

DEVELOPING SOCIAL SKILLS IN CHILDREN WHO HAVE DISABILITIES
THROUGH THE USE OF SOCIAL STORIES
AND VISUAL SUPPORTS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this action research project was to improve the social skills of eight preschool students and four first grade and second grade students through the use of Social Stories and visual supports to create a more positive learning environment. The teacher researchers wanted to increase the social skills of students who had been diagnosed with speech and language delays, learning disabilities, Autism Spectrum Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. This project was conducted from August 25, 2008 to November 14, 2008. The targeted students had difficulty sharing materials and toys with their peers, and taking turns in teacher-directed activities.

The teacher researchers created and implemented two Social Stories with visual supports that addressed sharing and turn-taking. The teacher researchers spent 15 minutes daily on the targeted social skill. The teacher chose a different structured activity each day to work on the targeted skill to promote generalization of the skills being taught.

Throughout the twelve week period, data was collected using five different tools which included a Parent Social Skills Rating Scale, Teacher Social Skills Rating Scale, Sharing Checklist, Turn-Taking Checklist, Journal Reflection Template-Sharing and Journal Reflection Template-Turn-Taking.

According to the data collected over the course of the research project, the teacher researchers found that the students had made gains in their ability to both share and turn-take with their peers. The teacher researchers believe that the strategies implemented throughout the research project helped teach students appropriate social skills. The teacher researchers feel that the use of Social Stories and visual supports ultimately aided students in developing and strengthening their sharing and turn-taking skills.

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CHAPTER ONE PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

Social issues can negatively affect a child's learning and self-esteem, making it difficult for them to establish positive relationships. It is crucial that these issues are addressed and that social skills are taught at an early age. Children who do not successfully develop social skills are at risk for having social and emotional issues later in life. Two teacher researchers, in the same school district, at two different schools conducted this action research project during the 2008-2009 school year. The project involved 12 students, 12 sets of parents, and two teachers. This project was conducted to help develop social skills in children who have disabilities.

The students at both Site A and Site B had difficulties with knowing how to appropriately interact with their peers. The students had difficulties in the areas of: greeting adults and peers, reading and understanding non-verbal social cues and body language, turn-taking, sharing, initiating and sustaining conversations, expressing feelings using words and dealing with social conflict. Delays in speech and language, neurological development, cognitive disabilities, lack of exposure to the appropriate skills, low socioeconomic status, late intervention and environmental factors further impeded their development of social skills. Evidence for the existence of these problems was found in informal and formal assessments, and the teacher researchers observations of inappropriate social behaviors exhibited in and out of the classroom.

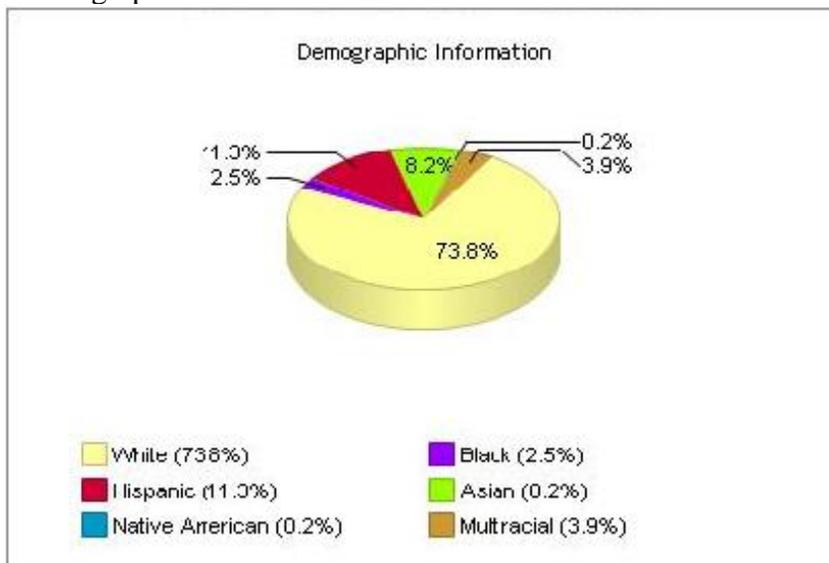
The eight students targeted in this study from Site A were between the ages of three and five years old. They each had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), and were

in a self-contained classroom. All eight students had delays in one or more of the following areas: social development, speech and language development, motor development and/or cognitive development. Site B had four students between the ages of six and eight years old. They each had a diagnosis of Autism, had an IEP, and were in a self-contained Autism classroom. All of the students at Site B had delays in most social skill areas. The students had difficulty taking turns, sharing the same materials, initiating and sustaining a conversation, reading and understanding non-verbal social cues and had poor impulse control. Having deficits in these social skills areas hindered the students from sustaining and maintaining positive peer relationships.

School A

School A opened its doors in the fall of 2002. School A housed pre-kindergarten and grades three through five. In 2007, School A had a total enrollment of 1,217 students, 243 of those students were at the preschool level. All of the following figures and data were taken from the Interactive Illinois Report Card (IRC).

Figure 1: Demographic Information School A



In 2007, the student population at School A was made up of 73.8 % White, 2.5% Black, 11.3% Hispanic, 8.2% Asian/Pacific Islander, 0.2% Native American and 3.9% Multiracial/Ethnic students. The percentage of students who had limited English was 5.3%. The low-income rate was 3.8%. School A had 96.4% of their students attend school on a daily basis. The mobility rate was 3.7% among the students enrolled. Data on the 2007 State School Report Card showed no problems with chronic truancy at School A.

In 2007 the district's early childhood program had one early childhood administrator, ten early childhood teachers, one early childhood Autism teacher, ten program aides and ten one-on-one assistants. The early childhood support staff consisted of seven speech pathologists, two speech paraprofessionals, three occupational therapists, one occupational therapist assistant, two part-time physical therapists, two social workers, two psychologists and one school nurse. The district also contracted two occupational therapists from the county and had access to an Autism consultant who was hired by the district. In the district where School A was located, 82.2% of the teachers employed were female and 17.8% were male, with the average number of years teaching 6.8. Of the staff at School A, 98.5% were White, 0.25% were Black, 0.7% were Hispanic and 0.7% were Asian.

School A had a gym, motor skills room, sensory room and a library resource center that the early childhood students could utilize. There also was a playground located on the premises that the students had access to.

School A offered programs for children ages three through five who qualified for special services. All students that received services had been developmentally screened

and/or evaluated and had qualified for the services. Screenings at School A were conducted several times per year. School A offered several programs designed to meet the unique needs of the preschool population. The preschool housed five at-risk classrooms that each had 20 students, one teacher and one programming assistant. Those classrooms educated children who were at risk of having developmental delays, due to risk factors including: social-economic status, English as a second language (ESL), or developmental delays of six months or less. School A also housed ten integrated classrooms, each of which had 16 students, one teacher and one programming assistant. In each of the integrated classrooms, eight of the students were at-risk of having developmental delays and eight students were developmentally delayed and had an IEP. There were four self-contained classrooms each of which had 11 students, one classroom teacher and one programming assistant. The self-contained classrooms educated children who had developmental delays and/or who were mentally or physically impaired. All of the students in the self-contained classrooms had an IEP. There was also one classroom that was designed to meet the needs of children that were diagnosed with Autism.

There were ten morning sessions of preschool, which consisted of two at-risk classes, seven self-contained classes and one kindergarten-readiness self-contained class. In the afternoon there were three at-risk classes, five integrated classes and two self-contained classes. School A held each session five days a week for two-and-a-half hours a day. In addition, there was one Autism classroom that was held five days a week and was a full-day program.

The speech and language pathologist, social worker, occupational therapist and psychologist all provided services to students inside of their classrooms. The support staff

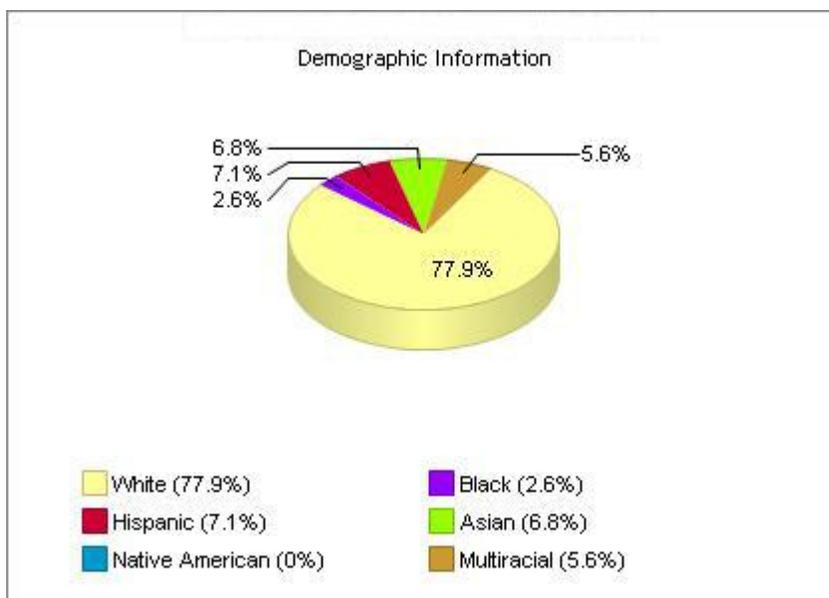
worked with students both individually and in groups to service each child's specific educational goals.

Library time and physical education classes were held once a week for the early childhood students. In 2007, these students also had the opportunity to participate in the Special Olympics Young Athletes program after school. School A was one of the sites chosen for the pilot program. There was also a parent education course offered once a month, as well as a special needs advisory committee for parents. School A also had a preschool lending library that parents could utilize.

School B

School B is located in the Northwest suburbs of a major midwestern city. It opened its doors in 2000, and it serviced students in kindergarten through second grade. School B's enrollment in 2006 was 1,029. The following information was taken from the Interactive Illinois Report Card in 2007.

Figure 2: Demographic Information School B



Of the 1,029 students at School B, 77.9% were White, 2.6% were African American, 6.8% were Asian/Pacific Islander, and 5.6% were Multiracial, according to the 2007 Interactive Illinois Report Card. Of the students who attended School B, 3.7% of the students fell into the low income category which consisted of families receiving public aid, who lived in institutions or foster homes, or who were eligible to receive free or reduced lunches. Also, 3.7% of the total population had limited English proficiency, and were enrolled in a transitional bilingual program. School B had no truancy problems and the mobility rate was 4.2%, which means that this is the percentage of students who either moved into the district or left the district in the given year. The attendance rate was 95.2%. All data in this section was taken from the Interactive Illinois Report Card.

The faculty at School B consisted of 17 full-day kindergarten teachers, 15 first grade teachers, 15 second grade teachers, 2 bilingual teachers, and 3 reading specialists. School B also housed a variety of special education programming which included the following programs: three instructional classrooms, two self-contained classrooms, and three self-contained Autism classrooms. There was one adapted physical education teacher, three psychologists, three social workers, five speech and language pathologists, four occupational therapists and one physical therapist. School B offered a variety of fine arts and physical education classes. There were three art teachers, four music teachers, and five physical education teachers. School B had one principal, one full time assistant principal and one part time assistant principal. All of the administrators at School B were white. The average teacher's salary at School B was \$47,579, and had been teaching an average of 6.8 years. School B students had met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the 2006-2007 school year.

School B had a unique set up. Each wing of the school housed a different grade level. There was a separate wing for kindergarten, first grade, and second grade. Within the wings, they had pods of classrooms: four classrooms to a pod. The pod of teachers planned and implemented the same instruction. Each wing also housed related school personnel, such as a speech therapist, occupational therapist and psychologist.

School B housed five self-contained classrooms. Two of the classrooms serviced students with a wide variety of disabilities, such as Down syndrome, mental impairment, and other health impairments. The other three self-contained classrooms serviced students diagnosed with Autism. School B housed all of the Autism kindergarten to second grade classrooms for the district. The three Autism classrooms split the students based on their ability level and current functioning in the following domain areas: self-help skills, communication needs, and academic and cognitive functioning. There were also three instructional teachers who worked collaboratively with the general education teachers co-teaching, as well as, pulling students out to give them small-group instruction. The two reading recovery teachers taught students who were considered at-risk readers and worked on basic decoding and comprehension skills. Social work, speech and language therapy, and occupational therapy services were also available to students who were deemed appropriate to receive such services. School B offered programs to enhance the students' education, such as the Peer Buddy Program. This program paired students who have disabilities with an age-appropriate peer. They spend one hour a week playing games, reading books and participating in different classroom activities together.

School B was decorated with posters, student work samples and artifacts indicating a high level of involvement by all. The Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) was

also active in the school. They spent hours volunteering, fund raising and decorating the school for holidays.

School A and B Community

School A and School B were located in the same rapidly growing community. The surrounding community had a population of 23,460 (Encyclopedia of City, 2000). In the 1990s, the community's population increased by nearly 400%, making it one of the most rapidly growing suburbs in the United States at that time. The U.S. Census of 2000 indicated that there were 23,152 people, 7,652 households, and 6,297 families residing in the community (Interactive Illinois Report Card). The makeup of the community in 2000 was 91.59% White, 1.50% Black, 6.31% Hispanic, 3.33% Asian, 0.02% Pacific Islander, 0.14% Native American, 1.86% from other groups, and 1.56% from two or more groups. In this community there were 7,652 households, out of which 51.8% had children under the age of 18 living in them; 73.4% were married couples living together; 6.2% had a female householder with no husband present; and 17.7% were non-families. Thirteen percent of all households were made up of individuals and 1.8% had someone living alone who was 65 years of age or older. The average household size was 3.03% and the average family size was 3.35. The median age was 31 years (City-Data, 2006). According to the 2000 U.S. Census data, the age distribution for the community was as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Population of the Community

Total Population 15 or Younger	<u>Total Population of Community</u>	
	Number	Percent
	6,965	30.1
16-24	2,033	8.8
25-44	10,292	44.5
45-64	3,094	13.4

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census

The median income for a family was \$76,921. About 1.6% of families and 2.1% of the population were below the poverty line (City-Data, 2000). The community had a low crime rate as indicated by Table 2.

Table 2. Crime Rate in the Community

Crime in the Community by Year								
Type	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Murders	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
per 100,000	0.0	4.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Rapes	0	9	4	0	5	7	1	2
per 100,000	0.0	38.9	17.3	0.0	18.0	25.2	3.5	6.9
Robberies	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	1
per 100,000	0.0	4.3	4.3	0.0	0.0	3.6	0.0	3.5
Assaults	14	26	20	7	9	9	14	22
per 100,000	71.3	112.3	86.4	30.2	32.5	32.5	49.6	76.4
Burglaries	6	35	20	17	13	12	15	32
per 100,000	30.6	151.2	86.4	73.4	46.9	43.3	53.2	111.2
Thefts	168	144	147	141	140	180	179	195
per 100,000	855.4	622.0	634.9	609.0	504.9	649.2	634.3	677.4
Auto thefts	3	4	5	5	6	5	2	4
per 100,000	15.3	17.3	21.6	21.6	21.6	18.0	7.1	13.9
Arson	0	4	2	2	0	0	0	2
per 100,000	0.0	17.3	8.6	8.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.9

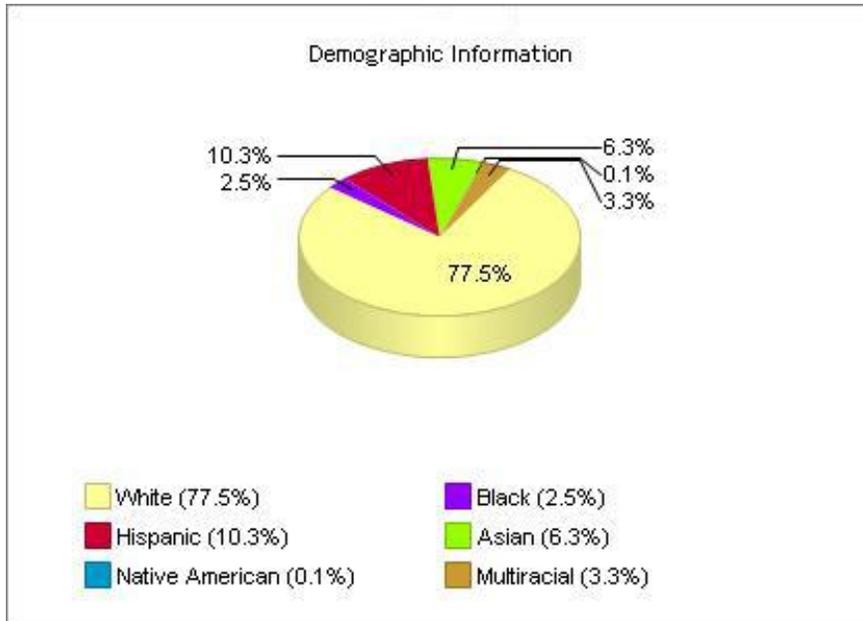
Source: City-data, 2000

District Information

School A and School B were located on the same campus and were part of the same school district. The students went to School A for preschool, to School B for

kindergarten through second grade, and then they went back to School A for third through fifth grade. In 2000, the district had the following demographic information: 77.5% of the students were White, 10.3% were Hispanic, 0.1% were Native American, 2.5% were Black, 6.3% were Asian and 3.3% were Multiracial.

Figure 3. Demographic Information for District



Source: Illinois Interactive Report Card, 2007

Even though both School A and School B had made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), the district as a whole had not. One of the middle schools and the high school did not make AYP in 2007. In the fall of 2007, 4.6% of the students fell into the low-income category. Mobility district wide was 5.1%, and the truancy rate was 0.5%.

School/Community Issues

The community faced the challenge of providing educational services that the growing population required. In 2007, the community was served by three separate school campuses, which combined housed the districts five elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. The district's early childhood program enrollment

had grown significantly and there were issues concerning where the program would be located due to lack of space.

National Context

“While federal programs such as No Child Left Behind emphasize the importance of academic skills to school success and achievement, there is a growing interest in how social skills develop and how they contribute to learning” (Brophy-Herb, 2007). Hartup (1992) states, “the single best childhood predictor of adult adaptation is not school grades, and is not classroom behavior, but rather, the adequacy with which the child gets along with other children.”

Social skills or ‘pragmatics’ are a vital part of living and functioning in our world today. Many children with delays in speech and language, neurological development, cognitive disabilities, lack of exposure to the appropriate skills, low socioeconomic status, late intervention and environmental factors further impeded their development of social skills. Parents, educators, and therapists are challenged to teach these children the ‘unspoken’ rules of social behavior. Typically developing children pick up these skills through experience and learn from interactions with others. Children with disabilities sometimes lack the ability to learn from their life experiences, or pick up social skills and cues from peers, siblings and adults, and thus have more difficulty with social skills. In order for these children to learn the critical life skills essential to living with others, they have to be taught (Social Skill Builder, 2008).

Teacher Researcher Reflections

Positive social interactions are a crucial skill children need to develop in early childhood. The development of these skills can be difficult for children who have

disabilities. Hartup (1992) notes that “peer relationships in particular contribute a great deal to both social and cognitive development and to the effectiveness with which we function as adults.” Without social skill interventions early in life, students have a greater risk of developing depression, low self-esteem, social isolation, low achievement in school, social anxiety, poor employment history and difficulties in developing and sustaining positive relationships in their adulthood. Children with disabilities sometimes lack the understanding to learn from their life experiences and have more difficulty with social skills (Social Skill Builder, 2007). The majority of the children in our classrooms lack age-appropriate social skills and have social delays that impede their learning.

Teacher Researcher A

Many of the children in my early childhood classroom have delays in their development which, in-turn, impede their social competence. I have found that the majority of my students struggle in social situations and have difficulties with sharing, turn-taking and responding appropriately to their peers. I feel that my students’ social delays directly affect their ability to function cooperatively in the school environment and hinder their learning. In addition, these delays prevent the students from developing positive peer relationships which provide them with the opportunities to interact and learn from each other. Therefore, I believe that it is imperative that I implement the strategies needed to help my students learn and develop positive social skills.

Teacher Researcher B

In my classroom, my students lack the age-appropriate social skills necessary to function in the general education classroom. All of my students lack the ability to maintain positive peer relationships, have difficulty sharing toys and classroom materials,

taking turns, greeting familiar peers, staff and support personnel, making eye contact, following simple directions, participating in group activities and managing their anger and emotions appropriately. Even though some children with special needs are able to pick up positive skills through everyday interactions with adults and peers, it is important that teachers and parents teach and practice age appropriate social skills. Many teachers leave it up to the parents and families to teach social skills. Teachers should work in conjunction with parents and care takers to teach students social skills so that the students can have meaningful and positive social interactions. With this said, I would like to implement research based strategies to help increase my students' social awareness and social skills. Social skills are necessary for every day interactions with peers, teachers, parents and their families. Without age appropriate social skills, my students struggle with maintaining positive peer relationships and self-control. Burke (2000) states "social skills are necessary to help students interact with one another and others in and out of the classroom." While some students may be lacking basic social skills, teachers can set the stage for teaching all students social skills by modeling positive interactions.

We both believe that social skills are a vital part of learning and functioning in our world. Educators today are faced with the challenge of teaching their students these crucial life skills to enhance their social competence. As teacher researchers, we would like to learn different research-based methodologies on developing children's social skills and ways to implement them in our classrooms. We feel that teaching our students these skills will help them develop responsible behaviors and instill in them a positive sense of self-worth, enabling them to grow and become independent, confident, self-disciplined members of society.

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

The purpose of this action research project was to develop social skills in early childhood-aged children who have delays in speech and language, neurological development, cognitive disabilities, lack of exposure to the appropriate skills, low socioeconomic status, late intervention and other environmental factors. The social skills targeted were sharing and turn-taking. The teacher researchers in this action research project observed their students' social interactions during structured and unstructured activities in the classroom. After analyzing the data, the teacher researchers concluded that the majority of the students had difficulties with sharing and turn-taking with their peers.

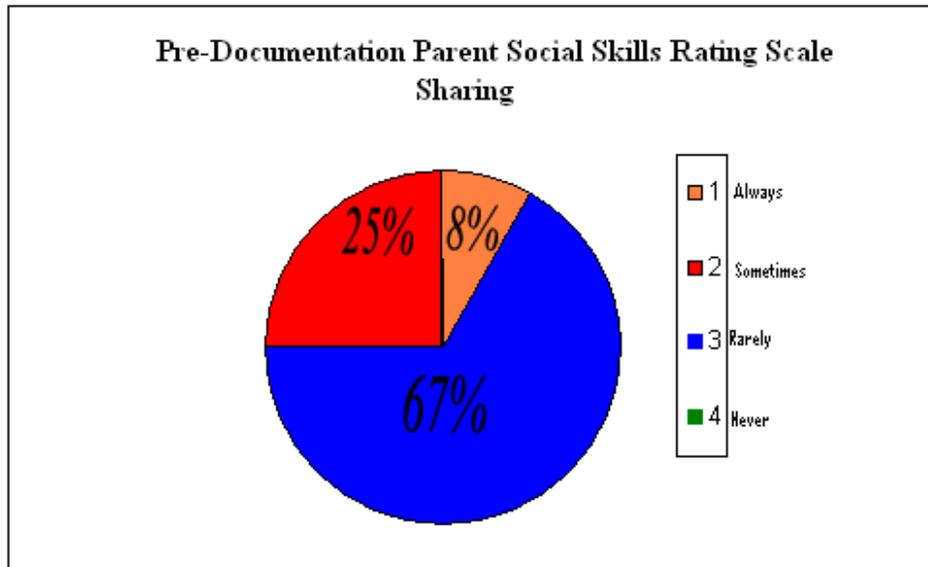
The time frame for the data collected existed over a twelve-week period. Weeks 1 and 2 consisted of pre-documentation, using six tools created and provided by the teacher researchers. These tools included a Parent Social Skills Rating Scale (see Appendix A), Teacher Social Skills Rating Scale (see Appendix B), Sharing Checklist (see Appendix C), Turn-Taking Checklist (see Appendix D), Journal Reflection Template-Sharing (see Appendix E) and Journal Reflection Template -Turn-Taking (see Appendix F). Week 3 consisted of the introduction of the topic of sharing with the use of a whole group Social Story that was supported by the use of visual supports and modeling. During Weeks 4 through 6, the teacher researchers read a Social Story about sharing to the students daily, before they participated in a structured small group teacher-directed activity. Week 7 focused on the topic of turn-taking using Social Stories, visual supports, and modeling. During Weeks 8 through 10, a Social Story about turn-taking was read to the students in a large group each day, before they engaged in a structured small group teacher-directed

activity. Finally, Weeks 11 and 12 involved post-documentation using the tools created and provided by the teacher researchers.

Parent Social Skills Rating Scale

The Parent Social Skills Rating Scale (see Appendix A) was given to the parents of students at the beginning and end of the action research project. Copies of the Parent Social Skills Rating Scale were distributed to parents at the Open House on August 25, 2008. The parents were asked to return the rating scales to the classroom teacher by September 2, 2008. The parents were asked to circle how they felt their child performed on each of the eight statements made. The options, were given on a Likert-type Scale, and included the following: four meaning “always”, three meaning “sometimes”, two meaning “rarely”, and one meaning “never.” The purpose of the Parent Social Skills Rating Scale was to gain information about their child’s frequency and ability to engage in social interactions both before and after the intervention.

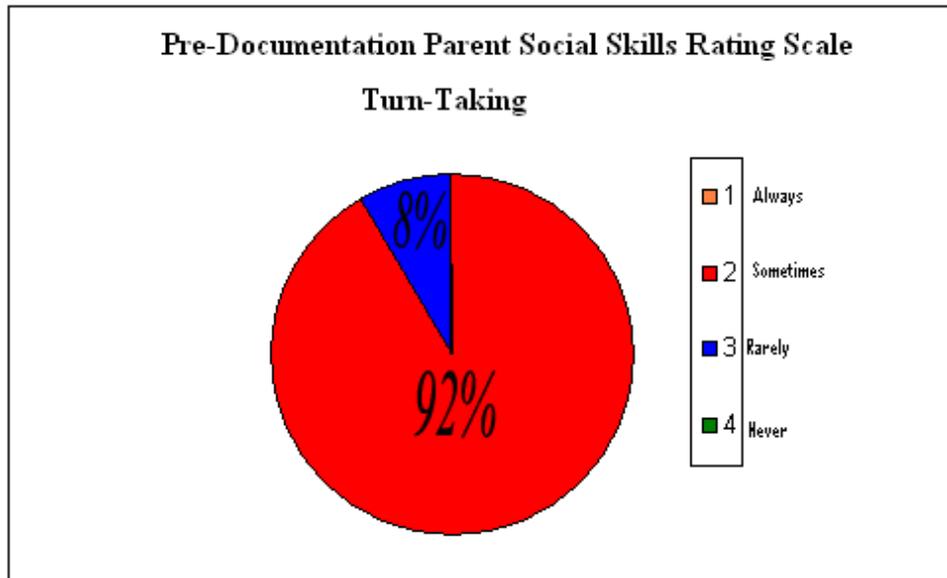
Figure 4. Pre-Documentation Parent Social Skills Rating Scale Sharing



Source: Parent Social Skills Rating Scale from Sites A and B

Figure 4 shows the combined results of the parents' responses to the statement of "Plays for 2-3 minutes with groups of children sharing same materials." Eight of the twelve parent respondents or 67% indicated that their child rarely shared in social situations. Three of the twelve parent respondents or 25% indicated that their child sometimes shared in social situations. One of the twelve parent respondents or 8% indicated that their child always shared in social situations. There were no parent respondents that indicated that their child never shared in social settings.

Figure 5. Pre-Documentation Parent Social Skills Rating Scale Turn-Taking



Source: Parent Social Skills Rating Scale from Sites A and B

The combined results of the completed Parent Social Skills Rating Scales for Turn-Taking (see Appendix A) are shown in Figure 5. Using the same Likert-type Scale, the parents were asked to respond to the statement “Takes turns with others.” Eleven of the twelve parent respondents or 92% indicated that their child sometimes takes turns with others. One of the twelve parent respondents or 8% indicated that their child rarely takes turns with others. There were no parent respondents that indicated that their child always takes turns or never takes turns with others in social settings.

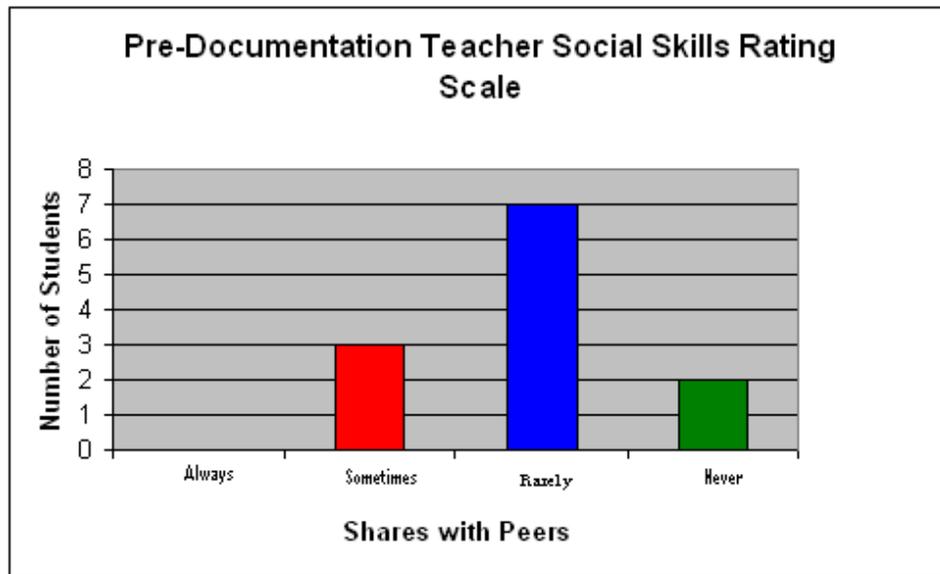
Teacher Social Skills Rating Scale

The Teacher Social Skills Rating Scale (see Appendix B) was completed by the teacher researchers who worked with the students in the classrooms. The Teacher Social Skills Rating Scale was completed during the pre-documentation and post-documentation process. The teachers circled how they felt each student performed in each of the eight statements. The rating scale consisted of the numbers one through four: four meaning

“always”, three meaning “sometimes”, two meaning “rarely”, and one meaning “never.”

The purpose of the Teacher Social Skills Rating Scale was to gather data on the appropriateness and occurrence of social skills that students exhibited inside of the classroom.

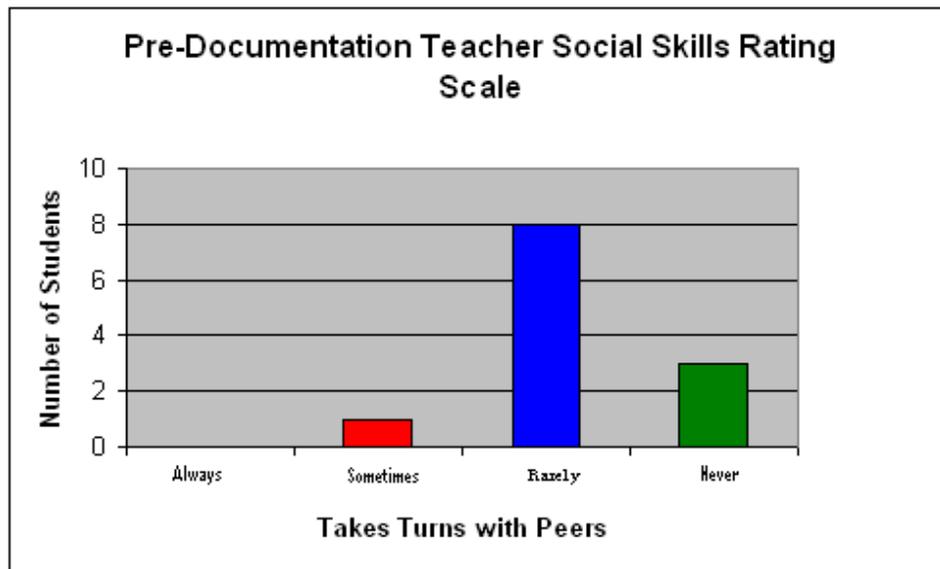
Figure 6. Pre-Documentation Teacher Social Skills Rating Scale



Source: Teacher Social Skills Rating Scale from Sites A and B

Figure 6 displays the combined results of the Social Skill Rating Scale for Sharing (see Appendix B) that was completed by the teacher researchers. The teacher researchers indicated that seven of the twelve students or 58% observed rarely shared with their peers in the classroom setting. Three of the twelve students or 25% sometimes shared with their peers in the classroom setting. Two of the twelve students or 17% were observed never sharing with their peers in the classroom setting. The teacher researchers indicated that they had not observed any of the students always sharing with their peers.

Figure 7. Pre-Documentation Teacher Social Skills Rating Scale



Source: Teacher Social Skills Rating Scale form Sites A and B

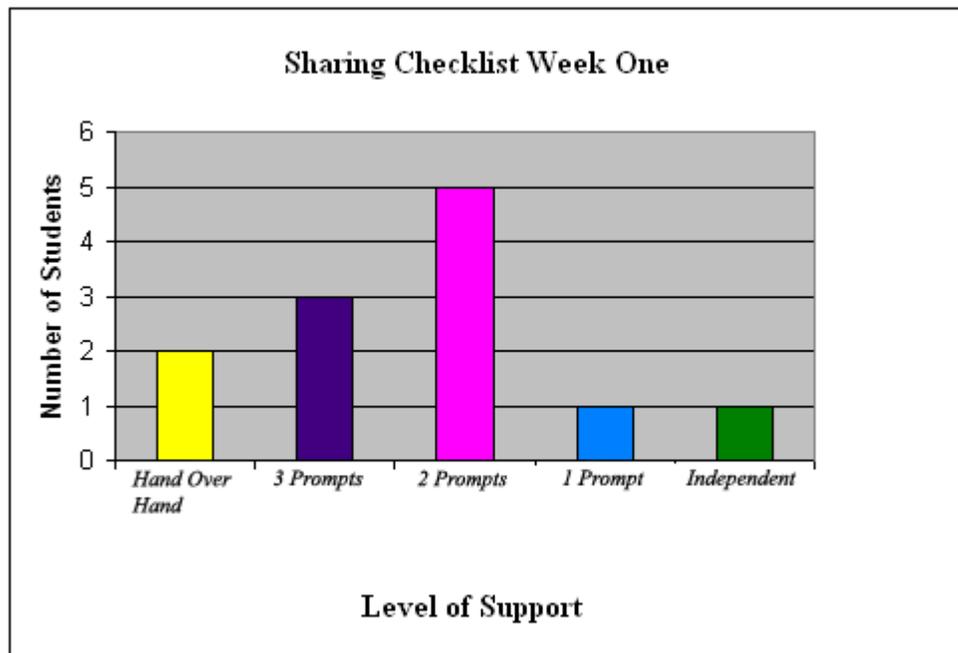
Figure 7 shows the results of the Teacher Social Skills Rating Scale (see Appendix B) in regards to turn-taking with peers. The teacher researchers indicated that eight of the twelve students or 67% observed rarely took turns with peers in the classroom. Three of the twelve students or 25% never engaged in turn-taking with their peers in the classroom. One of the twelve students or 8% sometimes used their turn-taking skills with their peers in the classroom. The teacher researchers indicated that none of the students were observed to always turn-take with their peers in the classroom.

Sharing Checklist

The Sharing Checklist (see Appendix C) was used to record the students' performance of the targeted social skill. The teacher researchers used the Sharing Checklist each Friday or on the last day of the school week to gather data on the progress of the intervention. The Sharing Checklist was completed after observing an activity, which required the students to utilize the social skill being taught. The Sharing Checklist

was used to document the specific activity being observed and the level of support that was needed to facilitate the desired social skill. The teacher researchers had five statements to choose from, which varied in the level of prompting and support. The yellow bar to the far left of the graph represents those students who needed full adult support and hand-over-hand assistance to share materials or a toy with a peer. This means the adult facilitated the entire session, and the student followed the adult's lead. The dark purple bar, the second from the left represents the students who needed three verbal or visual prompts from the adult to share materials or a toy with a peer. This means the student could eventually share a toy or material with their peer; however they needed the assistance of a visual support and prompting. The fuchsia bar, or the one directly in the middle, represents the students who needed two verbal or visual prompts from the adult to share materials or a toy with a peer. This means the student could eventually share a toy or material with their peer; however they needed the assistance of a visual support and prompting. The teal bar, or the second bar from the right, represents the students who needed one verbal or visual prompt from the adult to share materials or a toy with a peer. This means the student could eventually share a toy or material with their peer; however they needed the assistance of a visual support and prompting. The bar to the far right, or the green bar, represents the number of students who could independently share a toy or materials with a peer without the use of visual supports or adult prompting. This means the student can share toys or materials with other peers without facilitation from an adult.

Figure 8. Teacher Observational Checklist for Sharing



Source: Sharing Checklist Results from Site A and B

Figure 8 shows the baseline data the teacher researchers gathered on sharing, and the level of support that was needed during the structured sharing activity. The teacher researchers set up opportunities and structured activities that provided opportunities for students to share materials with their peers. For example, during a structured teaching time, the teacher researcher would give one student all of the Play-Doh, and give the other student all of the Play-Doh toys. Then, the teacher researcher would wait to see if the students shared the materials. If they did not facilitate sharing the toys on their own, the teacher researcher would prompt them do so with the use of visual supports and adult assistance.

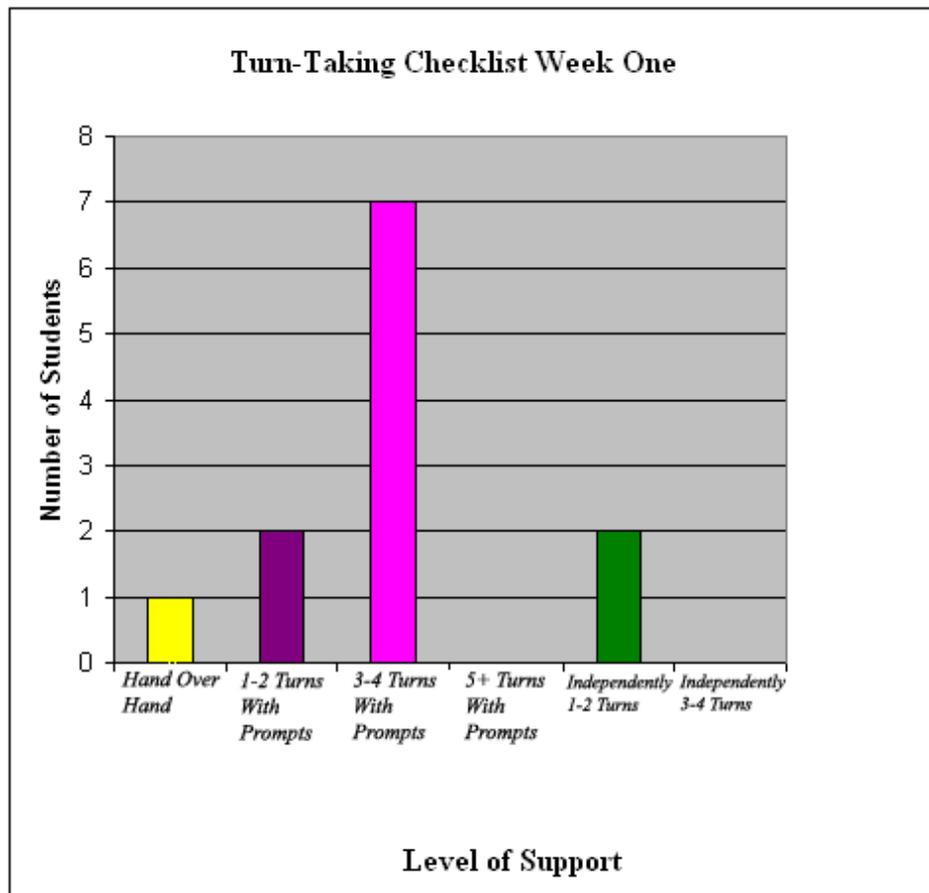
Two of the twelve students or 17% required full hand-over-hand support to share with peers during the observed activity. Three of the twelve students or 25% needed 3 verbal/visual prompts to share with their peers. Five of the twelve students or 42%

observed needed 2 verbal/visual prompts to successfully demonstrate the social skill. One of the twelve students or 8% needed 1 verbal/visual prompt to share materials with peers. One of the twelve students or 8% was able to share independently during the activity.

Turn-Taking Checklist

The Turn-Taking Checklist (see Appendix D) was used in a similar manner to the Sharing Checklist that was previously mentioned. The Turn-Taking Checklist was completed each Friday, or the last attendance day of the week, during a structured, small group teacher directed activity. The teacher researchers set up structured activities to foster opportunities for the students to take turns with one another. For instance, the teacher researchers would set up a game such as Wack-A-Mole. The teacher researcher would give one student the hammer and have them take a turn. If the student did not independently give the hammer to their peer after they took their turn, the teacher researcher would use verbal and visual supports until the student gave the hammer to the next person in line. If the student still did not share, the teacher would prompt the student using hand-over-hand support to help the student give the hammer to the next student in line. The Turn-Taking Checklist was used to document the activity that was being observed and the level of support that was needed during the activity. The teacher researchers were required to circle the statement that best described the observed support that was needed in each of the six statements. The six statements described the student's ability to reciprocally turn-take during an activity, which varied from the student needing complete assistance to the student taking three to four turns independently with a peer.

Figure 9. Turn-Taking Checklist



Source: Turn-Taking Checklists from Site A and B

Figure 9 shows the teacher researcher’s baseline data, and the level of support that was needed during the teacher directed structured activity. The activity observed required students to demonstrate the targeted social skill of turn-taking. The teacher researchers used the Turn-Taking Checklist (see Appendix D) on Fridays or on the last day of the school week to gather data on the progress of the intervention. The Turn-Taking Checklist was completed after observing an activity, which required the students to utilize the social skill being taught. The Turn-Taking Checklist was used to document the activity that was being observed and the level of support that was needed to facilitate the desired social skill. The teacher researchers had five statements to choose from, which

varied in the level of prompting and support. The yellow bar to the far left of the graph represents those students who needed full adult support and hand-over-hand assistance to take one turn with a peer. This means the adult facilitated the entire session, and the student followed the adult's lead. The dark purple bar, the second from the left, represents the students who took one to two turns with a peer, but needed no more than two verbal or visual prompts from an adult. This means the student could eventually take one or two turns with a peer, however they needed the assistance of a visual support and prompting. The fuchsia bar, or the third bar from the left, represents the students who took three to four turns with a peer, and needed no more than two verbal or visual supports to take a turn. This means the student could eventually take three to four turns with a peer; however they needed the assistance of a visual support and prompting. The teal bar, or the third bar from the right, represents the students who could take five or more turns with a peer, but needed no more than two visual or verbal prompts to take a turn. This means the student could eventually take a turn with a peer, however they needed the assistance of a visual support and prompting. The bar second from the right, or the green bar, represents the number of students who could independently take one to two turns with a peer without the use of visual supports or adult prompting. This means the student could take one to two turns with other peers without facilitation from an adult. The orange bar, or the bar to the far right of the graph, represents the number of students who could take three to four turns with others without facilitation from an adult. Two of the twelve students or 17% took 1-2 turns with 2 verbal/visual prompts. Seven of the twelve students or 58% required 2 verbal/visual prompts to take 3-4 turns reciprocally during the observed activity. Two of the twelve students or 17% were able to take 1-2

turns independently with no adult prompting. One of twelve students or 8% needed full hand-over hand-support to take one turn with a peer.

Journal Reflection Template-Sharing

The Journal Reflection Template- Sharing (see Appendix E) was utilized daily to write descriptions about the student interactions that were observed during structured small group teacher-directed activities. The purpose of these entries were to document interactions so that teacher researchers could analyze and evaluate the intervention strategies and reflect on the effect that implementation had on developing students' social skills. These reflections were entered daily over a four-week period. The Journal Reflection Template-Sharing documented the activity observed and required the teacher researchers to circle whether the student needed full prompting, partial prompting or if the student demonstrated the social skill independently. The teacher researchers also needed to circle the appropriate statement in regards to the amount of time the student was able to participate in the group activity. In addition, the template allowed the teacher researchers space to enter their written reflections of the social interactions observed of their students. All of the students' names have been changed to protect their privacy and confidentiality.

Journal Reflections from Teacher Researcher A

The following journal entries were written by Teacher Researcher A during the beginning stages of the intervention. The teacher researcher at Site A entered a journal reflection for sharing on September 8th, 2008 that documented the social skills of a student being observed during a table toy activity. All the names of the students have been changed. The teacher researcher writes that, "Ethan grabbed the parts of the potato

head from a peer and did not respond to verbal/visual prompts to “share” and needed hand over hand support.” Another student refused to share Play-Doh tools during a small group activity on September 12, 2008. The teacher researcher from Site A entered a journal reflection that stated:

Jon is having difficulty sharing play materials with peers. He says, “No!” when verbally prompted to share a roller with a peer. The teacher researcher used a visual timer along with the verbal prompt, “two more minutes.” When the time was up Jon still refused to give the peer the tool and instead hid underneath the table with it.

The teacher researcher from Site A added a journal reflection on September 23rd, 2008 which documented the difficulty that Holly was having using her words to communicate wants and needs effectively during sharing activities. The teacher researcher observed that, “Holly became increasingly frustrated and started screaming when another peer did not respond to her request to share the blocks in the building center.” The teacher researcher speculated that Holly’s delays in speech and language development made it difficult for the other peer to understand her request.

Another journal reflection was added on September 26th, 2008 which reflected on the observed behaviors and social skills of the students in the classroom as a whole. The teacher researcher wrote:

I am finding that some of my students are not yet receptive to the act of sharing with their peers. Some of my students are having difficulty just being at the same centers as their peers and will leave an area and play somewhere else to avoid interactions. It is challenging for me to find opportunities to teach social skills

when many of my students have no interest in even interacting with each other.

Journal Reflections from Teacher Researcher B

The following journal entries were written by Teacher Researcher B during the beginning stages of the intervention. All of the students' names have been changed to protect their privacy and confidentiality. Teacher Researcher B entered a journal entry on September 9th, 2008 stating that Bobby was having difficulty sharing the same materials with a peer. The teacher researcher writes, "Bobby yelled at the other children in the class and grabbed the Play-Doh toys out of another child's hand. He did not respond to the "share" visual support the teacher showed him."

On September 11, the teacher researcher noted that Tommy had difficulty sharing the same materials with his peers. He was observed screaming and flailing his arms and legs, as he had a meltdown because he did not want to share the puzzle pieces with another student. He wanted to hold all of the pieces and complete the puzzle independently.

Tommy is having great difficulty sharing toys and materials with his peers. He is engaging in negative behaviors such as yelling, flailing his arms and legs, dropping to the floor, grabbing the materials out of another child's hands, and hitting the other children to obtain the desired item. Tommy is not yet demonstrating the understanding of the concept of sharing.

On September 18, 2008, Teacher Researcher B noted in a journal entry that Jimmy was having a difficult time sharing the potato head pieces with his peers. The teacher showed him the visual support, but Jimmy stated "no" and ran away from the group. He started crying and repeatedly yelled "no." Eventually, he went back to the table

and took the potato head pieces out of another student's hands. He had a difficult time regrouping and did not rejoin the group. Sharing materials and toys has been extremely difficult for Jimmy. He continues to need full adult assistance to share with peers.

On September 23, 2008, Teacher Researcher B reported:

Jacob is having difficulty sharing materials with peers. He becomes agitated and begins to grab the materials from the other students' hands. He is having a difficult time understanding the concept of sharing. He becomes very overwhelmed and many times he will leave the group. Other times, he becomes upset that he has to wait for a specific item if another child is playing with it. The teacher sets a visual timer for two minutes to help Jacob share the materials and wait his turn.

Journal Reflection Template-Turn-Taking

Journal Reflection Template-Turn-Taking (see Appendix F) was utilized daily to write descriptions about the student interactions that were observed during small group activities. The purposes of these entries were to document interactions so that the teacher researchers could analyze and evaluate intervention strategies, and reflect on the effect that the implementation had on developing students' social skills. These reflections were entered daily over a four-week period. The Journal Reflection Template-Turn-Taking documented the activity observed and required the teacher researchers to circle whether the student needed full prompting, partial prompting or if the student was able to demonstrate the social skill independently. The teacher researchers also needed to circle the appropriate statement in regards to the time the student was able to participate in the group activity. In addition, the template allowed the teacher researchers to enter their

written reflections of the social interactions observed of their students. All of the students' names have been changed to protect their privacy and confidentiality.

Journal Reflections from Teacher Researcher A

The teacher researcher from Site A documented in a journal reflection on October 15, 2008 the turn-taking skills of two students that were being observed. In this reflection the teacher researcher wrote, "Tia did not wait to take a turn. She spun the spinner and moved the game piece two times in a row and did not give Amber a chance to play until prompted by the teacher." Throughout the game, the teacher researcher needed to use a visual support for turn-taking eight times during which, five turns were taken between the students. On October 20th, 2008 the teacher researcher from Site A entered another journal reflection that stated, "During the game Don't Spill the Beans I had to take the beans away and give them to Ethan and Tia individually when it was their turn, because they were having such a difficult time taking turns with each other." The teacher researcher from Site A also reflected on an incident that happened during unstructured free time in one of the centers. The teacher researcher wrote:

Anthony and a peer were in the kitchen area playing. Both of them wanted to push the grocery cart and wound up pulling it in opposite directions and yelling loudly at each other, "It's my turn!" Anthony pushed the cart into the other student and knocked him to the floor. The student who was knocked on the floor started to cry and went and told the program assistant what had happened.

Journal Reflections from Teacher Researcher B

On October 7, 2008 Teacher Researcher B wrote:

Jacob is having difficulty taking turns with his peers. Today during the scooter

game he became very aggressive when it was time to give the scooter to another peer. The teacher showed him the visual support, but the student became even more agitated. He began screaming “no” and kicked an assistant in the chest, knocking the wind out of her. She needed medical attention.

The teacher researcher was concerned about Jacob’s aggressive behavior. Teacher Researcher B reviewed the turn-taking rules with him and went over the visual supports again. The teacher researcher closely monitored Jacob during the rest of the activities and data collection process.

On October 14, 2008 Teacher Researcher B noted that Bobby was having a difficult time taking turns during the Wack-A-Mole game. When it was his turn to give the hammer to another student, he started to scream and hit the student behind him. The teacher researcher showed Bobby the visual support and prompted him to hand it to the next student.

On October 16, 2008, Teacher Researcher B noted that:

Jimmy is having a difficult time taking turns with his peers. He will often leave the activity because it is hard for him to wait his turn. He will run around the classroom or hide under a table. He still needs full hand-over-hand support to take turns with his peers.

On October 21, 2008, Teacher Researcher B noted that Tommy was having a difficult time taking turns with his peers. Even when presented with a visual support, he did not take a turn with his peers. He needed full hand-over-hand assistance to take a turn with a peer.

Probable Causes

There are many possible factors that can contribute to the delays in social development that the students in this project display. These factors can include: learning disabilities, Pervasive Developmental Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, speech and language delays, as well as, lack of exposure to social skills, social economical status, late interventions and environmental factors.

Learning Disabilities

Children who have learning disabilities may lack the key social skills necessary for success in the educational setting, as well as, social interactions later in life (Bovey & Strain, 2003, p.3). Many times a child's learning disability can negatively impact not only their academic functioning, but their social awareness as well. In some instances, individuals with a learning disability do not pick up on social cues and need to be taught appropriate social skills. "Many individuals with learning disabilities are less socially skilled than same-aged peers. When they are asked to use cognitive social behaviors, students with learning disabilities may be less able to do so than their peers" (Seevers & Jones-Blank, 2008, p.2). Jones-Blank and Seevers (2008) believe that:

Children and adolescents with disabilities sometimes have behaviors that are awkward or unacceptable in social interactions. The lack of appropriate social skill behaviors may be a characteristic of their disability. With this said, teachers, parents and peers need to teach students with disabilities how to act and react in social situations. (p.1)

Facilitating social interactions and teaching our students who have learning disabilities how to interact socially with their peers, can help them develop these vital skills.

Pervasive Developmental Disorder

Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD) is a neurological disorder that can impact a child's ability to communicate and socialize with others. Significant deficits in social skills and speech and language development, as well as sensory processing issues, are commonly seen in children who have been diagnosed with PDD.

Bloomquist (2006) asserts that:

Pervasive developmental disorders are seen in children who have serious social interaction problems, difficulty communicating, and often display "odd" behaviors (e.g., rocking, flapping hands, etc.). These children can be rigid in their behavior and become upset if their environment is not orderly and predictable. (p.20)

The delays and issues that our students have that are characteristics of this disorder, can negatively impact their social development and growth. It is essential that social skill interventions are put in place for our students who have PDD, so that they may develop the skills that are needed to interact effectively in social situations.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is characterized by a person's inability to attend to tasks and is also associated with high activities levels. In addition, a person who has ADHD may have difficulties with impulse control in a variety of situations. Harlacher, Roberts and Merrell (2006) state that, "The presence of ADHD is associated with behavioral and academic difficulties within a classroom setting, such as difficulty staying on task; trouble delaying responses (i.e. shouting out answers); academic underachievement, difficulty with peer relations; trouble completing assigned

tasks” (p.6). The academic and social difficulties that our students sometimes experience in the classroom environment can be socially isolating for them and can decrease their chances of positive social interactions with their peers.

Speech and Language Delay

Delays in speech and language development can significantly affect a child’s social skills and can impede appropriate interactions with their peers. Children with speech and language delays can become frustrated and conflicts can frequently occur due to misunderstandings. “Studies of preschool and school-age children with language delays indicate that deficits in language are associated with increased problem behaviors” (Irwin, Carter & Briggs-Gowan, 2002, p.1324). The students in our classrooms who have language delays often lack social skills because they cannot clearly communicate with peers and adults which, in-turn, leave them overwhelmed and frustrated. “When children are delayed in language development, they may have difficulty in peer social interactions that require communication skills for play and problem solving” (Qi & Kaiser, 2004, p.595).

Lack of Exposure to Social Skills

Another cause of a delay in social skill development in early childhood-aged children is a lack of exposure or training. Seevers and Jones-Blank (2008) maintain that, “most children learn social skills from interaction with others-other children, family members, friends and adults. Some children with disabilities need to learn social skills more directly” (p.1). They also conclude that, “Many students with disabilities have never learned “appropriate behavior” for social settings. Perhaps they did not receive this guidance at home either because lack of training by elders or another system of values

being taught” (Jones-Blank & Seevers, 2008, p.1). Without this training, it is difficult for our students who have disabilities to learn how to act and behave by just observing their peers and adults.

Low Socioeconomic Status

Low socioeconomic status can sometimes cause a delay in social skills in early childhood-aged children with disabilities. “Children who come from low social-economic households are at increased risk for behavior problems and social delays” (Qi & Kaiser, 2004, p. 595). Generally, children who live in a low socioeconomic status are often-times not exposed to as many experiences and opportunities as same aged peers, who are from families that have higher incomes. Families who have a low socioeconomic status sometimes lack the funding and resources necessary to help their child improve their social skills. In addition, Brophy-Herb (2007) states that "family malnutrition at the age of four can predict behavior problems at a later age” (¶ 6). Evidence suggests that higher than expected levels of externalizing and internalizing behavioral problems also exist among low-income children.

Qi and Kaiser (2004) state the following:

Externalizing behavioral problems include physical aggression (e.g., hitting, kicking, biting), verbal aggression (e.g., threatening others with violence), impulsive behavior, weak attentional regulation. Internalizing behaviors represent problems of an introverted nature, problems often internal to the self such as worries, fears, anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal. (p. 596)

Late Intervention

Children who do not learn appropriate social skills at an early age are at an

increased risk of developing social and emotional difficulties. When social interventions are introduced too late, it can cause a delay in social skill development, as well as, social issues later in life.

Problems in children's socio-emotional development are often overlooked until they reach a critical level requiring major interventions to counteract current problems. Often children with social emotional problems do not receive interventions until the end of the primary grades, despite the fact that many of their parents were aware of their difficulties when their children were three years old (Van Horn, Atkins-Burnett, Ramey, & Snyder, 2007, ¶11). Teaching our students social skills at an early age and implementing early intervention to deal with social problems and conflicts are key components in helping students cope and learn social strategies to deal with their emotions.

Environmental Factors

The stress and anxiety caused by environmental factors can be contributing factors in a child's lack of social development. "Children dealing with higher levels of stress due to their home lives were found to have lower social skills" (Brophy-Herb, 2007, ¶5). "One of the reasons for this is because when parents are upset or stressed, they may not have the time or energy to interact with their child in ways that would help them develop socially" (McEvoy & Yoder, 1993, p. 78). Bloomquist (2006) contends that, "if a parent is preoccupied with personal problems or if the family unit is having difficulties, it will undoubtedly contribute to a child's developmental struggles" (p.32).

The National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (1994) states that:

The birth of a child with a disability, or the discovery that a child has a disability,

can produce stress among family members. Stress can also be caused by a number of ongoing factors, or by special circumstances. Some families are stressed by the amount of financial resources required to meet the needs of the child who has a disability. (¶ 1)

In conclusion, there are many contributing factors that can affect the development of student's social skills. The disabilities, disorders, delays and circumstances that affect students can have a negative impact on their social development. Educators are faced with the challenge of addressing the special needs and social issues that early childhood-aged students are having.

As teacher researchers, we are dedicated to implement research based strategies that will effectively foster the development of our students' social skills. Therefore, with this action research project, we plan to implement strategies that will help teach our students how to share, take turns appropriately and display positive interactions with their peers in the classroom environment.

CHAPTER THREE THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

There may be no greater predictor of mental health than an individual's ability to interact with his or her social environment and develop a network of friends, associates and peers. Longitudinal and retrospective research studies have noted the relationship between poor social skills and low childhood social competence, as well as mental health problems, substance abuse, and loneliness later on in life (Gumpel, 2007, p. 351).

Clearly, it is important for teachers to teach students who lack social skills the appropriate way to react in social situations. Research has shown many methods to be effective. Traditionally, the use of Character Education curriculums have been successful in teaching typically developing children age appropriate social skills. "Most children learn social skills from interaction with others-other children, family members and adults. Some children with disabilities need to learn social skills more directly. This may include a specific curriculum and the individualized methods" (Seevers & Jones-Blank, 2008, p.1).

Social Stories

Educational literature review suggests that the use of Social Stories and visual supports improve social skills in children with disabilities. "A Social Story is one positive behavior intervention for students with autism. A Social Story is a short, simple story written from the perspective of the child that delivers instruction on appropriate social behavior" (Crozier & Tincani, 2005, p. 150). "They focus on describing and explaining the cues in that situation as well as teaching appropriate responses (Scattone, Tingstrom

& Wilczynski, 2006, p. 211).

Carol Gray, former consultant to students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Jenison, MI, and internationally recognized author and presenter, first developed Social Stories in 1991. Although Social Stories were developed for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), the approach has also been seen to be successful with children, adolescents, and adults with ASD and other social and communication delays and differences, as well as individuals developing normally (Thegraycenter.org, retrieved June 3, 2008). Gray states that there are specific steps in writing and implementing a Social Story. Gray outlined several basic steps necessary for developing a Social Story intervention.

First, the development of a Social Story involves targeting a specific problematic social situation that the Social Story will have its focus. Once a target situation is identified, the second step involves identifying the salient features of the context or setting (e.g., where a situation occurs, who is involved, how long it lasts, how it begins and ends, what occurs.) Specifically through direct observations and interviews with caregivers and teachers, information is gathered pertaining to the function of and/or maintaining features of the inappropriate, or nonexistent behaviors. Finally, this information is used to generate the social story (Gray, 2005, p.115).

Gray and Garland (2003) state that “Social Stories can be read either independently or by a caregiver, presented through audio equipment, or presented via video tape. Gray also suggests students complete a checklist or answer questions in writing at the end of the story, or have the student role play, demonstrating what he or she

will do the next time the situation occurs.” (p. 8)

One study conducted by Sansosti, Powell-Smith and Kincaid (2004) showed results following Social Story interventions that indicated trends in the desired direction for each participant. “The findings from these studies suggest that implementation of the Social Stories was effective in reducing the frequency of tantrum behaviors for each participant.” (p. 196)

“In addition to reducing inappropriate behaviors, Social Stories are effective in increasing pro-social behaviors such as initiating social activity and increasing flexibility during social activities (Feinberg, 2001) and teaching appropriate greeting behavior (Romano, 2002, p. 1046).

Visual Supports

Visual supports are pictures parents, teachers and professionals can use to help facilitate learning in multiple environments. Visual supports can also help children generalize skills learned and apply those skills in different situations. “A visually cued instruction involves the use of pictographic and written language as instructional supports in both structured and natural learning contexts” (Quill, 1995, p. 10). Visual supports can help students communicate their wants and needs, expand their vocabulary, and allow them to independently make choices. The Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (2003) states:

Many children with disabilities have strong visual skills, and these skills can be capitalized on with visual supports. Visual communication tools such as objects, photographs, picture symbols, daily schedules and choice boards can provide the supports necessary to greatly improve a child’s understanding and ability to

communicate, helping children be more active, independent and successful participants in their lives. (¶ 6)

Students with disabilities usually have heightened visual skill ability. Visual supports can be photographs, simple pictures, graphic organizers and picture schedules. Visual supports can help alleviate stress and anxiety for individuals who have difficulty reading nonverbal social cues and help them understand what they are expected to do. “Incorporating visual cues to the prompt hierarchy has been shown to benefit the acquisition, generalization and maintenance of daily living skills” (Pierce & Schreibman, 1995, p. 297).

Quill (1995) states:

Visually cued instruction aides the child’s understanding of spoken language instruction. They are able to focus their attention on visual materials better than they can attend to the rapidly changing social and communicative events with adults with peers that are inherent in group instruction. (p. 10)

Visual supports help children with disabilities understand exactly what they are expected to do. The pictures provide them concrete information that is easier for them to process than verbal language.

Combining Social Stories and Visual Supports

“Many studies have combined Social Stories with other interventions, including verbal and pictorial prompts, behavior charts, and reinforcement for appropriate responding” (Scattone, Tinfstrom, & Wilczynski, 2006, p. 212). Visual supports have been proven effective in teaching students who have Autism and other developmental disabilities. “Although there is no best program or one best way of helping children with

Autism, the importance of using supports based on concrete and visual teaching aides is largely upheld” (Rao & Gagie, 2006, p. 29).

Scattone, Tinfstrom, and Wilczynski (2006) combined Social Stories with verbal prompts, pictorial cues and self-evaluative video. They found that in one case that “the greatest increase occurred for Drew, whose social interactions improved from a mean of 7% of intervals during baseline to a mean of 39% of intervals during intervention. The other two students that participated in the study showed improvements in social interactions as well” (p. 217). Overall, each participant in their study showed positive gains in their social skills.

Project Objective and Processing Statements

The purpose of this action research project was to develop social skills in early childhood-aged children who have delays in speech and language, neurological development, cognitive disabilities, lack of exposure to the appropriate skills, low socioeconomic status, late intervention and environmental factors. The teacher researchers chose sharing and turn-taking as the targeted social skill because turn-taking and sharing are age appropriate skills, typically developing peers the students’ age are working on. An early-elementary aged student needs to know how to share and take turns with their peers to foster and maintain positive peer relationships.

The Parent Social Skills Rating Scale (see Appendix A) and the Teacher Social Skill Rating Scale (see Appendix B) revealed that all of the students in Classroom A and Classroom B needed to improve their social skills in the areas of turn-taking and sharing. The teacher researchers wanted each student to improve their ability to take turns and share toys and materials with their peers. The teacher researcher accomplished this by

using Social Stories and visual supports during structured, small group teacher directed activities that fostered turn-taking and sharing. For example, during a structured teaching time, the teacher researcher would give one student all of the Play-Doh, and give the other student all of the Play-Doh toys. Then, the teacher researcher would prompt the students to share the materials, if they could not do so on their own.

Teacher Researcher A and Teacher Researcher B collected their data using the following tools: Sharing Checklist (see Appendix C), Turn Taking Check List (see Appendix D), Journal Reflection Template-Sharing (see Appendix E), Journal Reflection Template-Turn-Taking (see Appendix F), These strategies were to be implemented in the two teacher researchers' classrooms at Site A and Site B, between September 2008 and November 2008. As a result of implementing these strategies in the classrooms, students were to increase their ability to share and participate in turn-taking activities appropriately with their peers.

To achieve these objectives, the following processes were used:

1. Two Social Stories were developed to teach sharing and turn-taking skills.
2. Visual Supports were designed to be introduced and utilized during small group activities.
3. Lessons and activities were designed, based on the unit of study provided students the opportunities for sharing and turn-taking.

Project Action Plan

Pre-Study (June 11, 2008 - August 25, 2008)

- Teacher researchers were given surveys and consent forms.
- Teacher researchers created and prepared surveys, checklists, lessons and materials for activities.

Pre-Documentation (August 25, 2008 - September 5, 2008)

Week 1 August 25-29

- Parent Consent Forms were sent home with parents/guardians at Open House at site A and B on Monday, to be collected by Friday.
- Parent surveys were sent home with consent forms at Open House on Monday to be collected by Friday.

Week 2 September 2-5

- Teacher surveys were filled out by the teacher researchers at Site A and Site B.

Interventions (September 8, 2008 - November 21, 2008)

Week 3 September 8-12

- Monday- Teacher researchers introduced the topic of Sharing through whole group
- Social Story/Visual Supports/Modeling.
- Tuesday - Friday- Social Story is read before small group daily.
- Picture Cues for sharing strategies introduced/modeled each day.
- Students were presented an activity, based on unit of study, in small groups for fifteen minutes daily.
- Picture Cues/Modeling used, as needed, during small group activity.
- Teacher journals will be kept by each teacher researcher and entries will be added daily.
- Friday-Teacher researchers will check each students skills using Teacher Observational Checklist for week one of the intervention.

Week 4 September 15-19

- Monday-Friday Teacher researchers read Social Story before small group daily.
- Students were presented an activity, based on unit of study, in small groups for fifteen minutes daily.
- Picture Cues/Modeling used, as needed, during small group activities.
- Teacher journals will be kept by each teacher researcher and entries will be added daily.
- Friday-Teacher researchers will check each students skills using Teacher Observational Checklist for week two of the intervention.

Week 5 September 22-26

- Monday-Friday Teacher researchers read Social Story before small group daily.
- Students were presented an activity, based on unit of study, in small groups for fifteen minutes daily.
- Picture Cues/Modeling used, as needed, during small group activities.
- Teacher journals will be kept by each teacher researcher and entries will be added daily.
- Friday-Teacher researchers will check each students skills using Teacher Observational Checklist for week three of the intervention.

Week 6 September 29-October 3

- Monday-Friday Teacher researchers read Social Story before small group daily.
- Students were presented an activity, based on unit of study, in small groups for fifteen minutes daily.
- Picture Cues/Modeling used, as needed, during small group activities.
- Teacher journals will be kept by each teacher researcher and entries will be added

daily.

- Friday-Teacher researchers will check each students skills using Teacher Observational Checklist for week four of the intervention.

Week 7 October 6-9

- Monday- Teacher researchers introduced the topic of Turn-Taking through whole group Social Story/Visual Supports/Modeling.
- Tuesday - Friday- Social Story is read before small group daily.
- Picture Cues for Turn-Taking strategies introduced/modeled each day.
- Students were presented an activity, based on unit of study, in small groups for fifteen minutes daily.
- Picture Cues/Modeling used, as needed, during small group activity.
- Teacher journals will be kept by each teacher researcher and entries will be added daily.
- Friday-Teacher researchers will check each student skills using Teacher Observational Checklists for week one of the intervention.

Week 8 October 14-17

- Monday-Friday Teacher researchers read Social Story before small group daily.
- Social Story/Visual Supports/Modeling
- Picture Cues for Turn-Taking strategies introduced/modeled each day.
- Students were presented an activity, based on unit of study, in small groups for fifteen minutes daily
- Picture Cues/Modeling used, as needed, during small group activity.
- Teacher journals will be kept by each teacher researcher and entries will be added daily.
- Friday-Teacher researchers will check each students skills using Teacher Observational Checklist for week two of the intervention.

Week 9 October 20-24

- Monday-Friday Teacher researchers read Social Story before small group daily.
- Social Story/Visual Supports/Modeling
- Picture Cues for Turn-Taking strategies introduced/modeled each day.
- Students were presented an activity, based on unit of study, in small groups for fifteen minutes daily.
- Picture Cues/Modeling used, as needed, during small group activity.
- Teacher journals will be kept by each teacher researcher and entries will be added daily.
- Friday-Teacher researchers will check each students skills using Teacher Observational Checklist for week three of the intervention.

Week 10 October 27-31

- Monday-Friday Teacher researchers read Social Story before small group daily.
- Social Story/Visual Supports/Modeling
- Picture Cues for Turn-Taking strategies introduced/modeled each day.
- Students were presented an activity, based on unit of study, in small groups for fifteen minutes daily.
- Picture Cues/Modeling used, as needed, during small group activity.
- Teacher journals will be kept by each teacher researcher and entries will be added

daily.

- Friday-Teacher researchers will check each students skills using Teacher Observational Checklist for week four of the intervention.

Post-Documentation (November 3, 2008 - November 14, 2008)

Week 11 November 3-7

- Parent surveys were sent home to parents on Monday to be collected by Friday.

Week 12 November 10-14

- Teacher surveys were filled out by the teacher researchers at Site A and Site B.

Analysis of Data (November 17, 2008 - December 26, 2008)

- Data will be analyzed and conclusions will be assessed.
- After all data has been recorded, these documents will be destroyed.

Method of Assessment

Parent Survey

The Parent Social Skills Rating Scale (see Appendix A) was given to parents at Open House on August 25, 2008 for the purpose of pre-documentation. Parents were asked to send the surveys back to the teacher researcher at their respective schools by August 29, 2008. These same surveys were sent to parents on November 3, 2008 to be sent back to the teacher researcher by November 7, 2008. The results of these surveys were used to determine if any progress was made, in regards to their child's social skills.

Teacher Survey

The Teacher Social Skills Rating Scale (see Appendix B) was filled out by Teacher Researcher A and Teacher Researcher B on September 2, 2008 to collect baseline data for turn-taking and sharing. The same survey was filled out by Teacher Researcher A and Teacher Researcher B on November 10, 2008 to assess the progress of the students' skills in relation to turn-taking and sharing. The purpose of these surveys was to compare pre-intervention results to the post-intervention results to determine if any progress was made in developing students' social skills.

Sharing and Turn-taking Check List

The Teacher Researchers used the Sharing Check List (see Appendix C) and the

Turn-Taking Check List (see Appendix D) for the purpose of the recording students' performance of social skills over an eight week period. The students' skills were assessed and recorded during weeks three through ten, using these checklists, each Friday. The data taken from these checklists was used to determine the effectiveness of the strategies that were used during the intervention process.

Journal Reflection Templates for Sharing and Turn-Talking

The teacher researchers used the Journal Reflection Template- Sharing (see Appendix E) and the Journal Reflection Template-Turn-Taking (see Appendix F) to write descriptions about the student interactions observed during structured, small group teacher directed activities. The teacher researchers set up a structured, teacher directed activity daily, focusing on the targeted social skill. For example, the teacher researcher set up the game Marble Run and then observed the students ability to take turns with their peers. If the student did not take turns, the teacher researcher would use visual supports and prompts to assist the student in taking turns. If the student was still unable to take turns, the teacher researcher would prompt the child to take a turn using the hand-over-hand method. These collections recorded students' social interactions daily over an eight-week period. Teacher researchers used these entries as a way to analyze and evaluate intervention strategies and reflect on the effectiveness of the implementation in relation to developing students' social skills over time.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The purpose of this action research project was to develop social skills in early childhood-aged children who have delays in speech and language, neurological development, cognitive disabilities, lack of exposure to the appropriate skills, low socioeconomic status, late intervention and other environmental factors. The social skills targeted were sharing and turn-taking. The teacher researchers incorporated the use of Social Stories and visual supports to help encourage the development of these skills in their classrooms.

During the pre-intervention phase, the teacher researchers administered the Parent Social Skills Rating Scale (see Appendix A) and the Teacher Social Skills Rating Scale (see Appendix B). The Parent Social Skills Rating Scale and the Teacher Social Skills Rating Scale was used to gather post-documentation data. The information that was collected from the two scales was used to target problem behaviors and provided baseline data for the research being conducted.

The students social skills were documented within the teacher researchers classrooms throughout the intervention process. The Sharing Checklist (see Appendix C) and the Turn-Taking Checklist (see Appendix D) were used at the end of each week to document the students ability to demonstrate the targeted social skill, and also how much prompting and support was needed during teacher directed peer group activity. The teacher researchers used the Journal Reflection Template-Sharing (see Appendix E) and the Journal Reflection Template-Turn-Taking (see Appendix F) to document progress

and monitor the students' ability to take turns and share toys and materials with their peers during a structured teaching time. Entries were used to document interactions so that teacher researchers could analyze and evaluate intervention strategies and reflect on the effect the implementation had on developing students' social skills.

Throughout the intervention phase, the teacher researchers read Social Stories daily and utilized visual supports during small group situations, to promote the targeted social skill. Unexpected school closings, due to a teachers strike, and time constraints affected the number of school days that the Social Stories were read to the students in the classroom.

During the post-documentation phase, the Parent Social Skills Rating Scale (see Appendix A) was sent home to parents to complete and return to school. The Teacher Social Skills Rating Scale was also completed by the teacher researchers. The teacher researchers reviewed and analyzed the data that was collected during the pre-intervention, intervention, and post-intervention phases of the research project. The information that was compiled provided the teacher researchers with the data needed to determine whether or not the use of Social Stories with visual supports helped to develop social skills within the classrooms.

Presentation and Analysis of the Results

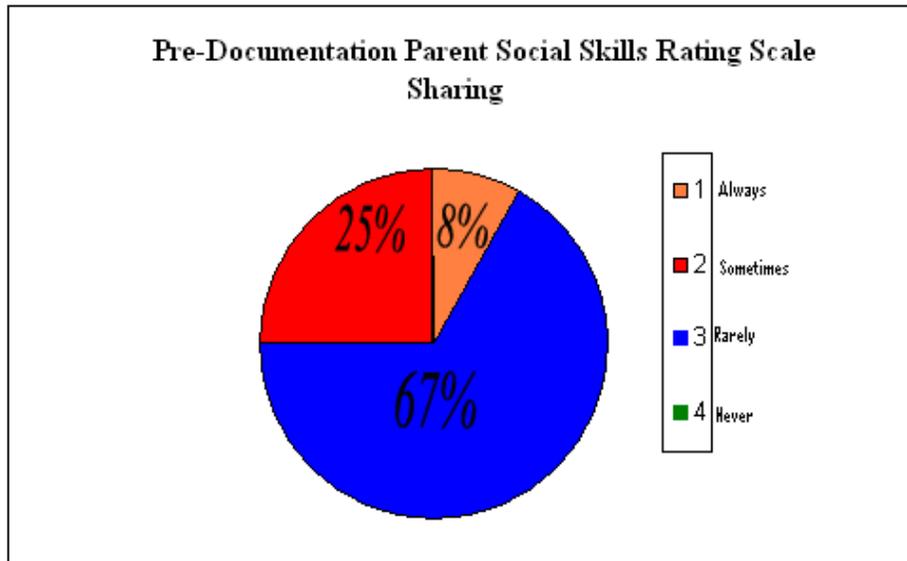
Parent Social Skills Rating Scale

The Parent Social Skills Rating Scale (see Appendix A) was given to parents two times. The parents first received the Parent Social Skills Rating Scale on August 25, 2008. There was a 67% return rate on the rating scales that were completed by the parents. The Teacher Researchers used this for pre-documentation purposes. The teacher

researchers wanted to know if the students presented the same level of social skill awareness at home, as they did at school. On this scale, parents were asked to circle how they felt their child performed in each of the eight statements made. The options were given on a Likert-type Scale included the following; four meaning “always”, three meaning “sometimes”, two meaning “rarely”, and one meaning “never.” The purpose of the Parent Social Skills Rating Scale was to gain information about their child’s frequency and ability to engage in social interactions both before and after the intervention in their home environment. After analyzing the results from the pre-intervention and post-intervention surveys, the teacher researchers noticed a consistent trend that the students’ parents marked their child higher on the rating scale than the teacher researchers did. This means the parents felt that their child displayed more age-appropriate social skills than the teacher researchers had observed in their classrooms.

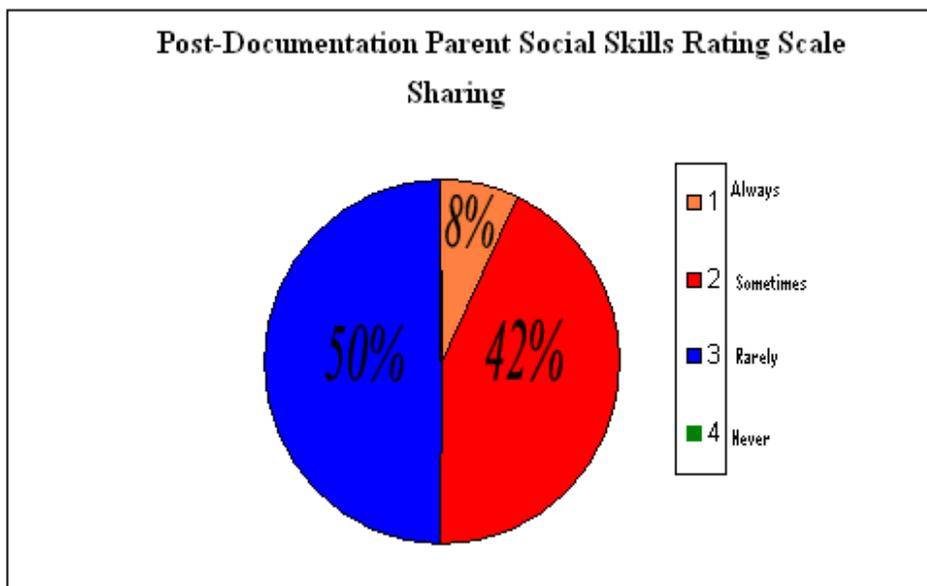
The teacher researches had the parents respond to eight questions on the Parent Social Skills Rating Scale (see Appendix A), but only used question three “Plays for 2-3 minutes with groups of children sharing same materials” and question seven “Takes turns with others” for data purposes. The teacher researchers asked the parents the other six questions to gain a better understanding of each student’s social awareness and their ability to interact and relate to peers and siblings.

Figure 10. Pre-Documentation Parent Social Skills Rating Scale-Sharing



Source: Parent Social Skills Rating Scale from Sites A and B

Figure 11. Post-Documentation Parent Social Skills Rating Scale-Sharing

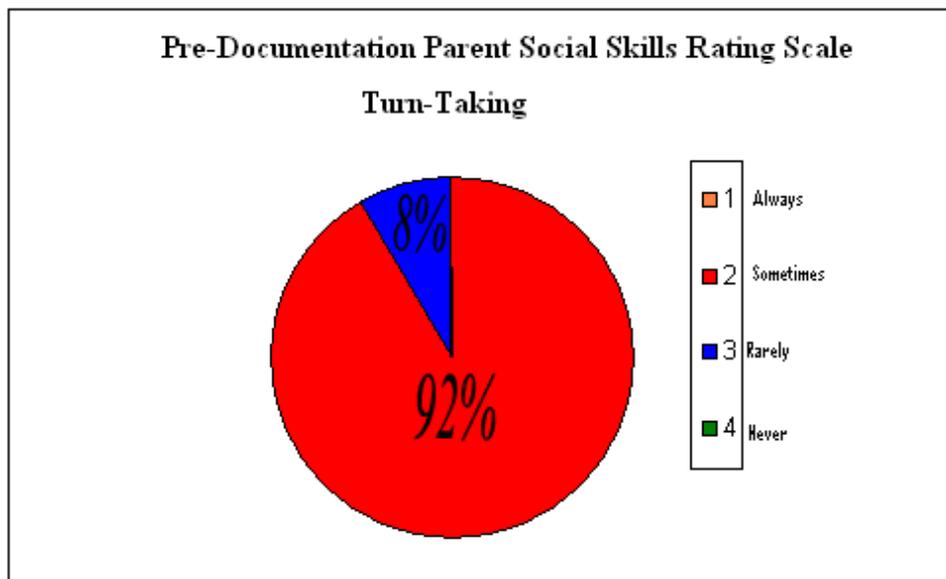


Source: Parent Social Skills Rating Scale from Sites A and B

Figure 11 shows the combined results of the parents' responses to the statement of "Plays for 2-3 minutes with groups of children sharing same materials." Six of the twelve parent respondents or 50% indicated that their child rarely shared with others. Five of the

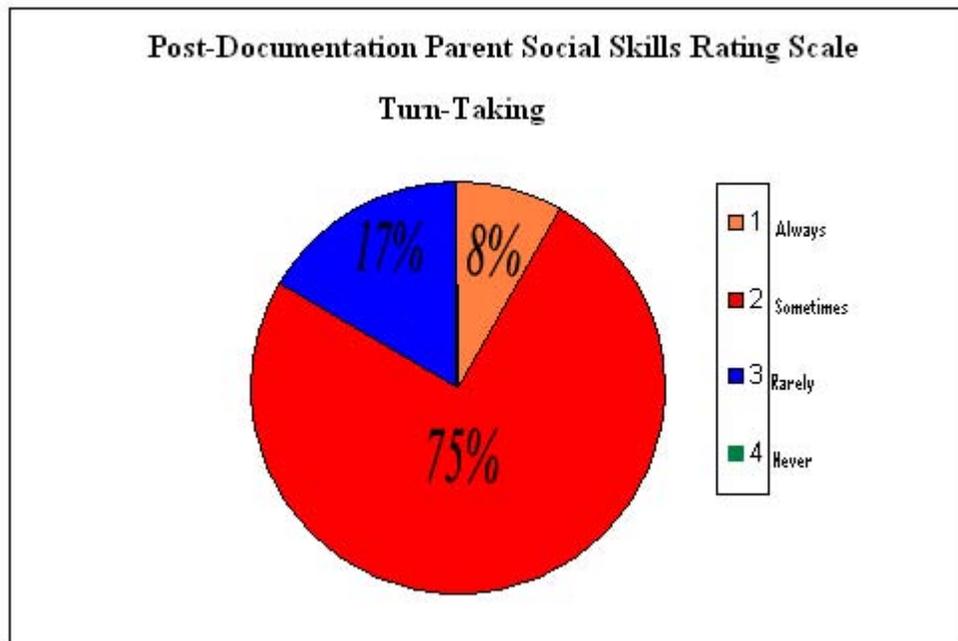
twelve parent respondents or 42% indicated that their child sometimes shared with others. One of the twelve parent respondents or 8% indicated that their child always shared with others. There were no parent respondents that indicated that their child never shared with others. After analyzing and comparing the pre-documentation and post-documentation results, the teacher researchers found that two students moved from “rarely” to “sometimes.” The data also shows that all of the students maintained or gained social skills in regards to sharing toys and materials with their siblings and peers.

Figure 12. Pre-Documentation Parent Social Skills Rating Scale-Turn-Taking



Source: Parent Social Skills Rating Scale from Sites A and B

Figure 13 . Post-Documentation Parent Social Skills Rating Scale-Turn-Taking



Source: Parent Social Skills Rating Scale from Sites A and B

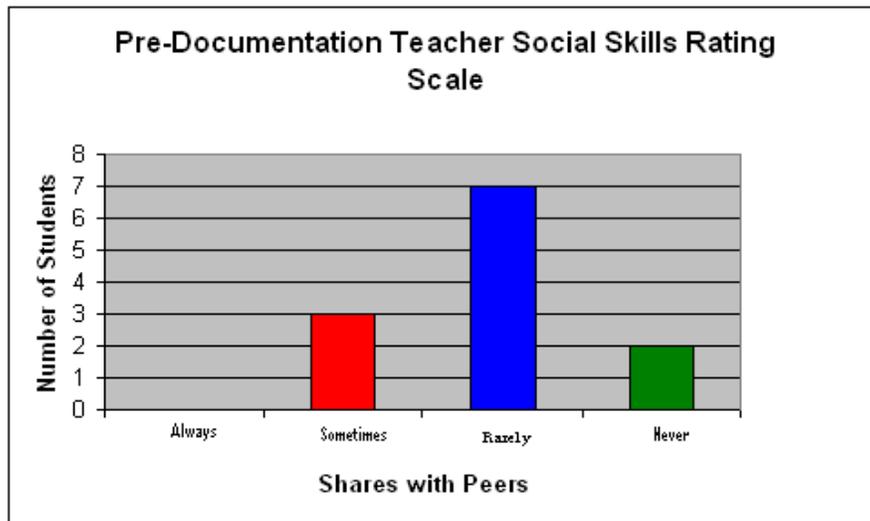
The combined results of the completed Parent Social Skills Rating Scales for Turn-Taking are shown in Figure 13. Parents were asked to respond to the statement "Takes turns with others." Two of the twelve parent respondents or 17% indicated that their child rarely took turns with others. Nine of the twelve parent respondents or 75% indicated that their child sometimes took turns with others. One of the twelve parent respondents or 8% indicated that their child always took turns with others. There were no parent respondents that indicated that their child never took turns with others. After analyzing and comparing the pre-documentation and post-documentation results, the teacher researchers found three students moved from one category to another. One student moved from "rarely" to "sometimes" and another moved from "sometimes" to "always." The teacher researchers found that one student moved from "sometimes" to "rarely." There could be many reasons for this loss. First, a different parent could have filled out the Parent Social Skill Rating Scale for pre-documentation, than post-

documentation. Secondly, the student could have had difficulty taking turns with a peer or sibling when the parent observed the child to fill out the post-documentation Parent Social Skills Rating Scale (see Appendix B), or the student might need to be exposed to the intervention for a longer period of time to obtain and require the appropriate skills for turn-taking.

Teacher Social Skills Rating Scale

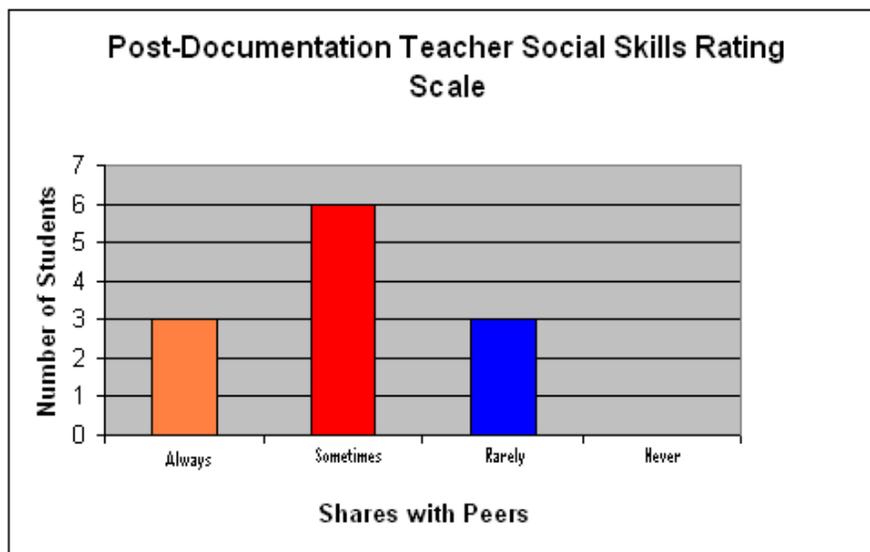
The Teacher Social Skills Rating Scale (see Appendix B) was completed by the teacher researchers who worked with the students in their classrooms. The Teacher Social Skills Rating Scale was filled out to gather pre-documentation and post-documentation on each student's ability to share and take turns with their peers. Using the scale, the teacher researchers circled how they felt each student performed in each of the eight statements. The Likert-type rating scale consisted of the numbers one through four: four meaning "always", three meaning "sometimes", two meaning "rarely", and one meaning "never." The purpose of the Teacher Social Skills Rating Scale was to gather data on the appropriateness and occurrence of social skills that students exhibited inside of the classroom. Like the Parent Social Skills Rating Scale, the teacher researchers responded to eight questions on the Teacher Social Skills Rating Scale (see Appendix B), but only used question three "Plays for 2-3 minutes with groups of children sharing same materials" and question seven "Takes turns with others" for data purposes. The teacher researchers responded to the other six questions to gain a better understanding of each student's social awareness and their ability to interact and relate to their peers.

Figure 14. Pre-Documentation Teacher Social Skills Rating Scale



Source: Teacher Social Skills Rating Scale form Sites A and B

Figure 15. Post-Documentation Teacher Social Skills Rating Scale

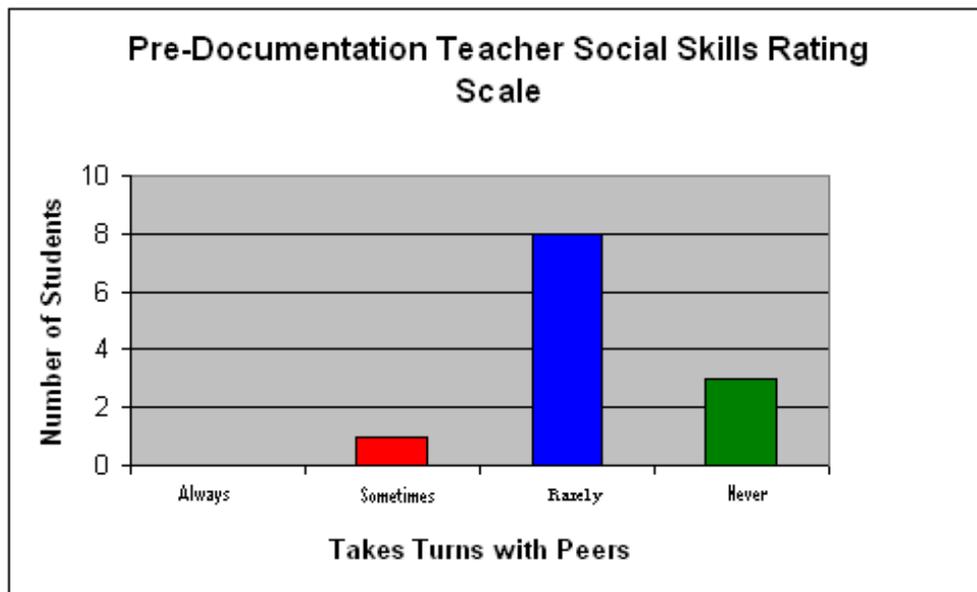


Source: Social Skills Rating Scale form Sites A and B

Figure 15 displays the combined results of the Social Skill Rating Scale for Sharing (see Appendix A) that was completed by the teacher researchers. The teacher researchers indicated that three of the twelve students observed or 25% rarely shared with their peers in the classroom setting. Six of the twelve students or 50% sometimes shared with their peers in the classroom setting. Three of the twelve students or 25% were

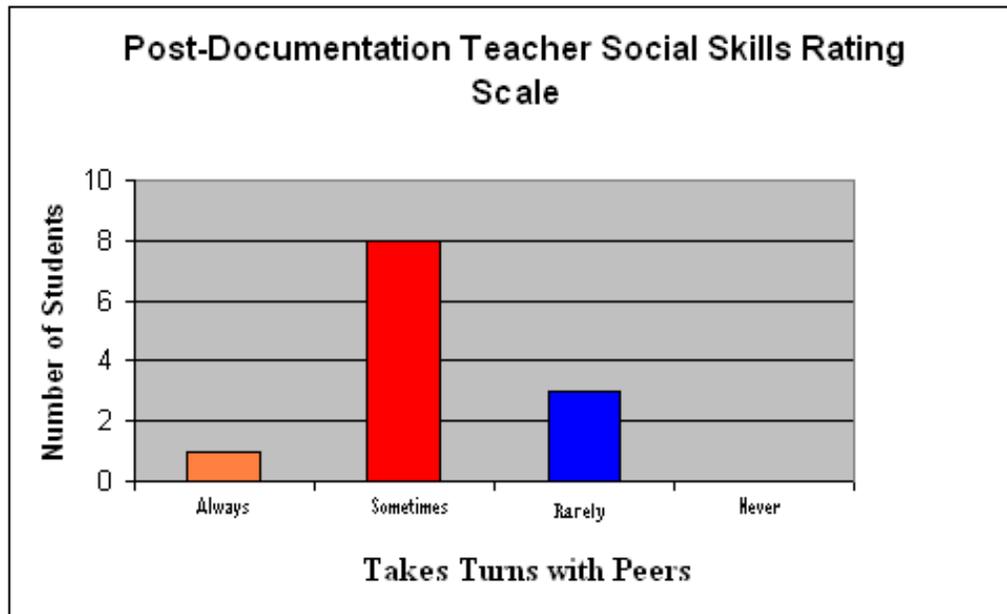
observed to always share with their peers in the classroom setting. The teacher researchers indicated that they had not observed any students who never shared with their peers in the classroom setting. After analyzing and comparing the pre-documentation and post-documentation results, the teacher researchers found that each student increased their social skills in regards to the statement “Plays for 2-3 minutes with groups of children sharing the same materials.” One student went from scoring “never” to scoring “sometimes,” and another student went from scoring “never” to scoring “rarely.” The teacher researchers also noted five students who scored “rarely” during the pre-documentation data scored “sometimes” in the post-documentation data. Last, the teacher researchers noted that three of the students who scored “sometimes” during the pre-documentation data scored “always” on the post-documentation data.

Figure 16. Pre-Documentation Teacher Social Skills Rating Scale



Source: Teacher Sharing Checklists from Site A and B

Figure 17. Post-Documentation Teacher Social Skills Rating Scale



Source: Teacher Turn-Taking Checklist from Site A and B

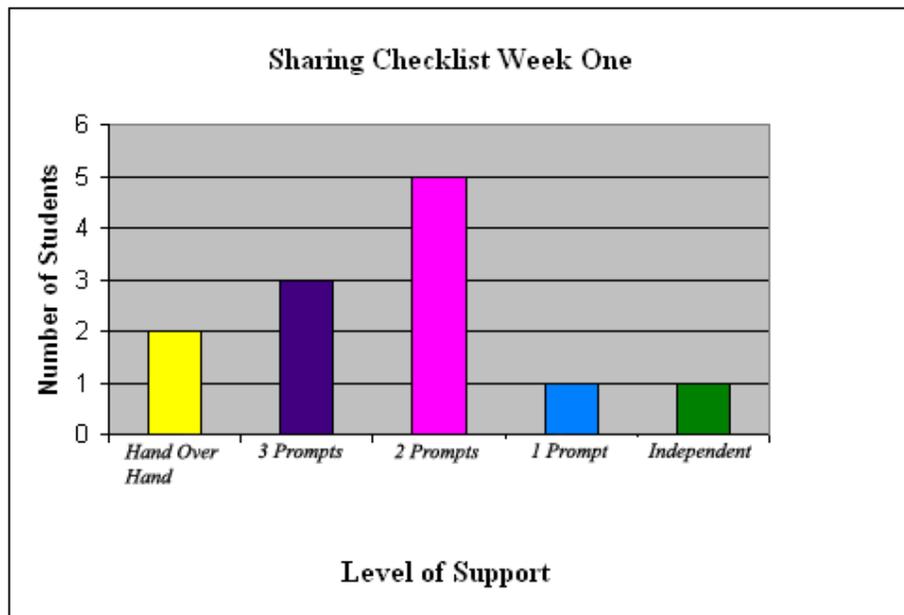
Figure 17 shows the results of the Teacher Social Skills Rating Scale for Turn-Taking. The teacher researchers indicated that three of the twelve students observed or 25% rarely took turns with peers in the classroom environment. One of the twelve students or 8% never engaged in turn-taking with their peers in the classroom environment. Eight of the twelve students or 67% sometimes used their turn-taking skills with other peers in the classroom environment. The teacher researchers indicated that they had not observed any students who never took turns with their peers. After analyzing and comparing the pre-documentation and post-documentation results, the teacher researchers found that each student increased their social skills in regards to the statement “Takes turns with others.” The data indicated the following: three students made gains and moved from “never” to “rarely,” one student moved from “never” to “sometimes,” one student did make slight gains, but still remained at “rarely,” six students moved from “rarely” to “sometimes,” and one student moved from “sometimes” to “always.” Most of

the students made some gains during the intervention.

Teacher Observational Checklist-Sharing

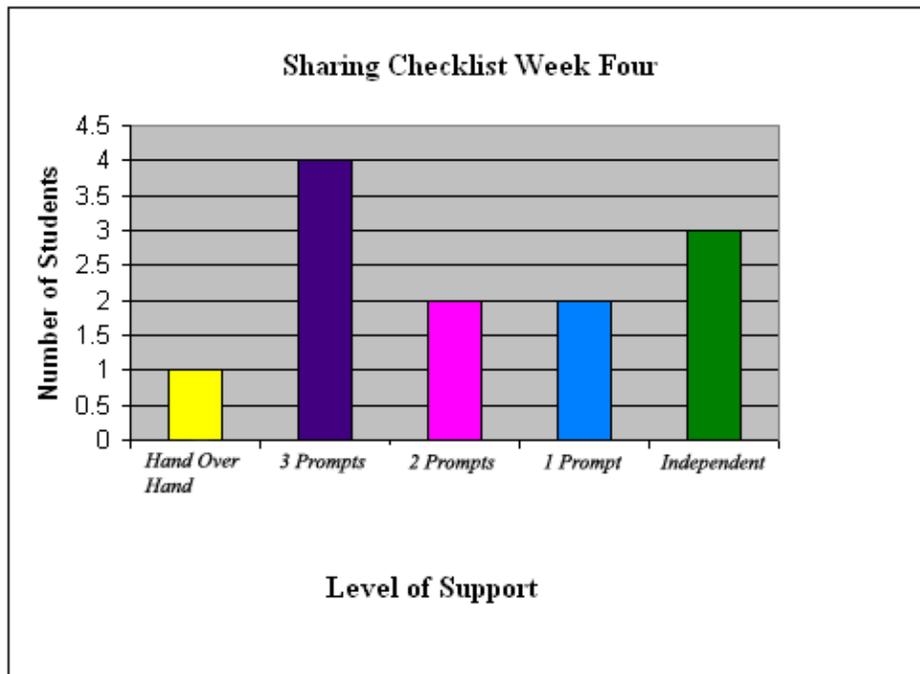
The Teacher Observational Checklist-Sharing (see Appendix C) was used to record the students' performance of the targeted social skill. The teacher researchers used the Teacher Observational Checklist-Sharing (see Appendix C) on Fridays or on the last day of the school week. The checklists were completed after observing a teacher directed activity, which required the students to utilize their social skills. The checklists were used to document the activity that was being observed and the level of support that was needed to facilitate the desired social skill. The teacher researchers had five statements to choose from which varied between the student needing hand-over-hand assistance to share to the student being independent in sharing items and/or toys with peers.

Figure 18. Pre-Documentation Sharing Checklist



Source: Teacher Sharing Checklists from Site A and B

Figure 19. Post-Documentation Sharing Checklist



Source: Teacher Sharing Checklists from Site A and Site B

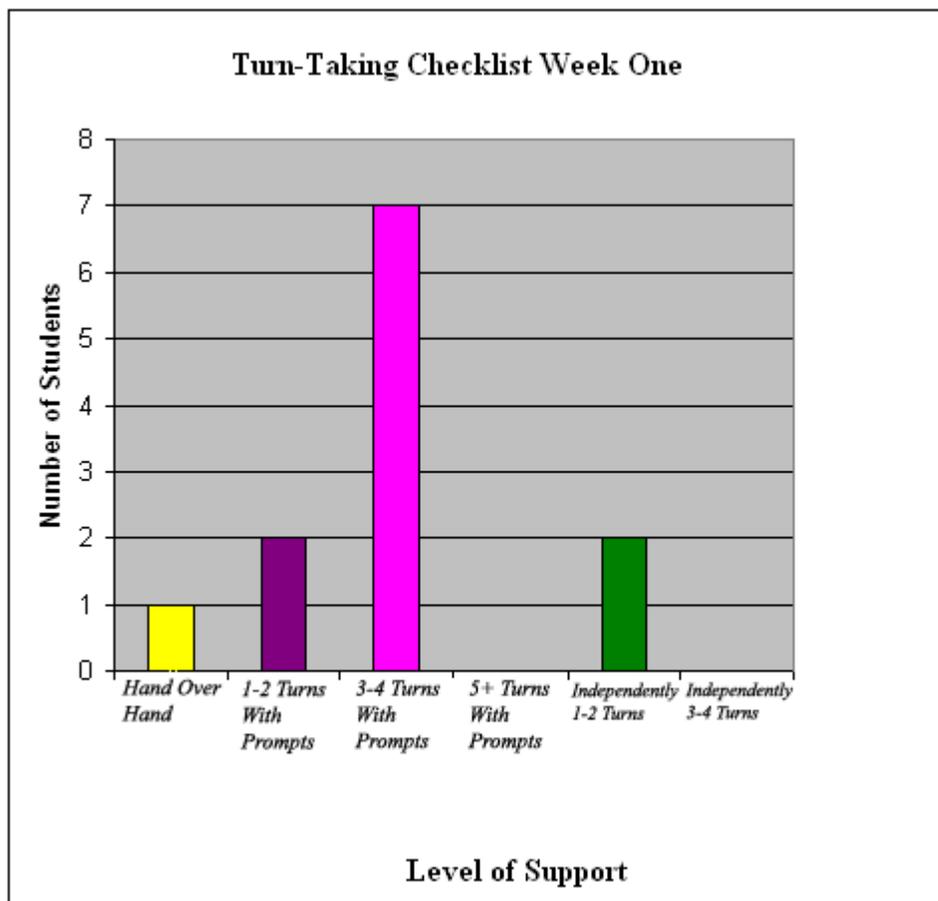
Figure 19 shows the level of support that was needed during the structured activity that the students participated in. The activity observed required students to demonstrate the targeted social skill of sharing. Teacher researchers used the Sharing Checklist (see Appendix C) to gather pre-observational data and post-observational data. The graph titled Sharing Check List Week One shows the pre-observational data both Teacher Researcher A and Teacher Researcher B took during the first week of implementation. The graph titled Sharing Check List Week Four shows the post-observational data Teacher Researcher A and Teacher Researcher B took during the last week that the social skill of sharing was addressed. The teachers had five statements to choose from, which varied in the level of prompting and support. The yellow bar to the far left of the graph represents those students who needed full adult support and hand over hand assistance to share materials or a toy with a peer. This means the adult

facilitated the entire session, and the student followed the adult's lead. One of the twelve students or 8% needed full hand-over-hand assistance to share a toy or materials with a peer. The dark purple bar, the second from the left represents the students who needed three verbal or visual prompts from the adult to share materials or a toy with a peer. This means the student could eventually share a toy or material with their peer; however they needed the assistance of a visual support and prompting. Four of the twelve students or 35% needed this support to share a toy or materials with a peer. The fuchsia bar, or the one directly in the middle, represents the students who needed two verbal or visual prompts from the adult to share materials or a toy with a peer. This means the student could eventually share a toy or material with their peer; however they needed the assistance of a visual support and prompting. Two of the twelve students or 16% needed this level of support to share a toy or materials with a peer. The teal bar, or the second bar from the right, represents the students who needed one verbal or visual prompt from the adult to share materials or a toy with a peer. This means the student could eventually share a toy or material with their peer; however they needed the assistance of a visual support and prompting. Two of the twelve students or 16% needed this level of support to share a toy or materials with a peer. The bar to the far right, or the green bar, represents the number of students who could independently share a toy or materials with a peer without the use of visual supports or adult prompting. This means the student can share toys or materials with other peers without facilitation from an adult. Three of the twelve students or 25% could independently share materials or a toy with a peer.

After analyzing and comparing the pre-documentation and post-documentation results, the teacher researchers found that each student increased their social skills in

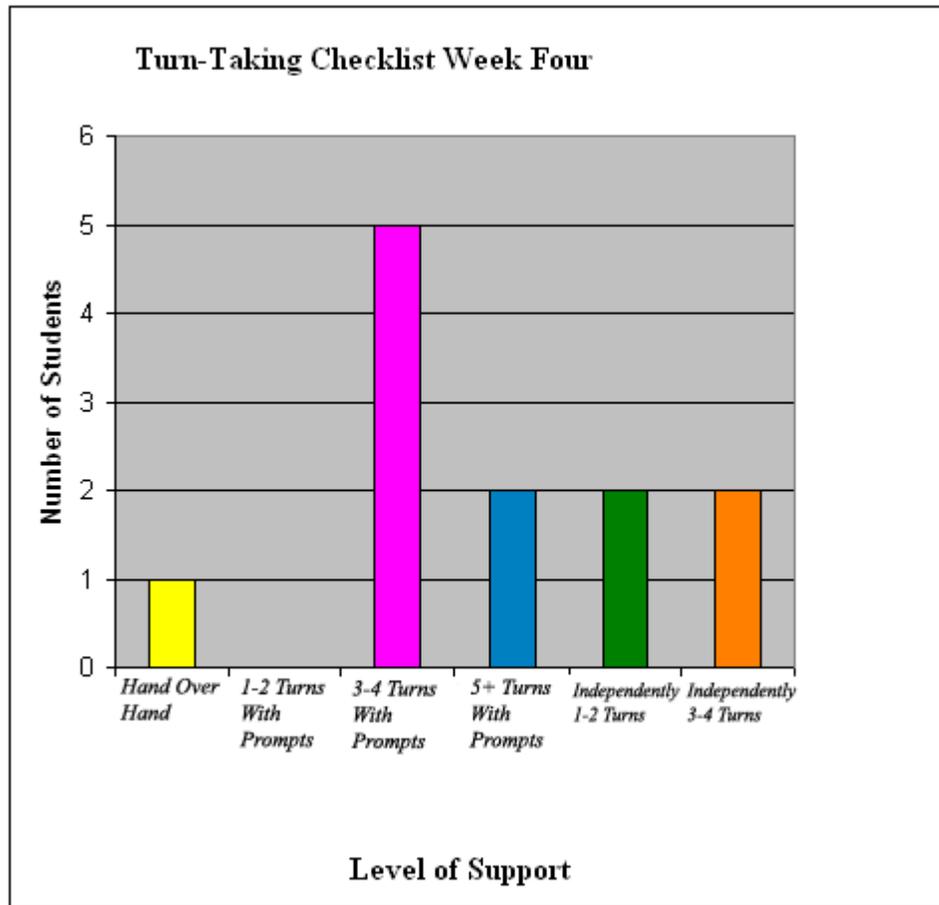
regards to the statement “Plays for 2-3 minutes with groups of children sharing the same materials.” The teacher researchers were pleased to find that every student made some improvement in regards to sharing with their peers. The data indicated the following: one student moved from needing hand-over-hand assistance to needing three visual/verbal prompts, one student moved from needing two visual/verbal prompts to only needing one visual/verbal prompt, one student went from needing two visual/verbal prompts to sharing with their peers independently, and one student went from needing one visual/verbal prompt to sharing with their peers independently.

Figure 20. Turn-Taking Checklist Week One



Source: Turn Taking Checklists from Site A and B

Figure 21. Turn-Taking Checklist Week Four



Source: Turn-Taking Checklists from Site A and B

Figure 21 shows the level of support that was needed during the structured activity that students participated in. The activity observed required students to demonstrate the targeted social skill of turn-taking. Teacher researchers used the Turn-Taking Checklist to gather pre-observational and post-observational data. The graph titled Turn-Taking Checklist Week One shows the pre-observational data both Teacher Researcher A and Teacher Researcher B took. The graph titled Turn-Taking Checklist Week Four shows the post-observational data Teacher Researcher A and Teacher Researcher B took. The teachers had five statements to choose from, which varied in the level of prompting and support. The yellow bar to the far left of the graph represents

those students who needed full adult support and hand-over-hand assistance to take one turn with a peer. This means the adult facilitated the entire session, and the student followed the adult's lead. The dark purple bar, the second from the left, represents the students who took one to two turns with a peer, but needed no more than two verbal or visual prompts from an adult. This means the student could eventually take one or two turns with a peer, however they needed the assistance of a visual support and prompting. The fuchsia bar, or the third bar from the left, represents the students who took three to four turns with a peer, and needed no more than two verbal or visual cues to take a turn. This means the student could eventually take three to four turns with a peer; however they needed the assistance of a visual support and prompting. The teal bar, or the third bar from the right, represents the students who could take five or more turns with a peer, but needed no more than two visual or verbal prompts to take a turn. This means the student could eventually take a turn with a peer, however they needed the assistance of a visual supports and prompting. The bar second from the right, or the green bar, represents the number of students who could independently take one to two turns with a peer without the use of visual supports or adult prompting. This means the student can take one to two turns with other peers without facilitation from an adult. The orange bar, or the bar to the far right of the graph, represents the number of students who could take three to four turns with others without facilitation from an adult.

Five of the twelve students or 41% required 2 verbal/visual prompts to take 3-4 turns reciprocally during the observed activity. Two of the twelve students or 17% were able to take five or more turns with 2 verbal/visual prompts. Two of the twelve students or 17% were able to take 1-2 turns independently with no adult prompting, and two of the

twelve students or 17% were able to take 3-4 turns independently with no adult prompting. One of twelve students or 8% needed full hand-over-hand support to take one turn with a peer.

After analyzing and comparing the pre-documentation and post-documentation results, the teacher researchers found that each student increased their social skills in regards to the statement “Takes turns with others.” The teacher researchers were pleased to find that every student had made some improvements in regards to taking turns with their peers. The data indicated the following: two students moved from taking one to two turns with the use of visual/verbal cues to taking more three to four turns with the use of visual/verbal prompts. Two students moved from taking three to four turns with the use of visual/verbal cues to taking more than five turns with the use of visual/verbal cues. Two students moved from taking three to four turns with the use of visual/verbal cues to taking one to two turns independently, and two students moved from taking one to two turns independently to taking three to four turns independently. The teacher researchers feel that the intervention was successful, and each student made some gains during the intervention.

Journal Reflection Template- Sharing

The Journal Reflection Template-Sharing (see Appendix E) was utilized daily to write descriptions about the student interactions that were observed during small group teacher-directed activities. The purpose of these entries were to document interactions so that teacher researchers could analyze and evaluate intervention strategies and reflect on the effect that implementation had on developing students’ social skills. These reflections were entered daily over a four-week period. The Journal Reflection Template-Sharing

documented the activity observed and required the teacher researchers to circle whether the student needed full prompting, partial prompting or if the student was able to use the social skill independently. Teachers also needed to circle the appropriate statement in regards to the time the student was able to participate in the group activity. In addition, the template allowed the teacher researchers to enter their written reflections of the social interactions observed of their students. All of the students' names have been changed to protect their privacy and confidentiality.

Journal Reflections from Teacher Researcher A

Teacher Researcher A noticed moderate improvements in her students' ability to share with peers in the classroom. Overall, students required less adult prompting during activities that required them to use their sharing skills. The teacher researcher documented through a journal reflection on September 24th, 2008 the gains that one of her students had made during a small group activity. "Ethan wanted the blue pattern bead that another student was using to complete his pattern card. He looked into the students' face and said, "Peez?" and pointed to the blue bead. When the other student didn't respond, he took the bead." The teacher researcher commented that although Ethan took the blue bead without permission the fact that he attempted to ask before taking something from a peer, was an improvement in his sharing skills.

Likewise, improvement was noted on September 29th, 2008 during small group time. The teacher researcher writes:

Jon is responding more positively and requires less prompting to share during the daily small group activities. Today when a peer asked for some of the Lego wheels that he was using, he gave the peer one of the six he was holding. When

the program assistant asked Jon if he could share two more, he also complied.

On October 3rd, 2008 a student took the play phone from Holly during an unstructured play time. Holly went to the board where the Sharing Social Story was displayed and proceeded to give it to the student who had took her phone. The teacher researcher speculated that this gesture was Holly's attempt to communicate to the other student that she wanted him to share. The teacher researcher reflected in her journal entry that she felt that Holly was beginning to understand the concept of sharing through the use of the Social Stories that were being read in the classroom.

Journal Reflections from Teacher Researcher B

Teacher Researcher B noted that each student made progress in relation to sharing toys and items with their peers. She noticed a change in all of her students as it relates to sharing. During the final week of implementing the sharing lessons, during leisure time Jacob asked another student if he could have the toy they were playing with by using the phrase "Can I have that?" The student stated "I need a minute" and the student asked the teacher to tell him when it was his turn. During the first week of implementation Jacob had difficulty sharing toys. He would grab toys out of other students' hands. This student made huge gains in sharing with peers. Overall, Jacob has made the most progress in relation to sharing.

"During the first week of structured sharing activities, Jimmy needed full hand-over-hand assistance sharing items and toys with his peers. He was often agitated and could not take more than one or two turns with a peer without becoming distressed and leaving the group. During the final week of observation on October 2, 2008, Jimmy played Candy Land with a peer and took four turns with adult assistance."

On October 3, 2008, the teacher researcher noted that with adult assistance and visual supports, Bobby shared the Play-Doh toys with a peer. When the intervention first began, Bobby had a difficult time sharing and would often grab the materials or toys out of another student's hand.

Teacher Researcher noted on October 3, 2008:

The students understand the concept of sharing. One of the students can independently share a toy or materials with their peers, two students can share with their peers given visual supports and minimal adult prompting, and one student can share given visual supports and adult prompts. Each student has made progress sharing materials and toys with their peers and other adults. I have noticed an increase of tolerance when students are asked to share the same materials and toys. I have also noticed that they are using the sharing lingo "Can I have that?" instead of grabbing it from their peer.

Journal Reflection Template-Turn-Taking

Journal Reflection Template-Turn-Taking (see Appendix F) was utilized daily to write descriptions about the student interactions that were observed during small group activities. The purpose of these entries were to document interactions so that teacher researchers could analyze and evaluate intervention strategies and reflect on the effect that implementation had on developing students' social skills. These reflections were entered daily over a four-week period. The Journal Reflection Template-Turn-Taking documented the activity observed and required the teacher researchers to circle whether the student needed full prompting, partial prompting or if the student was able to use the social skill independently. Teachers also needed to circle the appropriate statement in

regards to the time the student was able to participate in the group activity. In addition, the template allowed the teacher researchers to enter their written reflections of the social interactions observed of their students. All of the students' names have been changed to protect their privacy and confidentiality.

Journal Reflections from Teacher Researcher A

Teacher Researcher A noticed a definite improvement in her students' ability to turn-take during structured and unstructured activities. On October 30th, 2008 the teacher researcher added an entry describing her observation during a structured activity.

Tia and a peer were involved in a memory game which required them to take turns flipping over cards to try to find a match. The teacher researcher had to facilitate the turn-taking between Tia and the peer for the first two turns. Tia then began to take turns independently, using the phrases, "My turn" and "Your turn" to indicate whose turn it was, for the next seven turns. This is a marked improvement in her turn-taking skills from just two weeks ago.

The teacher researcher reflected on the gains that another of her students had made during her observation. On November 4th, 2008 Anthony and two peers were playing the game Don't Break the Ice. Each student was directed to take turns using the hammer. Anthony and one of the peers had each took a turn when the hammer was inadvertently given back to him. Anthony responded by saying, "Amber gets to go now" and handed the hammer to the peer who hadn't yet had a turn. The teacher researcher noted that this was a definite improvement and she was impressed by the positive social skills that Anthony had displayed during her observation.

Teacher Researcher A entered another journal entry on November 6th, 2008 which

stated:

I believe that Jon is becoming more comfortable in social situations. Although he typically responds more positively when he is turn-taking and interacting with the adults in the classroom, he is beginning to allow more peers into his play and seems more comfortable with turn-taking and sharing toys and materials with his peers.

The teacher researcher also noted in her reflection on November 13th, 2008, “Ethan still has difficulty sometimes waiting his turn, however, the visual supports that are put in place seem to help remind him and I find that we are needing to prompt him less.”

Journal Reflections from Teacher Researcher B

After reviewing the data and analyzing the graphs, Teacher Researcher B noted on October 31, 2008 that all of the students had made gains in taking turns with their peers. The teacher noted in her journal entry:

The students are really starting to understand the concept of taking turns. They are increasingly more tolerant of accepting “No, I am not ready to share” from a peer and are doing a great job waiting for their turn. All of the students are able to wait their turn and now are less likely to physically act out.

Teacher Researcher B noted on September 20, 2008:

During free play, Tommy asked a peer if he could take a turn with the green sensory ball. Instead of impulsively grabbing the ball from the other student, he waited for the other student’s response. The other student responded, “I need a minute.” Tommy found another toy to play with while he was waiting for his turn.

Tommy has made progress in the area of taking turns with his peers. When the intervention first began, he would often become agitated and upset because he did not want to share materials or toys with his peers. Now, he is using the turn-taking language he learned through the Social Stories, and at times is beginning to implement it on his own.

On October 8, 2008, Teacher Researcher stated that with visual supports and adult assistance, Jimmy took four turns with a peer playing Bozo Buckets. The teacher researcher noted that in the beginning stages of this intervention, this student became aggressive towards staff and other students. He often would not be able to stay with the group for no longer than two to three minutes. Over time, Jimmy learned the turn-taking rules and relied on visual supports and teacher assistance to help him take turns with his peers. Over time Jimmy needed less and less hand over hand support, and relied on the visual supports to remind him of the rules.

On October 28, 2008 the teacher researcher noted that during the structured teaching time, Jacob could now independently take five turns with another student with limited teacher support. "He quickly learned the turn-taking rules, and can now generalize the skills to unstructured play time in the classroom. He has much better impulse control and will often repeat the rules verbally as he follows them. He will often remind the other students of the rules as well. By far, this student has made the most progress during the intervention."

On October 28, 2008 the teacher researcher noted that during the structured teaching time, Bobby took one turn independently with a peer, and then needed visual supports and verbal prompts from an adult to take four more turns. Bobby has made

progress in terms of taking turns with peers. When the intervention first began, Bobby would yell at the other children and grab toys and materials from their hands. Bobby will still do this on occasion, but his impulse control and responsiveness to the visual supports has really improved.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this action research project was to develop and strengthen the social skills of early elementary aged students who have disabilities. To do this, the teacher researchers used Social Stories and visual supports to teach the social skill lessons. Over the twelve week process, both Teacher Researcher A and Teacher Researcher B noted that all of their students had some increase in their sharing or turn-taking skills. However, some students made bigger gains than others.

The teacher researchers found the use of Social Stories and visual supports effective in teaching their students the social skills of sharing and turn-taking. They planned lessons centered around the students' interests to teach the students sharing and turn-taking skills. Each day, the teacher researchers read the students the targeted Social Story and then set up a structured, small group teacher directed activity that gave the students the opportunity to share or take turns with their peers.

After analyzing the data, both Teacher Researcher A and Teacher Researcher B noted that the interventions were successful. They feel that each student made some gains in regards to the social skills taught. The researchers felt that even during unstructured playtime or recess, the students were now less likely to act on impulses and more likely to ask for what they wanted. After dissecting and analyzing the data, the teacher researchers' observations were backed up by their research data. All of the students made

some improvements in sharing and taking turns with their peers in the classroom setting.

After great discussion, the teacher researchers feel that the use of Social Stories and visual supports aided their students in developing and strengthening their social skills. However, there were several factors the teacher researchers would change if they did the action research project again. First, the teacher researchers would have chosen one social skill to target. This way, the students would be exposed to one intervention for a longer period of time. Instead of targeting sharing for four weeks and turn-taking for four weeks, the teacher researchers would have chose one of the skills to teach to the students for eight weeks. The teacher researchers feel that the more exposure the students have to one specific intervention, the more the students would have improved their social skills. The second factor the teacher researchers would have changed was the amount of time spent on social skills each day. As the research project outline stated, the teacher researchers spent approximately fifteen minutes teaching social skills each day.

The teacher researchers feel it would have been more beneficial to work on social skills twice daily, in ten-minute intervals. The teacher researchers feel that this would allow the students to have more exposure to the targeted social skill, and have greater opportunities to utilize the social skills. Last, the teacher researchers noted aggressive behaviors during the intervention process. The students in Teacher Researcher A and Teacher Researcher B's classrooms have difficulty with impulse control, waiting, sharing, taking turns and joining peers during a group activity. Each structured, small group teacher directed activity focused on targeting these issues, which in-turn caused the students at times to become aggressive. Throughout the intervention process, both teacher researchers kept the intervention groups small, with no more than two or three students

with one adult, so the adult could closely monitor the behaviors and immediately intervene if necessary.

Another issue that arose while we were compiling our data was trying to figure out a way to use the Parent Social Skills Rating Scale (see Appendix A). After we gathered our pre-observational and post-observational data, we realized that only two of the eight questions directly pertained to what we were actually looking for. So, we took our pre-observational and post-observational data from Question 3 “Plays for 2-3 minutes with groups of children sharing the same materials” and Question 7, “Takes turns with others.” The other six questions we used as background information. We also noticed in regard to the Parent Social Skills Rating Scale, that most parents rated their child higher than the teacher researcher did during the pre-observational data collection.

Reflection Teacher Researcher A

During the beginning phase of my research, many of the students in my classroom struggled during social situations and had difficulties with sharing, turn-taking and responding appropriately to their peers. The delays that my students have compromise their ability to function cooperatively in the school environment and ultimately hindered their learning. The delays in their social development also made it difficult for them to develop positive peer relationships, which could further provide them the opportunities to interact and learn from each other. Therefore I felt that it was imperative that I develop and implement the strategies needed to help my students learn and develop positive social skills. Throughout the intervention process I had the opportunity to help foster the development of my students’ social skills through the use of Social Stories and visual supports that were developed by Teacher Researcher B and myself. According to the data

collected over the course of my research, the students in my classroom were shown to have made gains in their ability to both share and turn-take appropriately with their peers. In addition, I have observed an increase of positive social behaviors within my classroom. I believe that the strategies that were implemented throughout the research project ultimately had a positive impact on my students and helped to teach them appropriate social skills.

Reflection Teacher Researcher B

All of the students in my classroom lack age appropriate social skills. Each child in my classroom has difficulty with impulse control, waiting, sharing, taking turns, keeping their hands and feet to themselves, joining peers to play, initiating or sustaining a conversation with an adult or peer that is not centered around a topic interest to them and joining peers during a group activity. Lack of social skills and social awareness in general inhibits my students from being successful in a general education classroom. Even though their academic skills are at or above their current grade level, they are in a self-contained Autism classroom to work on social skills and social interactions. As our program grows, so does our need for social skills intervention. There is no social skills curriculum designed especially for children who have disabilities that meets the needs of my students. So, for my action research project, I wanted to research and learn all I could about the different tools my partner and I could utilize to teach out students social skills. After countless hours of research, we felt that using Social Stories and visual supports would give our students the best opportunity to learn the targeted social skills. We also felt that these interventions had the most success with populations of students similar to our own. When we first began the interventions, I found it very challenging to implement

the interventions due to the resistance of my students. However, I stuck with it, and gradually noticed an increase in their tolerance to take turns and share toys and materials with their peers. I have noticed a drastic increase in their impulse control, language, and ability to tolerate peers playing with the same toys or using the same materials. Even though the action research project is finished, I still read the Social Stories and twice a day I set up a teacher directed activity to target a social skill. I am truly pleased with the results from this action research project and will continue to teach my students the social skills they need to be successful and productive members of society.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

Parent Social Skills Rating Scale



Child's Birthday: _____

Date: _____

Please circle how you feel your child performs in each of the following statements.

	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1. Plays in close proximity to other children.	4	3	2	1
2. Joins other children playing.	4	3	2	1
3. Plays for 2-3 minutes with groups of children sharing same materials.	4	3	2	1
4. Initiates peer interactions.	4	3	2	1
5. Interacts with others during play	4	3	2	1
6 Negotiates and compromises with others.	4	3	2	1
7 Takes turns with others.	4	3	2	1
8. Appears to enjoy playing with others.	4	3	2	1

Thank you, in advance, for your participation and help.

APPENDIX B

Teacher Social Skills Rating Scale

Child's Birthday: _____

Date: _____

Please circle how you feel the student performs in each of the following statements.

	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1. Plays in close proximity children.	4	3	2	1
2. Joins other children playing.	4	3	2	1
3. Plays for 2-3 minutes with groups of children sharing same materials.	4	3	2	1
4. Initiates peer interactions.	4	3	2	1
5. Interacts with others during play	4	3	2	1
6 Negotiates and compromises with others.	4	3	2	1
7 Takes turns with others.	4	3	2	1
8. Appears to enjoy playing with others.	4	3	2	1

Thank you, in advance, for your participation and help.

APPENDIX C

Student D.O.B. _____ Date: _____

SHARING CHECKLIST

Activity observed: _____

Prompting:

Student needed hand over hand assistance, visual cues and verbal redirection to share item/toy.

Student needed no more than 2 adult visual/verbal prompts to share item/toy.

Student independently shared item/toy with peer.

Sharing:

Student needed HOH assistance to share item/toy.

Student needed 3 verbal/visual cues to share toy/item.

Student needed 2 verbal/visual cues to share toy/item.

Student needed 1 verbal/visual cues to share toy/item.

Student independently shared 1 item/toy with peer.

Student independently shared 2 items/toys with peer.

Participation:

Student did not participate in activity

Student participated in group for 1-3 minutes

Student participated in group for 4-7 minutes

Student participated in group for 8-10 minutes

APPENDIX D

Student D.O.B. _____ Date: _____

TURN-TAKING CHECKLIST

Activity observed: _____

Prompting:

Student needed hand over hand assistance, visual cues and verbal redirection to take one turn.

Student needed no more than 2 adult visual/verbal prompts to take one turn.

Student independently took one turn with peer.

Turn taking:

Student needed HOH assistance to take all turns.

Student took 1-2 turns with no more than 2 adult verbal/visual prompts.

Student took 3-4 turns with no more than 2 adult verbal/visual prompts.

Student took 5+ turns with no more than 2 adult verbal/visual prompts

Student independently took 1-2 turns with peer.

Student Independently took 3-4 turns with peer.

Participation:

Student did not participate in activity

Student participated in group for 1-3 minutes

Student participated in group for 4-7 minutes

Student participated in group for 8-10 minutes

