation (EAV) of \$1.55 billion. The district in which Sites A and B operated had approximately 1,900 Apple

Macintosh desktop and laptop computers running Mac OS X and Mac OS 9. There were approximately 50 servers and a wide area network that connected 13 district buildings (11 schools, 1 administration center, and 1 maintenance building).

The three teacher researchers assessed that off-task behavior was not a direct result of the information presented about the local context for Site A and Site B. The researchers believe off-task behavior seemed to be a result of factors not including the location, population demographics, home and occupation, the community, and the district.

#### National Context of the Problem

The literature provided many causes of off-task behaviors and relationships to discipline problems. Discipline problems are the single greatest factor in decreasing time on task in the classroom and when a student misbehaves. The teacher takes time away from instruction to reprimand the student and in turn the disruption by the teacher causes other students to become disengaged from tasks (Atwood, 2001). Another cause may be the lack of awareness of off-task behaviors by the students. Many students are quite unaware of how their secondary behavior appears (Rogers, 2006). Students stop work on-task when they begin to feel a loss of interest and boredom (Ito, 1996). In addition to these factors, teacher organization was a contributing factor to off-task behavior. Failure to gain students' attention, unclear and confusing directions, using lengthy explanations, dwelling too much on the detail rather than focusing on key points, and allowing students to take too much time moving from one task to the next contribute to student misbehavior (Wuest, 1999).

## CHAPTER 2

### PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

#### Evidence of the Problem

The purpose of this project was to decrease off-task behavior through a dot/point reward system and portfolio reflection. Forty-three second-grade students, 20 fifth-grade students, and 22 sixth-grade students participated in the study for a total of 85 students. Thirty-five certified teachers also participated in the research. The tools used for documenting the problem included a student survey, a teacher survey, and a behavior checklist. The dates of this research were September 4, 2007 through December 15, 2007.

#### Student Survey

The purpose of the student survey was to determine if students were aware of their off-task behavior. This tool was administered by each of the three teacher researchers to all second, fifth, and sixth-grade students at their respective schools. This consisted of 43 second-grade students, 20 fifth-grade students, and 22 sixth-grade students for a total of 85 students. The survey was administered during class time on Tuesday, September 4, 2007. The survey consisted of five Likert-scale type questions focusing on students' awareness of specific off-task behaviors. Each student was able to choose always, sometimes, or never for each of the five questions. A copy of this survey can be found in Appendix A. The rate of return for the student survey was 100% (n=35).

The first question for the survey was "I am excited about learning new things in school." Figure 1 below represents the first question included in the student survey. This question was selected to gauge students' overall interest in school. Unfortunately, most responses (n=48, 57%) fell on the rating scale under sometimes, which did not provide much information to the researchers.

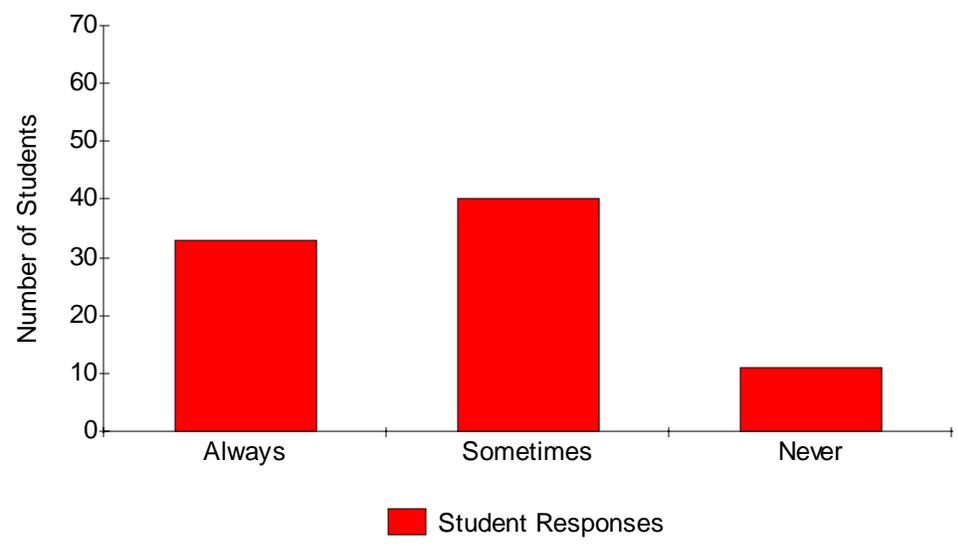


Figure 1

The second question was “I can pay attention when the teacher is giving directions.” This question was intended to check for student awareness of off-task behavior, such as daydreaming. Overall, (n=60, 71%) the students participating felt they were able to pay attention.

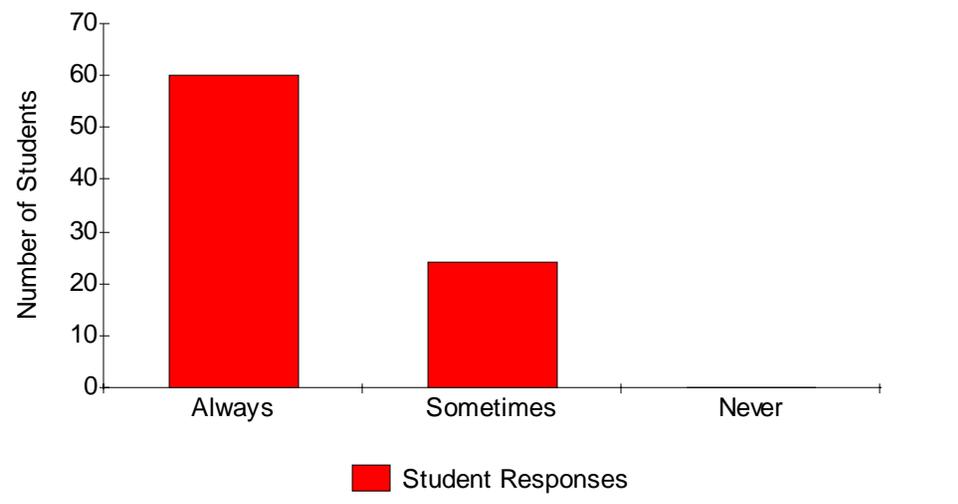


Figure 2

Question 3 of the survey was “I know when I am listening and paying attention.” This question was intended to again check for awareness of off-task behavior. What was interesting

was that some students (n=27, 32%) were not always aware of their own behaviors such as listening and paying attention.

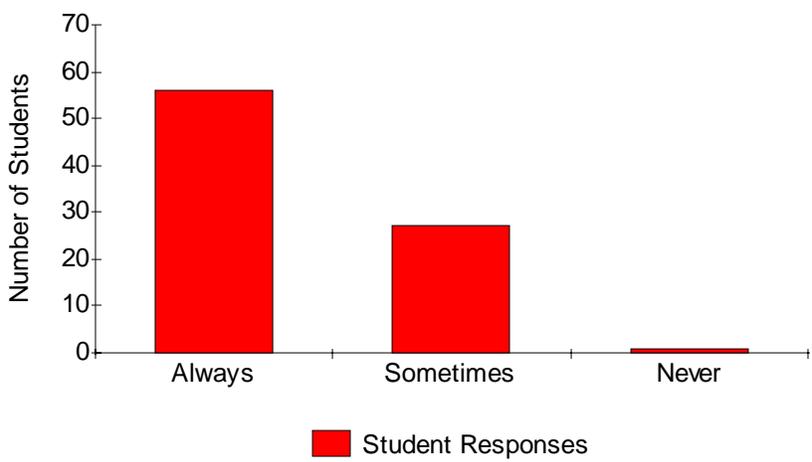


Figure 3

Question 4 of the survey asked students “My behavior allows others to complete their work.” The researchers were checking for student awareness of how their behaviors affect other classmates. In these results, most students (n=45, 54%) were aware of how their behaviors can distract others.

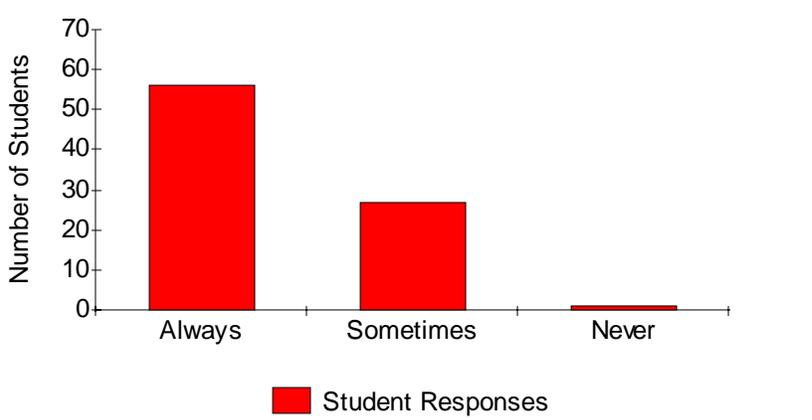
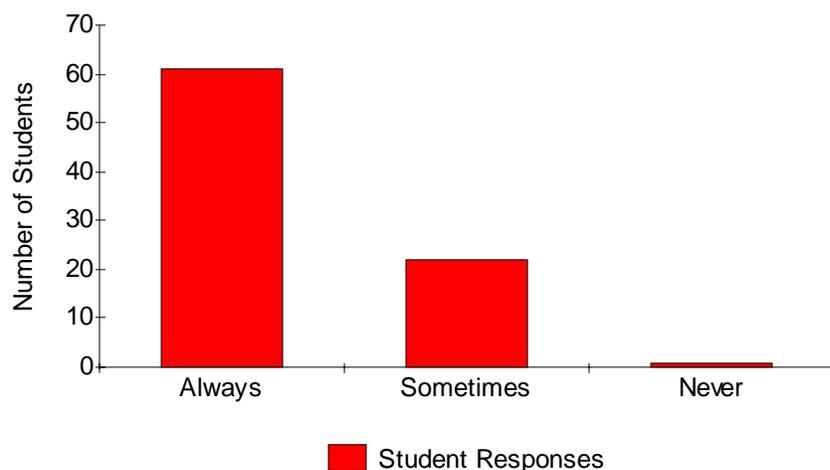


Figure 4

Question 5 of the student survey asked “During independent work time I am focused.” This question was looking for student awareness of how they use their work time. Most students (n=61, 73%) felt they were focused during that time.

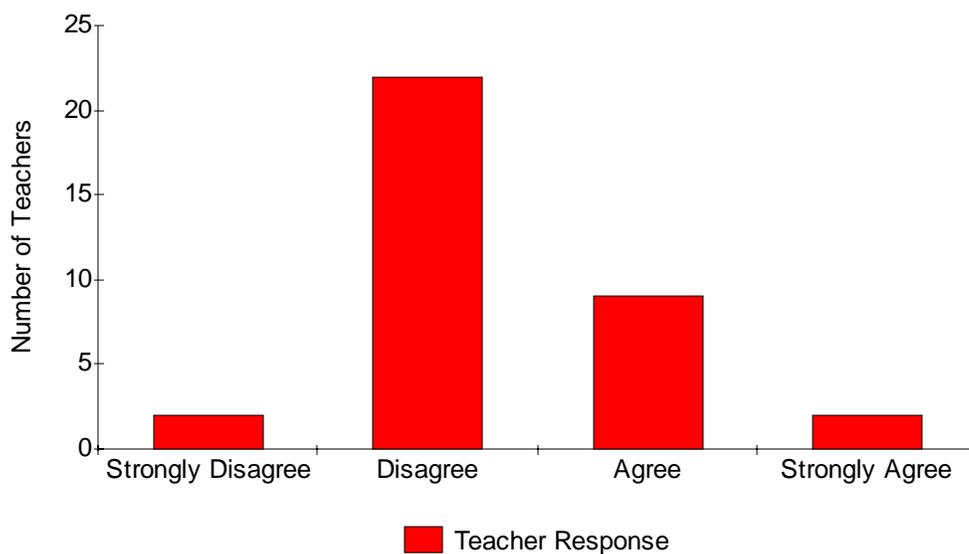


*Figure 5*

### Teacher Survey

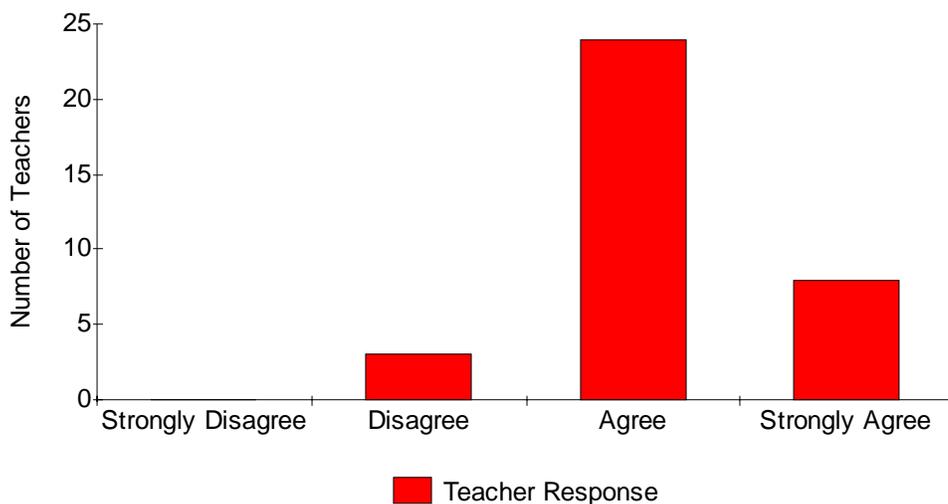
The purpose of the teacher survey was to determine the attitudes and perceptions teachers have regarding off-task behavior. This tool was administered by each of the three teacher researchers to all certified staff at their respective schools. Thirty-five certified staff returned the survey for a return rate of 75%. The survey was distributed on August 27, 2007 and was returned the week of September 4, 2007. The survey consisted of five questions. The first four questions focused on teacher’s current attitudes toward off-task behaviors using a Likert scale. Each teacher was able to choose always, sometimes, or never for each of the four questions. The fifth question offered seven specific off-task behaviors. Teachers were able to check off which behaviors they had observed at some point in their teaching careers. A copy of this survey can be found in Appendix B.

Figure 6 below represents the first question included in the teacher survey. The question read, “There is a high occurrence of off-task behavior in my classroom.” Most teachers (n=22, 63%) felt that off-task behavior does not occur frequently.



*Figure 6*

Figure 7 illustrates the second question of the teacher survey. The question asked teachers if off-task behavior interfered with students meeting their learning objectives. Most teachers (n=32, 91%) did, however, feel that this was an issue in their classroom even though they reported a low occurrence of off-task behavior.



*Figure 7*

Figure 8 represents the third question of the teacher survey. The question asks if off-task behavior interferes with their ability to deliver instruction. Teachers also strongly agreed (n=9, 26%) to off-task behavior interfering with instruction.

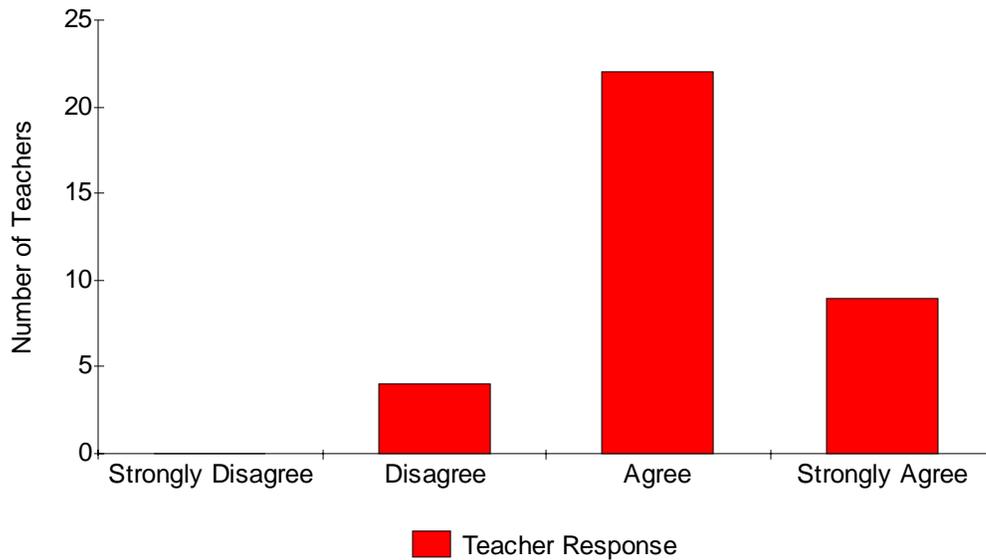
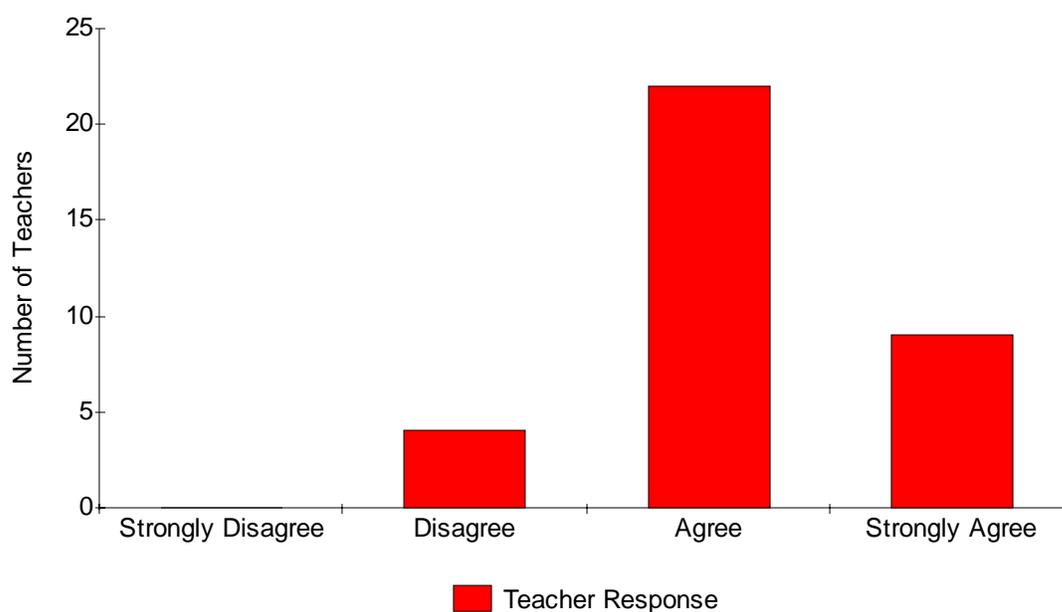
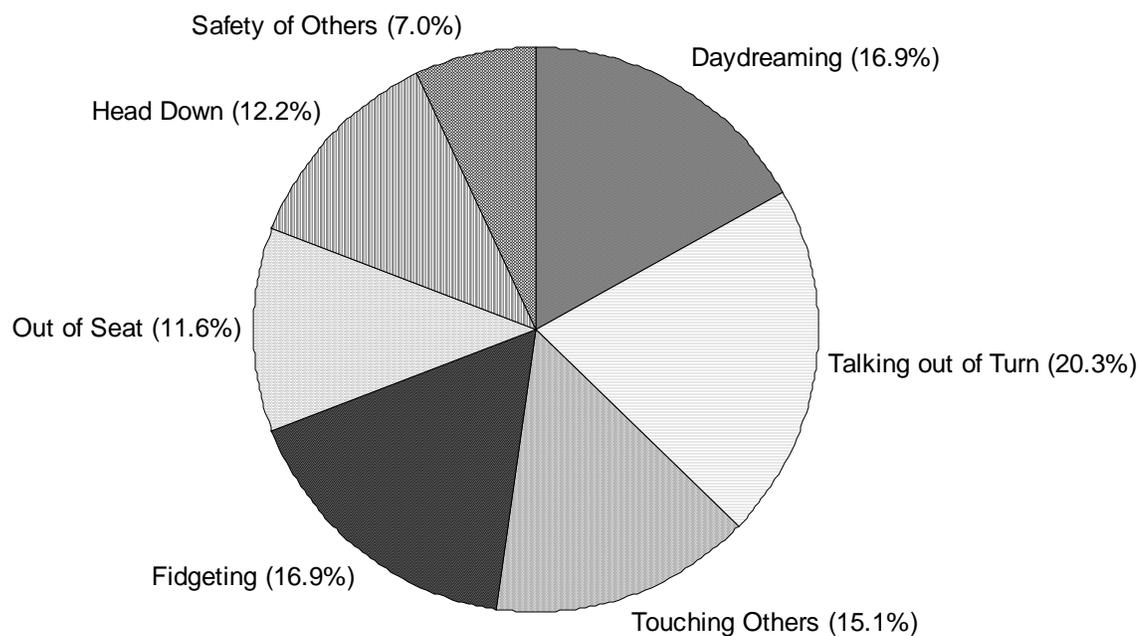
*Figure 8*

Figure 9 is the fourth question of the teacher survey. The researchers wanted to know if teachers felt that their organizational skills affect my students. Overall, (n=22, 63%) teachers strongly agreed with this statement.



*Figure 9*

Figure 10 represents the final question of the teacher survey. This question included seven off-task behaviors that the teachers were to check if they had occurred in their classroom. The seven off-task behaviors listed in question five that teachers could choose from were: students tend to daydream during a lesson, students talk out of turn, students do not keep their hands to themselves; students touch other people, students fidget with objects, students are out of their seats during inappropriate times, students put their heads down during a lesson or while doing in-class work, and students put safety of others and themselves at risk. Talking out of turn (n=35, 100%) was the most frequently reported while safety of others was the least.



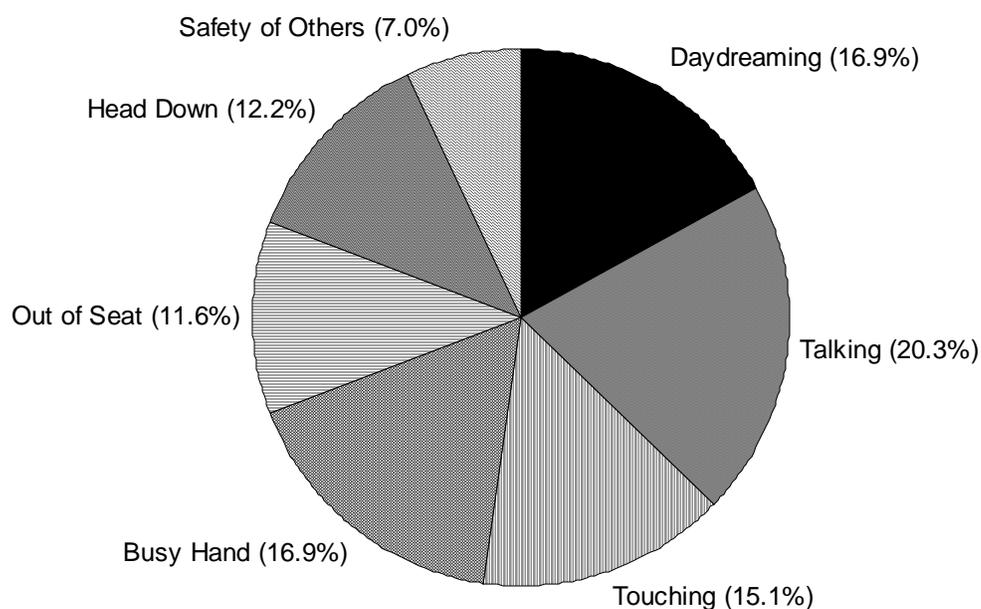
*Figure 10*

### Observation Checklist

The purpose of the observation checklist was to track the frequency of off-task behavior. By including specific off-task behaviors on this checklist, teacher researchers were able to show evidence of these behaviors in the classroom. This tool was administered daily for 30 minutes to fifth and sixth-grade Life Skills students from September 4, 2007 through September 7, 2007, for one teacher researcher. The other two teacher researchers used the checklist daily for 30 minutes to second-grade students from September 4, 2007 through September 14, 2007. Teacher researchers recorded, using a check, specific off-task behaviors and compiled the total amount.

Figure 11 below represents the frequency of the off-task behaviors. The seven off-task behaviors the teacher researchers were looking for included: daydreaming, talking out of turn, touching others (hands on other people), busy hands (fidgeting with objects), out of seat, head down, and putting safety of others at risk (running with scissors, kitchen hazards). Talking was

the most frequently observed behavior (n=160, 50%) coinciding with the results of the teacher survey as well as safety of others being observed the least. Daydreaming, talking, and touching others accounted for almost one-half of all documented behaviors.



*Figure 11*

### Summary

By using a student survey, teacher survey, and observation checklist students felt confident about their knowledge of their behavior affecting their academics. However, as reflected in Figure 1, students were not as confident in the area of being excited to learn new things. As shown in Figure 10, teachers were very well aware of the off-task behaviors that occurred in their classrooms. According to Figure 12, they believe that it does affect their students' performance. Teachers also felt that their own preparedness greatly affected the off-task behaviors that occur in the classroom.

### Reflection

As teacher researchers, we feel that the targeted off-task behaviors are on track with the behaviors present in our classrooms. This was evident in our observation checklists and results of

the teacher surveys. The results of our student survey showed that not all students are aware of their off-task behavior in relation to their academic performance. Based on this information, we feel that implementing the dot-point system has the potential to decrease off-task behavior and increase overall awareness and focus in the classroom. The awareness of these behaviors will increase the learning potential and overall self-confidence of the students as learners. They will be able to take responsibility for their behaviors and its affect on their academic success. The three tools used in the pre-documentation stage of the research shows that there is a problem area in off-task behaviors, specifically talking out of turn. However, we do plan to address and implement strategies to reduce all targeted off-task behaviors.

#### Probable Causes

Off-task behaviors were those that were irrelevant to the academic task at hand (Burns & Dean, 2005). Off-task behavior is a major concern for teachers as negatively impacting learning (Yarbrough & Thompson, 2002). For some students it is easier to pay attention in the morning rather than in the afternoon (Wright, n.d.). Misbehavior is due to not only lack of motivation, but also lack of appropriate skills (Barbetta, Norona, & Bicard, 2005). Behavior that is a problem may be the result of a child's inability to function in an unstructured environment (Hendley, 2007). While a student might appear not to be paying attention, it might be attributed to an inability to understand the information because of the way it's presented (Glazer, n.d.). Students who are not actively engaged may engage in off-task behaviors. Off-task students may also have trouble getting started or returning to work (Babkie, 2006). Off-task behaviors were those that were irrelevant to the academic task at hand (Burns & Dean, 2005). Students will not attend to tasks they see as irrelevant (Morgan-Flemming, Burley, & Price, 2003) or they may refuse to learn concepts when they do not see the relationship to the outside world (Daniels, 1998).

Recurrent inappropriate classroom behavior has been shown to compromise students' ability to learn socially acceptable and positive classroom and interpersonal behavior skills, and to be predictive of present and future academic underachievement (Moore, Anderson, & Kumar, 2005). In a review of research, Huitt, Caldwell, Traver, and Graeber (1981) found that student off-task or unengaged behaviors could be classified in one of five categories: management/transition, socializing, discipline, unoccupied/observing, and out of the room (Huitt, 1999). Other contributing factors of off-task behavior are students with ADHD because they may shy away from informing their professors (Farrell, 2003). Also, girls are less likely to be referred because they cause fewer problems in the classroom (Adams, 2006).

Four to nine percent of transition time is spent waiting for signals from the teacher (Atwood & Leitner, 2001). According to Randolph, elementary students spend less than 1% of total school time engaged in active responding (2007). While researchers were working with teachers to improve the engagement of students, they found management/transition and unoccupied/observing were used to classify 90% of unengaged behaviors (Huitt, 1999). On average, 50% to 75% of girls with ADHD are missed and girls with ADHD are diagnosed five years later than boys (Adams, 2006).

Unmotivated students will do work of poor quality or do no work at all (Erwin, 2003). If a student has a history of failure, he or she may feel incompetent and accept that they will have further failure in their lives (Stevens, Van Werkhoven, & Castelijns, 1997). Often times, when a student says they are bored, they do not think they can succeed at the task (Strong, Silver, Perini, & Tuculescu, 2003). Students may stop work on-task when they begin to feel a loss on interest and boredom (Ito, 1996). According to Wuest, when students begin to become bored in class, other behaviors emerge, and students will find other means to entertain themselves (1999). One

reason why some students feel they do not do their best is that they view the educational process as prescriptive and being controlled (Stevens et al., 1997). Glazer believes there's no such thing as a lazy child; there are only adults who say they are.

If a child is happy one moment and hysterical another, does extremely well in a subject one day but very poorly in the same subjects the next, this might be a signal that indicates something is bothering him. Another reason why a student may have difficulties paying attention is that they are preoccupied (Wright, n.d.). Viadero believes aggressive behavioral patterns in children often form before they set foot in a classroom (2002).

A symptom of inattention may be Attention Hyperactivity Disorder (Wright, n.d.). Boys are three times more likely to be diagnosed with ADHD, even though they're no more likely to have it. Too many young girls are not getting the help they need. Girls who are "spacey", disorganized, sensitive, and very talkative may have ADHD, but are very good at hiding it (Adams, 2006). Students who have chronic difficulties paying attention in class face the risk of poor grades and even school failure (Wright, n.d.). Oppositional students resist following rules, argue with adults, use harsh language, and annoy others (Marzano & Marzano, 2003).

Most misbehavior is for one of two reasons: 1. to get something, 2. to avoid something (Barbetta et al., 2005). If an emotional need is not being met, their behavior may become a challenge (Hendley, 2007). Socially inept students have inappropriate behaviors such as standing too close or touching others in annoying ways (Marzano & Marzano, 2003).

Many students are quite unaware of how their secondary behavior appears. Teachers often interpret such behavior as rudeness and as an attack on their status (Rogers, 2006). According to Stevens et al., underachievers are very dependent on their teachers' help, patience,

interest, and expertise. For this reason, this may hurt the child's relationship with their teacher and/or their classmates (1997).

Teachers tend to state negative statement statements toward students (do not, should not) and this may result in a worse behavior than how it already is (Carns & Carns, 1994). Limited positive feedback may also be a contributing factor to poor behavior (Daniels, 1998). According to Babkie, common mistakes that teachers make when communicating with students include; using sarcasm, using inappropriate language, having your students as your friends, telling students what not to do, looming over students when speaking, and calling out misbehavior in front of the class (2006).

When teachers feel manipulated by a student, their trust goes down (Erwin, 2003). According to Bluestein, teachers who complain that their students never take the initiative, have little self-control and rarely act responsibly. Consequently, these teachers never let these kids interact, get out of their seats or make a move on their own (1999). If you are not in control of yourself, you cannot control others (Jones, 2007).

Unengaged behavior sometimes begins when a teacher waits for the behavior to happen to then discipline a child (Huitt, 1999). Therefore, when dealing with students who are misbehaving, teachers would intervene early and quickly. When a teacher does not, it allows the misbehavior to spread and grow (Wuest, 1999). Although ignoring a misbehavior can be useful, it is difficult to determine when to ignore and when not to (Barbetta et al., 2005). Many times teachers are unaware of how to short-circuit the confrontation when dealing with discipline (Viadero, 2002). Ito states that at all cost, teachers are to avoid any confrontation with students who are off-task (1996).

For a teacher, having a class of 25 mixed abilities, background, and temperament makes having a “good” class even more challenging (Rogers, 2006). A teachers’ inability to meet the needs of all students can lead to misbehavior. A mismatch between teaching style and learning style can lead to frustration and off-task behavior (Ferris State University, n.d.). Contributing to student misbehavior can include a failure to gain the students attention, unclear and confusing directions, using lengthy explanations, dwelling too much on the detail rather than focusing on key points, and allowing students to take too much time moving from one task to the next (Wuest, 1999). A student may become frustrated if the amount of new material being introduced, even if presented with an appropriate ratio of unknown to known material exceeds the students’ acquisition rate, possibly leading to increased off-task behavior (Burns & Dean, 2005). A teacher may be disorganized or the lesson was poorly planned and presented so that the student has a hard time following along. Some students may be mismatched in instruction. The work is either too hard to too easy for students (Wright, n.d.).

Inappropriate curriculum can lead to misbehavior as well (Daniels, 1998). There are great differences in the amount of time students are exposed to learning activities (Karweit, 1984). More than one-fifth of each school day was spent on non-instructional activity such as taking out and putting away materials, bathroom trips, and waiting for instructions. When lunch and recess time were subtracted from a school day, only three hours and forty-five minutes were left for instruction out of a six and one-half hour day (Atwood & Leitner, 2001). Jones feels that only about half of the time in the school day is ordinarily used for instruction (2007). Transitions are often overlooked when planning the teaching day. There can be a direct link between a lesson and misbehavior (Barbetta et al., 2005) including the pace of the lesson (Babkie, 2006). The

more time spent on a task, the greater the likelihood of off-task behavior (Burns & Dean, 2005). Physical arrangement of the classroom may also cause misbehavior (Daniels, 1998).

Strictly controlling how a child spends their time, limits his or her chances to make decisions and experiment with new materials and ideas (Church, 2006). Negative emotions from parents and teachers are much more powerful than the positive ones and when the significant persons are angry or frustrated, the child will pick up on that and they will pay close attention to what is happening (Carns & Carns, 1994).

Discipline is one reason people give for opting to put their kids in non-public schools (Viadero, 2002). Discipline problems are possibly the single greatest factor in decreasing time on task in the classroom (Atwood & Leitner, 2001). Teachers inadvertently use inappropriate discipline techniques. They may be too general or try to correct too many behaviors. Negative consequences will never be totally effective (Alderman, 2001).

Some teachers think of time-out as a way to allow a student to calm down. Some use time-outs when they are not effective in reducing inappropriate behaviors. Time-out may serve as a reward for some students; an opportunity to escape from an assignment. Teachers who use time-out exclusively without trying other interventions may end up using time-out for behaviors that do not require such consequences (Ryan, Sanders, Katsiyannis, & Yell, 2007). It is tempting to overuse time-out because it serves as a reprieve from the students (Barbetta et al., 2005).

Threats and bribes buy short-term change in behavior, but can't help kids develop a commitment to positive values (Kohn, 1995). According to Erwin, incentives do not work to stop a behavior (2003). The token system may be used to reduce behaviors such as socializing students wandering around the room (Dugan, 2006). Rewards and punishments are instruments for controlling people (Kohn, 1996).

Which is better for classroom management: obedience or responsibility (Bluestein, 1999)? The goal of teaching responsibility is not just for children to follow directions or do that they are told to do (Miller & Church, 2001).

Most teachers deal on a daily basis with disruptions arising from student behaviors like talking out of turn, not following directions, and not interacting properly with peers and in the process lose valuable teaching time. Disruptive behavior is a major factor contributing to teacher stress and discontent and significantly affects teachers' capacity to maintain a productive and orderly learning environment (Moore et al., 2005). Teachers vary in their skill and competency in using classroom time effectively (Karweit, 1984). Another reason why unengaged behavior may begin is when a teacher is not paying attention to the number and length of trips to the bathroom or time spent outside the classroom (Huitt, 1999).

When faced with a serious behavior in the classroom, all other classroom management techniques may not apply (Jones, 2005). Often, when an approach to classroom management isn't working, we try harder, but negatively (Barbetta et al., 2005). If an issue is not handled quickly, it may build up to more inappropriate behavior (Ito, 1996). Excessive negative consequences result in teacher-controlled behavior rather than student-controlled behavior (Alderman, 2001).

Learning takes time, but providing time does not in itself ensure that learning will take place. Time is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for learning (Karweit, 1984). Transition times-finishing one activity and preparing for another- has proven critical in time mismanagement in classes. When a student misbehaves, the teacher takes time away from instruction to reprimand the student. Disruption the teacher causes leads other students to become disengaged from tasks (Atwood & Leitner, 2001). When the teacher and a student

become engaged in a confrontation, instruction stops and other students become spectators (Shukla-Mahta & Albin, 2003). Rules alone have little influence on student behavior (Barbetta, et al., 2005). Students may see rule making as a way to try and figure out what the teacher wants to hear (DeVries & Zan, 2003).

Control-inducing situations that should be avoided can occur when: the classroom arrangement initiates rowdy behavior, children do not know the classroom routine, and the classroom does not have enough materials (DeVries & Zan, 2003).

## CHAPTER 3

### THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

#### Review of the Literature

Through much research, there are many findings and proven methods to help reduce the frequency of off-task behavior in the classroom. Reducing off-task behavior could directly affect learning (Burns & Dean, 2005). The faster a situation can be resolved, the faster the teacher can focus back on the lesson (Jones, 2005). Self-monitoring interventions have been associated with improvements in on-task behavior, increases in work completion, and decreases in talking out for a range of students (Stahr, Cushing, Lane, & Fox, 2006).

Some suggest reducing satisfaction by providing students with a feeling of progress, offering students challenges throughout the lesson, and being enthusiastic. Variety reduces satiation and alleviates boredom (Wuest, 1999). “Recognize children for their good works; at the end of each day, discuss and then celebrate examples of children taking responsibility” (Miller & Church, 2001). According to Meyers, you must have prevention first; solve the problem before it begins (2004). Set up one child as an example to manipulate the behavior of everyone else (Kohn, 1995). Give children the chance to choose; this is how they learn to make good choices (Kohn, 1995).

Teachers may use a contract system with an off-task student. A contract could be best defined as is a written agreement between a student and teacher. Usually, the content is mutually created and specifies the behavioral expectations of the student and the teacher as well as time lines, rewards, and consequences for failure to meet the commitments (Ito, 1996). A contracting system has been highly effective for a number of children with numerous presenting concerns (Carns & Carns, 1994). The contract system can be extremely effective and a critical component

for new students with behavioral difficulties (Carns & Carns, 1994). With appropriate or off-task behavior, the contracting system has been effective with children who are shy and withdrawn as well as the aggressive child (Carns, 1994). The three important factors to making behavior contracts work is: (a) careful defining of the behavior desired, (b) the “magic number,” and (c) the “magic button.” The magic number is defined as the number of demonstrated desired behaviors necessary to earn a magic button or reward (Carnes, 1994).

Erwin says that five needs contribute to the source of all student motivation: (1) survival, (2) love and belonging, (3) freedom, (4) fun, and (5) power. He also suggests these needs, we can see an improvement in attitude and behavior (2003). For some students, the pressure to finish the test and assignments on time motivates them to be successful (Farrell, 2003). Getting excited about learning new things helps get children excited about learning themselves (Church, 2006).

Teachers also need to be sensitive to students’ motivation and be engaged in responsive instruction (Stevens et al., 1997). Giving a child appropriate choices help them feel like they do have choices in this world. Choice can help kids feel good about their thinking abilities, which is essential to motivating them to learn (Church, 2006). Giving students a certain number to maintain and letting them have a couple of misbehaving incidents and then lowering the number as time goes by makes the student feel that they do not have to be perfect and there is room in their lives for some imperfections (Carns & Carns, 1994). One of the many techniques that the article offers is *Activity Reinforcement*. This technique is to encourage the students to work on their work with a give and take process. If the student does their work they will receive an incentive for completing the task (Ito, 1996).

Academic learning time (i.e., the amount of time students spend on academic tasks, performing with a high rate of success) is the most important variable influencing student

learning (Atwood & Leitner, 2001). When instructional time was increased by twenty-three minutes a day; students gained the equivalent of an additional ten full days of instruction per year (Atwood & Leitner, 2001). Students can be more consistently on task when reading materials at the instructional level than at the independent or frustration levels (Treptow, Burns, & McComas, 2007).

Teachers need to make instruction interesting by choosing specific lesson topics that appeal to his/her students (Wright, n.d.). Organize units around questions that will encourage thoughts and concerns (Stong et al., 2003). Pace lessons based on need and responses (Babkie, 2006). Students need to be taught at a brisk pace rather than a slow pace (Wright, n.d.). The more time students have to spend on learning, the more they learn (Atwood & Leitner, 2001). According to Babkie, teachers must make learning meaningful (2006). Provide challenging exercises (Stong et al., 2003). Offer alternatives to paper and pencil tasks (Babkie, 2006). Play helps students become creative, imaginative, and inventive (Morgan-Fleming et al., 2003).

To reduce transition problems, make sure transition expectations are consistent (Barbetta et al., 2005). Changes in the school schedule, such as putting all extra curricular activities at the end of the week could be one way to solve the problem of off-task behavior (Karweit, 1984). Constant interruptions for nonessential reasons send a message that classroom instruction isn't important (Karweit, 1984).

Students in the elementary level with ADHD receive special services and expectations for taking tests in separate rooms, given longer time to complete tests, and have their medication brought to them by the school nurse (Farrell, 2003). College students with certain disorders (ADHD) are provided with academic adjustments (Farrell, 2003). This relates to the problem

because often times students with ADHD can exhibit certain off-task behaviors without even knowing it or being able to control them.

When a home climate is created that invites investigation, creative thinking, and collaboration lays the foundation for quality learning experiences (Church, 2006). Having meaningful conversations with a child about their activities helps them construct their own learning (Church, 2006). It is better to have a child choose the chore that you give them rather than telling them what to do (Miller & Church, 2001). Parents need to encourage the concept of getting attention through positive behavior not negative (Carns & Carns, 1994). Bridge the gap between research and practice on an issue that teachers and parents alike see as a top concern (Viadero, 2002).

Having colleagues' support and sharing ideas expertise are important for having successful strategies to help with off-task and misbehaving students (Stevens et al., 1997). The teacher is the only person who breaks through to set their off-task and misbehaving student, "...namely by acquainting himself or herself with the pupil's perception and attuning his or her own perceptiveness to it" (Stevens et al., 1997). A teacher will have to challenge the students and help them gain control over the problem that they are having (Stevens et al., 1997). Teachers who commit to developing responsible students were far less critical, controlling or authoritative than teachers who demand obedience (Bluestein, 1999). Positive Behavior Support (PBS) strategies include the following: create a comfortable, safe environment, promote emotional safety, document problem behaviors, understand the function of the behavior, develop problem-solving skills, notice appropriate behaviors, be consistent, and set the consequences (Hendley, 2007). Only ignore behaviors motivated for our attention (Barbetta et al., 2005).

A formula for effective teaching does not and may never exist (Atwood & Leitner, n.d.). Make sure a teacher can trust their instincts, seek help, and remember that children want to do well in all of their endeavor's and if they don't, there's probably a good reason for it (Glazer, n.d.). Being consistent on how a teacher handles each individual occurrence is important. Once a teacher begins to be inconsistent, the students will quickly take note of it (Ferris State University, n.d.). Consistency with each individual (some students require different consequences) is extremely important (Alderman, 2001). By taking time to talk to a student, sitting next to him or her, making eye contact, and helping the student work through their problem the teacher is showing the student he/she has high expectations for the student and supports his growing competence (Stevens et al., 1997). Move around the room to use proximity to detect problems and in turn, use of low-profile interventions (Alderman, 2001).

Teachers can use an "I" message with an explanation to get their point across to a misbehaving student (Ito, 1996). "Use "I" statements to address the concern...this way you are owning the problem and giving the student an easy opportunity to save face and get back on task" (Ferris State University, n.d.). "...repeating information, which requires lots of talk, is one way a learner remembers information he or she's heard, seen or read" (Glazer, n.d.). It is a good idea to pause before giving the necessary directions to convey the expectation that the students look toward you, listen, and subsequently respond (Rogers, 2006). Make direct with communication with a student (Treptow et al., 2007). Cue students as to what comes next (Babkie, 2006). Use an appropriate tone of voice when communicating with students (Marzano & Marzano, 2003).

Teachers are to always model caring and responsible behavior (Miller & Church, 2001). You cannot teach students to love learning, but you can model it with your own actions (Church 2006). Teachers are to try to stay calm at all costs. If necessary, cool off period may be a good strategy to use (Ferris State University, n.d.). By exhibiting appropriate levels of dominance and cooperation one can find the key to effective teacher-student relationships (Marzano & Marzano, 2003). Students are less likely to act aggressively when the teacher is not concerned with being in charge (Kohn, 1996). When dealing with a student who is very talkative and has friendship issues, be patient with her and without making this student your focus, encourage your class to be patient and generous with other children's differences (Adams, 2006).

At the beginning of the week the teacher is to state what are the appropriate behaviors (Dugan, 2006). During whole group activities, it is a good idea for teachers to circulate around the room to keep students focused (Wright, n.d.). Organize in way that avoids clutter (Babkie, 2006). Acknowledge students' feelings and communicate sensitivity and empathy (Meyers, 2004). Know your students and earn their respect (Jones, 2007). Use assertive body language (Marzano & Marzano, 2003). According to Babkie, make sure students feel comfortable, be respectful to them at all times, be consistent, and use routines (2006).

When a student is inappropriate, look at the classroom climate that has been created (Kohn, 1995). You should analyze your own behavior as a teacher to see if they are contributing to student's misbehavior (Daniels, 1998). When a student is off-task, what is the task? (Kohn, 1995). Focus on the behavior that the teacher wants to teach instead of the behavior that they want to correct (Carns & Carns, 1994). Learn from your past mistakes (Jones, 2007).

Children's attitude toward school, and how well they will perform in school may have to do with the way they were brought up. A child's first teacher is their caregiver, and it us

important to have a primary care give for this child. Having a primary care giver will help a child to accomplish the emotional tasks on becoming securely attached. Feeding, changing, and giving personal attention to babies when they need it is very important to helping them feel nurtured emotionally. It is more essential for babies to establish a certainty that their caregiver will be prompt in providing comfort. In turn the baby will try to be patient, and wait for the caregiver to come and help them. These babies will learn how to be patient, and wait for what they want. Children who are constantly off-task are not patient, and one of the reasons maybe because at young stages of their lives they were never given the attention they desired. Toddlers who have achieved the emotional stage of a secure attachment work harder at learning tasks and solving problems. According to Alice Sterling Honing, “They don’t give up so easily when a toy is hard to work. They will ask for your help and accept your suggestions when doing a puzzle that is somewhat difficult. They seem zestful rather than irritated about challenging tasks . . . They are more likely to play peacefully with peers and solve social fusses rather than get into fights (1999).” The patience and the emotional nurturing that children receive as babies will help them be prepared for school.

A study conducted by A. W. Carns and M. R. Carns (1994) have found that, “. . . children will make special effort to improve their behavior at school to earn 15 to 20 minutes of exclusive, uninterrupted activity with [their] important person.” By making special time for a child who does crave the attention from their special person will improve their on-task behavior. When children choose the behavior that a caregiver or teacher desires, the child has made a choice, because doing so meets some personal need. In turn, having a cooperative relationship with adults either with their caregiver or teacher will foster higher levels of self-regulating behavior.

It is a very scary feeling for some students to be starting a brand-new school year. As much as students need to prepare themselves for the new challenges in store for them, teachers also need to be prepared to help their students face those challenges, academically and socially. There may be many factors for a student to be off-task, but to eliminate some of those factors a teacher must be prepared for anything. It is an essential element that teachers start a brand-new school year with great classroom management. For this reason the teacher will more likely have an orderly classroom in January, as well as better student's achievement (Huitt, 1999). Teachers need to begin the year by laying out expectations for student behavior, along with what will be done to those who disobey. The expectations of student behavior, the rules, need to be clear and consistent. The rules for the classroom are to be publicized to all students and the boundaries need to be clearly stated. According to R. DeVries and B. Zan if children make the rules, they are more likely to observe them, because their opinion mattered on the classrooms expectations (2003). J. Bluestein also states, "By offering opportunities for self management, these teachers maintained their authority in the classroom without having to spend time competing for control (1999)." However, students who are considered to be off-task need to have more stringent rules, and a set of goals to help them focus exactly on the desired behavior. Teachers are to never assume a student is being malicious when it can just be ignorance. Most of the time students do not even realize they are being disruptive. Instead, teachers are to analyze a student's behavior and try to define what behavior is the concern, specify what is wrong with the behavior, decide what action should be taken to address the behavior, specify the behavior he or she wants from the student, and implement a plan (Daniels, 1998).

Along with a teacher having great classroom management, the arrangement of the classroom may also play in part to a student's off-task behavior. A teacher may try seating the

off-task student near the front of the class, and away from other talkative, disruptive students. Seating off- task students near the teacher also works, but sometimes is embarrassing for some students. Placing off- task students in the teachers “action zone” is a great method used by many teachers. The action zone is the area in the classroom where the teacher tends to focus most of his/her instruction time (Wright, n.d.). A realization that a teacher must consider when seating off-task students is that talking for some students is a way to relieve tension. So, the teacher must consider all of the factors before taking any action or “labeling” a student. A teacher should study what is happening in the classroom before and after a behavior occurs.

Planning and the teacher being prepared play a very important role on student behavior. Teachers who focus on making their instruction orderly, highly motivating, increasing student involvement find that they can generally hold the attention of most of their students most of the time (Wright, n.d.). Also, by teachers having regular routines, providing opportunities for students to respond appropriately, using a variety of learning activities to capture students’ attention, and keeping track of students progress will help students stay on-task. One strategy to improve on- task behavior is to give students a quick overview of the activities planned for the instructional period of the day (Wright, n.d.).”Another factor teachers must consider is the way they present their instructions to students. They should always call on individual students by their name and establish eye contract. Students also pay more attention when they cannot predict whom the teacher will call on next. As stated by S. A. Miller and E. B. Church, “Rather than offering a sequence of instructions . . . offer three and four simple, easy-to-follow directions (2001).” Teachers must also consider that some students do need brief attention breaks to re-energize themselves and gather their thoughts. A teachers use of effective time is very important to consider, and may go along with an orderly student population during a lesson.

Teachers are also to consider group dynamics when planning lessons, because when there are high rates of on- task behavior, students can work near their capacity. Student behavior is also influenced by the smoothness and effectiveness of transitions between tasks in a lesson (Wuest, 1999). A. Babkie (2006) came up with an acrostic way to help students remember how to transition; CHANGE C- collect my material and put them away, H- have ready what I need for the next activity, A- always watch my teacher for cues to move, – now take my seat quickly, G- get my materials out and ready for the next activity, E- encourage my peers to get started.

Teachers cannot just depend on students to know how to transition from one task to the other, but they do need to practice these skills with their students so they can stay on- task.

Teachers are to always have an action plan ready for any behavior; especially explosive behavior. The teacher is to explain each targeted behavior so students can clearly understand what is expected of him/her. To help students who are off- task, teachers are to change perception of the task to the students' perception so they can understand what is expected of them. Vis versa, the rewards students receive for being on- task should be changed periodically or modified based on the students interests. Teachers must also consider that the punishment should fit the crime and no student should be made an example out of. When a teacher is talking to a misbehaving student, he or she is to focus on the desired behavior rather than the behavior that he or she does not want. Corrections for misbehavior should be given calmly and not be publicized for the entire class to hear. In addition, teachers are to use a variety of verbal and physical reactions until the right approach is working for that particular student.

A method used by many teachers and has had great impacts on student behavior by keeping them on- task is using positive discipline and positive comments (Rogers, 2006). Positive discipline and comments when the appropriate behavior is being observed are the best

reinforcements to use with any child. Instead of focusing on the students' bad behavior, the teacher is to focus on the positive behavior. Reacting and acting in a positive way puts the teacher in a role of behavior facilitator/ educator, not discipliner. B. Rogers (2006) has found that even most difficult classroom personalities respond better to positive discipline. A teacher is to make sure that when a problem does occur, they focus on what is being asked of the student and how reasonable it is. According to J. B. Ryan et al., (2007) teachers should use a 5-1 ratio of positive to negative comments, and T. Alderman (2001) had found these positive reinforcements should vary every two to three months. A combination of encouragement and immediate corrective feedback was successful in improving attending behavior and arithmetic achievement. Teachers who trust young students to finish certain tasks give the students a feel of empowerment and an increased feel of responsibility (Miller & Church, 2001). When students do feel that sense of responsibility and trust from their teacher they are motivated by the opportunity to make choices, and they become self- motivated individuals. Which in turn is the goal of every teacher for his/her students.

#### Project Objective and Processing Statements

As a result of a dot/point system with a portfolio reflection, during the period of September 4, 2007 through December 14, 2007, the students of Teacher Researchers A, B, and C were to decrease off-task behavior.

The following tasks were to be accomplished prior to the implementation of the research project:

1. Purchase special paper and markers for dot charts.
2. Purchase pockets for dot chart to be placed in.
3. Purchase materials to create portfolios including hanging file folders and manila folders.
4. Create dot chart template.
5. Create reflection worksheets with stems.
6. Determine criteria for portfolio artifact selections.

## Project Action Plan

The action plan listed below guided the teacher researchers in implementing the research project to decrease off-task behavior. The action plan for Teacher Researcher A is presented separately as her dates are modified to accommodate her trimester schedule. The action plan of Teacher Researchers B and C is presented next, with similar tasks under an extended time frame.

### Pre-Study (August 27 – August 31, 2007)

- Copy parent letters and research tools
- Send out parent and student consent letters
- Collect consent forms
- Organize student portfolios

### Pre-Documentation Week (September 4 – September 7, 2007)

- Send out teacher survey
- Administer student survey
- Collect teacher and student surveys
- Analyze results of surveys
- Complete behavior observation checklist
- Analyze behavior observation checklist
- Introduce the dot/point system
- Model off-task behavior
- Introduce portfolio reflection stems

### Interventions (September 10 – November 2, 2007)

- Implement dot/point system with students, tallying dots on a daily basis
- Administer student portfolio reflection stem at the end of each week

### Post-Documentation (November 5 – November 16, 2007)

- Administer student survey
- Collect student survey
- Analyze results of survey
- Complete behavior observation checklist
- Analyze behavior observation checklist
- Analyze portfolio reflections

Pre-Study (August 27- 31, 2007)

- Copy parent letters and research tools
- Send out parent and student consent letters
- Collect consent forms
- Organize student portfolios

Pre-Documentation (September 4 – September 14, 2007)

## Week One (September 4 – September 7, 2007)

- Send out teacher survey
- Administer student survey
- Introduce dot/point system
- Complete behavior observation checklist
- Introduce portfolio reflection stems

## Week Two (September 10 – September 14, 2007)

- Continue behavior observation checklist
- Analyze behavior observation checklist
- Model off-task behavior
- Collect student and teacher surveys
- Analyze teacher and student surveys
- Administer portfolio reflection stem

Interventions (September 17 – November 30, 2007)

- Implement dot/point system with students, tallying dots on a daily basis
- Administer student portfolio reflection stem at the end of each week

Post-Documentation (December 3 – December 14, 2007)

## Week 14 (December 3 – December 7, 2007)

- Administer student survey
- Complete behavior observation checklist

## Week 15 (December 10 – December 14, 2007)

- Continue behavior observation checklist
- Analyze student surveys and portfolios reflections
- Analyze behavior observation checklists

### Methods of Assessment

The student survey was used in post-documentation to check for increased student awareness of off-task behavior. The survey consisted of five questions relating to students' perception of their behavior in relation to work performance. The scale range was always, sometimes, and never. The survey was administered the week of December 3, 2007. All participating second, fifth and sixth grade students (n=85) took the student survey during class time. Second graders took the survey during Reading/Language Arts. Fifth and sixth graders took the survey during Life Skills. The data collected from pre-documentation was compared to that collected at post-documentation to check for an increase in awareness.

The behavior observation checklist was used by the teacher researchers to look for any improvements in off-task behaviors. The checklist consisted of seven off-task behaviors that the teacher researchers looked for while teaching their lesson. The checklist was used daily December 3, 2007 through December 14, 2007. The second grade teacher researchers used the checklist during Reading/Language Arts daily. The fifth and sixth grade teacher researcher used the checklist daily during Life Skills. The behavior observation checklist data collected from pre-documentation was compared to that collected at post-documentation to check for a decrease in off-task behavior.

## CHAPTER 4

### PROJECT RESULTS

The objective of this research project was to decrease off-task behavior. Behaviors that the researchers classified as off-task were daydreaming during a lesson, talking out of turn, touching others, fidgeting with objects, out of seat, heads down during a lesson or while doing in-class work, and putting the safety of others and themselves at risk. Three teacher researchers divided among eighty-five students in grades two, five, and six participated in interventions in an attempt to decrease off-task behavior. The interventions included a weekly dot/point chart tracking the occurrence of off-task behaviors and a portfolio reflection each week. These interventions were used to increase awareness of off-task behaviors and make connections to the consequences related to them. This study took place September 4, 2007 through December 15, 2007. At this point, it is important to note that Teacher Researcher from Site A changed locations, which resulted in a change of teaching position.

#### Historical Description of the Intervention

At any given time throughout the school year, teachers are faced with off-task behaviors during instruction. Off-task behaviors can become discipline problems. According to Atwood & Leitner (2001), discipline problems are the single greatest factor in decreasing time on task in the classroom and when a student misbehaves, the teacher takes time away from instruction to reprimand the student and in turn the disruption by the teacher causes other students to become disengaged from tasks. Another cause may be the lack of awareness of off-task behaviors by the students. Many students are quite unaware of how their secondary behavior appears (Rogers, 2006).

The first two weeks of the project involved several steps. We administered both the teacher surveys and student surveys. We also completed our behavior checklists by observing students for the targeted off-task behaviors. The checklist was easy to use however, it was hard to complete while teaching without stopping instruction. Some students even started picking up on what was happening. It made us more aware of the occurrence of the targeted behaviors. It was surprising how more often the behaviors occurred than we realized.

In week three, each of us introduced the dot/point system and the reflection/reward process. All of us found this process to be quite time consuming with the hopes of it going smoother as time progressed. Students felt nervous at the thought of receiving a dot. It was also difficult to find time for students who were absent to complete their reflection for the week.

Weeks four and five continued the process with things get a little better. Although it was getting better, it felt as though it was difficult to give the students the attention they needed. It became more of a chaotic time in which we were running back and forth through the classroom. It also became difficult for some students to find an artifact of work that was “not so good.”

During weeks six and seven rewards were a hot commodity. So many rewards were given out and we felt as though it may not be working as effectively as hoped. It also proved to be quite expensive because more rewards were given out than consequences. The students who were not receiving rewards did not seem to be phased by this nor motivated to “try harder” the following week. Some students also took on the role of the teacher by pointing out when others should receive dots. By doing this, they interrupted class, which earned them a dot.

In weeks eight and nine we saw little or no change in student behavior. The portfolio reflections did not seem to be working out. More time was needed on curricular-related topics and the portfolios were taking away from this. The reflections also did not seem to be gaining the

expected results. Students would rush through not making connections and focus on getting their rewards.

During weeks ten and eleven, we took different routes. One of us began post-documentation because of a different time schedule. The student survey was administered for a second time. Again, the process was easy to administer but still took away from time on instruction. The other two continued their dot/point system. They still felt as though it was not gaining the results they had hoped for.

On week twelve, the two teachers left completed their post-documentation observation checklist and once again completed their student surveys. Overall, we felt that the post-documentation observation checklists did show a decrease in the targeted off-task behaviors.

In the beginning weeks we were very motivated to start the project. We hoped that there would be positive results. The students were also very excited to begin and earn their rewards. Some students would even go so far as to remind others when they were participating in an off-task behavior.

In a more global perspective, the off-task behaviors were not as we expected. The behaviors we targeted were ones we had seen on a consistent basis during our teaching careers. However, as the project continued, we felt that there were other off-task behaviors that should have been included in the list.

Implementing a dot/point reward system with a portfolio reflection is a solution to decreasing the frequency of off-task behavior and increasing students' overall awareness. This system will help students to manage and decrease their off-task behaviors to become a more responsible, hard-working student. When students have a sense of responsibility they are motivated by the opportunity to make choices and they are responsible, self-motivated

individuals (Bluestein, 1999). The intervention began with a dot chart representing each individual week after pre-documentation. If a student engaged in one of the targeted off-task behaviors, they would receive a “dot” on their chart. At the end of each week, the student would receive a reward or consequence based on the number of dots received. Once receiving their reward or consequence, students were to complete the second part of the intervention. Students were to take their dot charts along with a piece of selected class work from the week and complete a reflection. The idea of the reflection was to show the correlation between their behavior and quality of work. However, very few students made connections. As the weeks continued, the amount of dots that were possible to earn decreased. The only way our teaching methodology was altered was by taking time out of our curricular needs.

Teacher Researcher A feels that this project was not as effective in her current teaching position. The behaviors that I saw in my previous teaching position made me feel that these would be behaviors I would see regardless of social or economic status. After taking part in the research, I no longer agree with this idea. I feel that some students did possess off-task behaviors but not the same behaviors we were targeting. In the future, I will not continue this project but may consider adjusting the criteria for the next academic year.

As a result of implementing the interventions, teacher researcher B feels as though overall and although the data does not prove it, this action research project was a success. While much of the recording and reaching students to discipline them with a dot was time consuming, a small group of students did realize just how much they engage in off-task behavior. Often times, when one student received a dot, the others suddenly sat up straight and checked themselves to be sure that they do not get a dot. However, the 2007-2008 classes that participated in this

project were very well behaved with only a small handful of students who actually ever received dots. There were more students who never got a dot than those who did.

For the future, this had made teacher researcher B see that not only a lot goes into action research, but that just because data does not present a project to be successful, that does not mean that the project was not a benefit. Teacher researcher B will use a modified version of the dot/point reward system with students on an as needed basis to help motivate and decrease individual off-task behavior. Doing this as a whole class took more time than it was worth because the class as a whole was very well behaved.

I, Teacher Researcher C, feel that the dot chart had a tremendous effect on my personal behavior plan. Implementing the dot chart as a whole class was a wonderful idea, by not having certain students stand out as being assigned a specific behavior plan. However, I realized that it was very tricky to utilize the chart as a whole class behavior plan. It was very difficult for me to reach every student who deserved a dot, because I was busy teaching or attending to other students. I felt that at first in the beginning of the year, it was easy to implement the dot chart, but as the weeks progressed and I got more involved in my curriculum that I could not devote all my time to paying attention to every minor misbehaving detail. It was great for some students, but useless to others because they were never off-task. I am still using the dot chart in my classroom today even though the research as ended. However, I have changed the criteria for receiving a dot. For instance, I have noticed even though particular students are quite rarely off-task, but they are consistently forgetting their homework. The off-task standards are still in affect, but now they are receiving a dot if they forget their homework. The students seem more interested in the dot chart now, because I think they just needed a boost or a challenge every once in a while to get them motivated again. Overall, even though I felt the dot chart was time

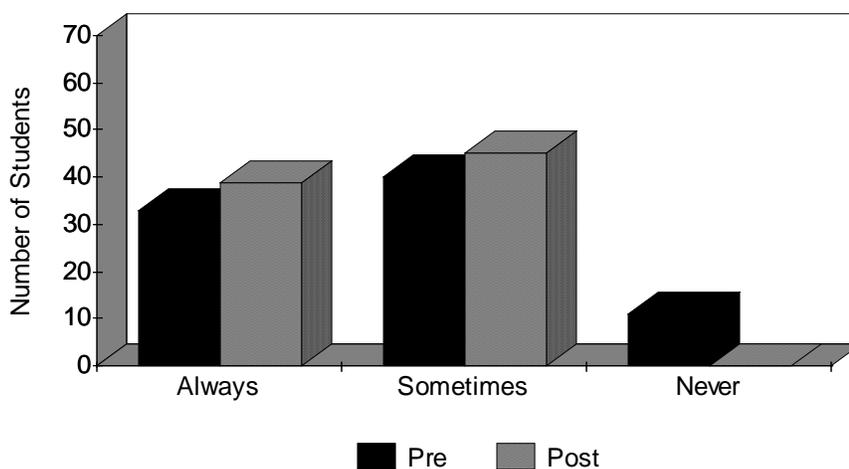
consuming, there was an improvement of off-task behavior in my classroom, because the students were more aware of their actions.

### Presentation and Analysis of Results

The purpose of this project was to decrease off-task behavior through a dot/point reward system and portfolio reflection. A total of 85 students participated in the study. Thirty-five certified teachers also participated in the research. The dates of the research were September 4, 2007 through December 15, 2007. The tools used for documenting the problem included a student survey, a teacher survey, and a behavior checklist.

#### Student Survey

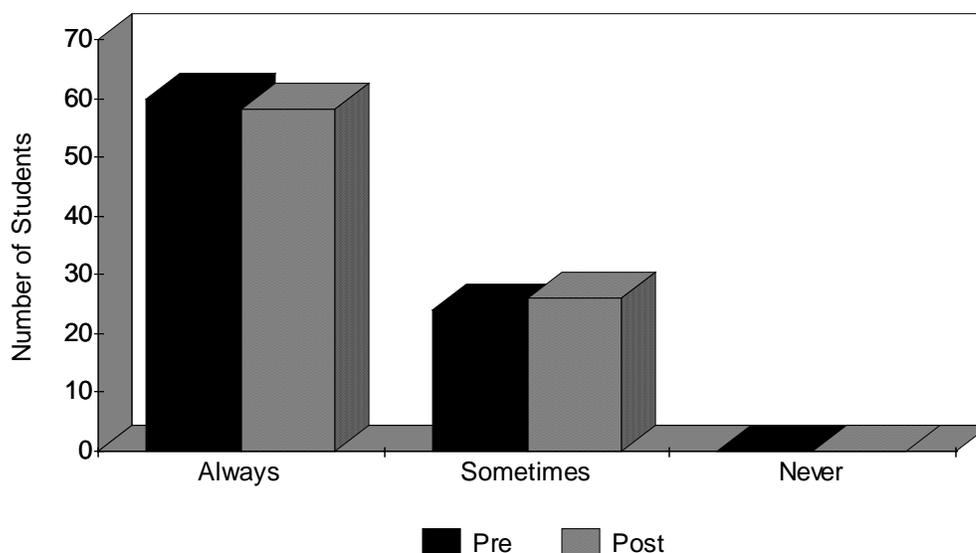
Figure 12 represents the first question for the student survey, “I am excited about learning new things in school.” This question was selected to gauge students’ overall interest in school. Most responses (n=39, 46%) fell within the always and sometimes ratings. This was an increase (n=33, 39%) from the previous survey.



*Figure 12*

The second question was “I can pay attention when the teacher is giving directions.” This question was intended to check for student awareness of off-task behaviors such as daydreaming

and talking out of turn. According to Figure 13, the students participating felt they were able to do so. There was a slight increase in awareness ( $n=2$ , 12%) as some responses switched from always to sometimes.



*Figure 13*

Question 3 of the survey was “I know when I am listening and paying attention.” This question was intended to again check for awareness of off-task behavior. According to Figure 14, the results were similar ( $n=54$ , 64%) to those in the pre-documentation survey ( $n=56$ , 66%).

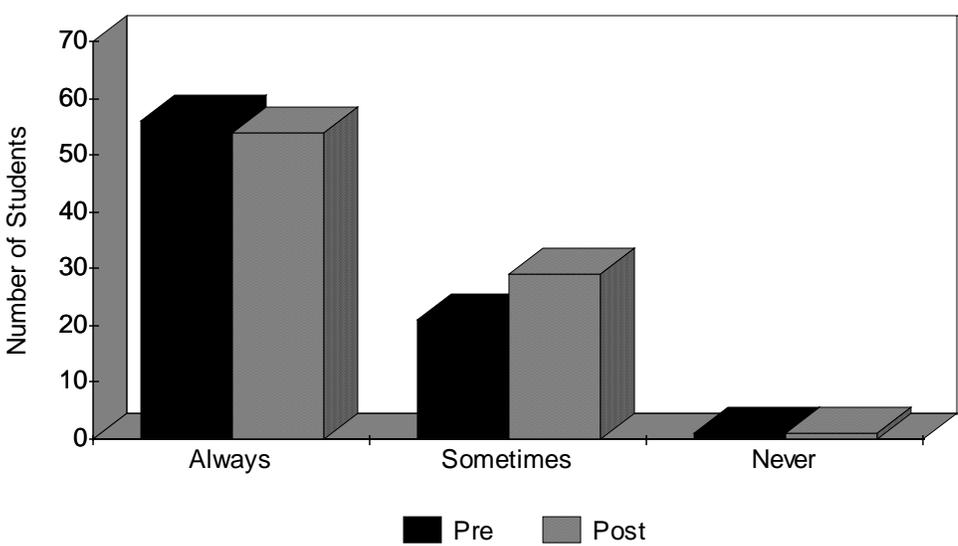


Figure 14

Question 4 of the survey asked students “My behavior allows others to complete their work.” The researchers were checking for student awareness of how their behaviors affect other classmates. Figure 15 shows how some students (n=46, 55%) were once again aware of how their behaviors can distract others.

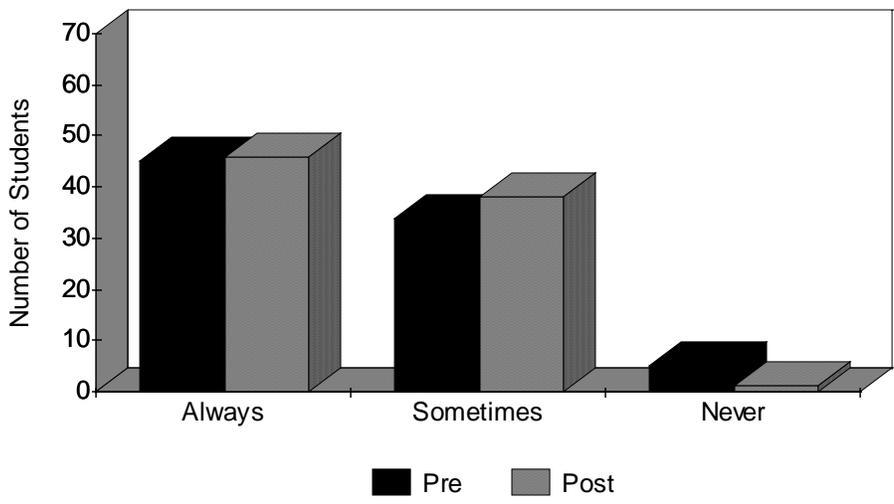
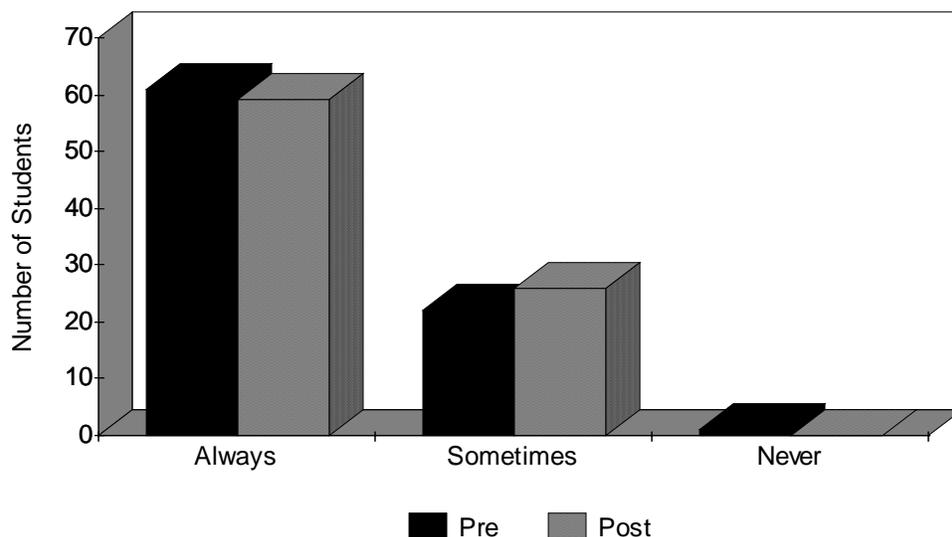


Figure 15

Question 5 of the student survey asked “During independent work time I am focused.”

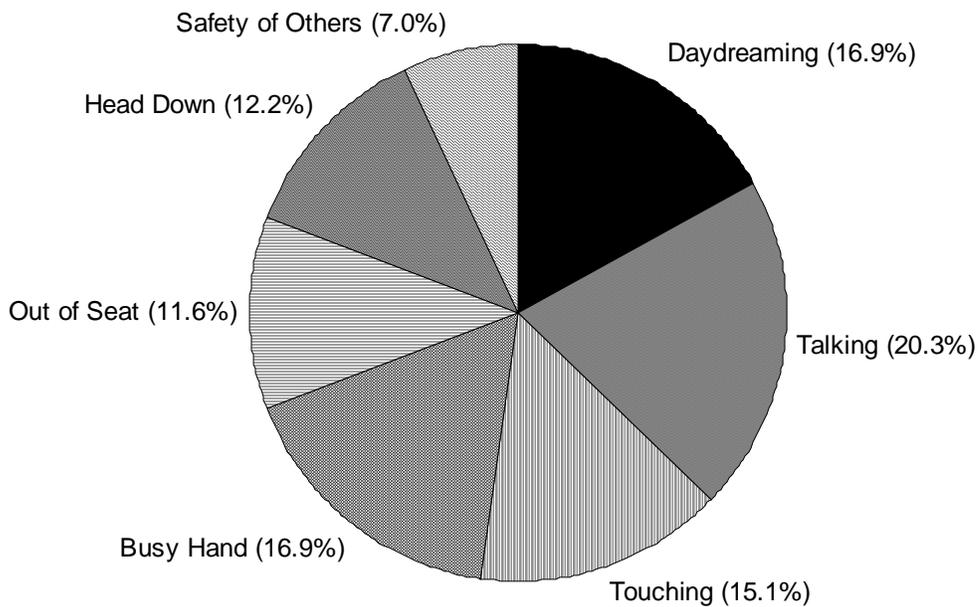
This question was looking for student awareness of how they use their work time. Figure 16 shows a slight increase in awareness (n=4, 5%) from the pre-documentation data.



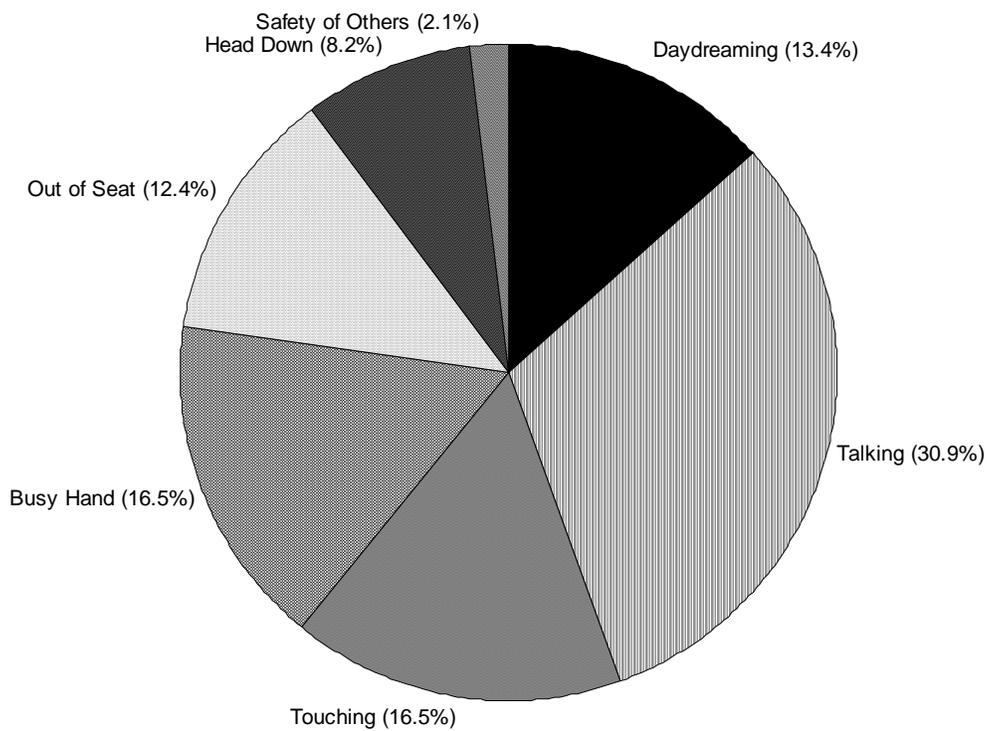
*Figure 16*

### Behavior Checklist

Figure 17 below represents the frequency of the off-task behaviors in both pre and post-documentation. The seven off-task behaviors the teacher researchers were looking for included: daydreaming, talking out of turn, touching others (hands on other people), busy hands (fidgeting with objects), out of seat, head down, and putting safety of others at risk (running with scissors and/or kitchen hazards). Although there were some significant decreases in several of the target behaviors, talking out of turn (n=30, 31%) still remained the most prevalent.



*Pre-documentation*



*Post-documentation*

*Figure 17*

## Conclusions and Recommendations

We concluded that our interventions had the potential to be effective over a longer period of time. The data proves correct due to an increase in certain off-task behaviors. Although the student surveys did not reflect much of a change from pre to post-documentation, we feel that the students' overall awareness of their off-task behaviors was slowly beginning to increase. We felt that the increase of some of the off-task behaviors was related to several factors. The curriculum being presented near the end of the intervention was much different than that of the beginning. In the beginning, the material was a review while later material was new and more exciting for the students. This led to students shouting out responses and questions in an attempt to gather as much information as possible. Although the data does not show a decrease in students' off-task behavior, we feel that the interventions would be more successful if adjusted.

We recommended that our interventions should have been extended over a longer period of time. Once students started to make connections and the process started to go smoother, the interventions were done. Also, it seemed as though it may have been more effective to use the interventions with some students rather than the whole class. This may have decreased the time taken away from time spent on curriculum. We also felt that changing the targeted behaviors would be more effective. It may also be helpful to decrease the number of targeted behaviors we were looking for. Two of us continued with the interventions on an as-needed basis with modifications. One of us did not continue because of having different students each trimester.

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## APPENDICES

Appendix A: Student Survey

**Student Survey**

*Directions: Circle the answer that fits you best. Please be honest.*

**1. I am excited about learning new things in school.**

**Always**



**Sometimes**



**Never**



**2. I can pay attention when the teacher is giving directions.**

**Always**



**Sometimes**



**Never**



**3. I know when I am listening and pay attention.**

**Always**



**Sometimes**



**Never**



**4. My behavior allows others to complete their work.**

**Always**



**Sometimes**



**Never**



**5. During independent work time I am focused.**

**Always**



**Sometimes**



**Never**



## Appendix B: Teacher Survey

**Teacher Survey**

*Directions: Please circle the response based on behaviors in your classroom during your teaching career.*

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

1	2	3	4
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

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

1	2	3	4
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

**3. Off- task behavior interferes with my delivery of instruction.**

1	2	3	4
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

**4. My organizational skills affect my students' off- task behavior.**

1	2	3	4
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

**5. Place a check next to the off- task behaviors that have occurred in your classroom. (In your teaching career)**

- Students tend to daydream during a lesson.
- Students talk out of turn.
- Students do not keep their hands to themselves; they touch other people.
- Students fidget with objects.
- Students are out of their seat during inappropriate times.
- Students put their heads down during a lesson, or while doing in-class work.
- Students put safety of others and themselves at risk.



## Appendix D: Dot Chart

**DOT CHART for the week of:**

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Daily Work/		Journal		
Reading/		L.A.		
Math				
Science				
Social Studies				

**DOT CHART for the week of:**

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday

Appendix E: Portfolio Reflection  
**Portfolio Reflection**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**I choose this piece of work this week because:**

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**Do you think the grade you earned on this assignment had to do with your behavior?**

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**Why or why not?**

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# 1st Trimester Portfolio Requirements

+  +  ✓/- Reading

+  +  ✓/- **Writing**

+  +  ✓/- Spelling

+  +  ✓/- **Math**

+  +  ✓/- Science

Teacher

Narrative

Choice

Expository

Persuasive

Appendix G: Project Photos

