

Can You Hear Me Now?
Improving Listening Skills in the Second Grade Classroom

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Introduction

Math was just ending in my second grade classroom. After a great addition/subtraction lesson using multi-link cubes as a tool to “Get to 100,” I was preparing for the last hour of the morning, Book Time (daily hour of Language Arts instruction). I clapped to get my students’ attention and began giving directions about cleaning up the cubes, turning in papers, and materials needed for Book Time stations. Immediately after explaining what to do, one student approached me and asked, “Where does this paper go?” Two students asked a friend, “What are we doing next?” Another student came up to me and said, “Miss Bratt, what should I bring to the Book Time stations?”

Glancing around the room, I saw three students cleaning up the cubes, several students getting drinks, two students chatting about that morning’s recess, and other students milling around. While math time was a buzz of energy as the students played games, it was time to change gears and get ready for Book Time. This transition was going poorly. My frustration mounted as I checked the clock and realized that we were a good five minutes behind schedule. I knew that I had ended math with enough time for clean up, so I was annoyed that my students were not ready to begin Book Time as planned. Questions from the students about what to do and where to put materials also added to my level of frustration as I had just given out all of the needed instructions. While repeating the directions to several students, I realized that these transitions were wasting precious learning time. After spending close to five minutes waiting for everyone to settle down and get ready, we began Book Time . . .

This vignette is a perfect example of the day-to-day struggles I face this year in my classroom. As an intern in the Professional Development School, I have decided to focus on following directions and listening in hopes of helping my second graders become better listeners. I am student teaching in two self-contained classrooms at Ferguson Township Elementary School during this yearlong internship. I spent the first part of the year in a first grade classroom and in January, I transitioned over to my second grade classroom, where I will gradually assume the role of full-time teaching. As part of my internship, I will be inquiring into my teaching, practices, and classroom to find ways to grow as an educator to benefit my students.

After experiencing the situation described above, I spoke with my mentor teacher about the class and discovered that transitions and directions have always been a problem. Students frequently miss instructions and are constantly asking questions about where to go or what to do.

Needing to repeat everything four or five times before the entire class was on task and ready to proceed was very common. My students did not seem to have major trouble listening during a read aloud or other engaging lesson, but somehow that listening ability was lost when it was time to switch activities or transition to another subject area. The other staff members in our classroom echoed these complaints, yet did not know where to find answers.

As a pre-service teacher, I was unsure if my own high expectations kept my students from succeeding. I thought it was realistic to give directions once and have the students follow the directions, after allowing time for processing and movement. Slowly, I realized this is probably a lofty expectation after examining the specific students in my class. This class is academically strong with ten students in the top reading group, ten in the middle reading group, and three in the lowest reading group. The students in the top reading group are also advanced in science and mathematics. We have three students with Individualized Education Plans (IEP) and six students receiving Title I reading support. The students are friendly with one another and while students have their closest friends, there are no obvious cliques or exclusive groups. Many students live near each other and play together after school and during extra-curricular activities. They love to share and talk with others about everything that is going on in their lives. However, these energetic and extremely capable students are not reaching their full potential because of poor listening.

My Reasons for This Inquiry and its Importance

Through my early classroom experiences in January 2005, it became obvious that I could focus on improving listening skills as my inquiry project. I was committed to finding a strategy, or many, that would help my students learn appropriate listening behavior, prepare themselves for directions before they are given, and use their friends and classmates to solve problems before approaching adults. In addition, I wanted to introduce an individual and a whole class positive reinforcement system as a way to promote good listening and motivate my students.

I decided to take on this project for a variety of reasons. First, I knew that my own frustrations would continue to mount as I took on more responsibility and teaching as the year progressed. As the vignette describes, I became annoyed as more students approached me with the same questions about instructions I had already given. I have never liked repeating myself and it only bothered me more that my students had learned that they did not need to pay attention

the first time directions were given, as it was almost guaranteed that everything would be repeated again at their convenience. I wanted to end this cycle and encourage my students to use problem-solving strategies more often.

Secondly, my students were not obtaining the highest marks because they lacked good listening skills. I examined my student's work carefully to look for mistakes caused by not adhering to directions. I glanced over math assignments, spelling quizzes, and homework sheets and many were riddled with errors. Students missed many questions because they simply did not read or follow the directions printed or given orally in class. My bright students were getting low grades not due to their lack of intelligence or inability to complete the work, but just because they did not take the time to follow the instructions. I did not want to see that behavior spiral downwards and critically affect their performance.

Lastly, I realized that my students needed intervention and lessons on listening so that they would be prepared for the higher standards in third grade. After discovering a common error in homework due to a missed direction, my mentor teacher and I discussed this with the class and reminded them about the expectations that will be in place for them next year. As it was progressing later in the year, we wanted to remind the students that the leniency they have experienced in second grade will not necessarily occur in third grade. We told them how grades were assigned and that missed or incomplete homework can equal no credit. While the idea was not to scare the students, we wanted them to realize the importance of directions. After considering all of these reasons to conduct this inquiry project, I knew that I wanted to help my students learn crucial listening skills so that they could achieve greater success in all areas of their lives.

Consulting Literature

When first thinking about helping my students become better listeners, I was thrilled with the idea, but did not know where to start. I sought information from many researchers on this topic. The importance of teaching students how to listen well can be seen by just stepping into a classroom and observing the sheer amount of time students spend focusing, or attempting to focus, on one speaker. The classroom teacher provides much of the instruction in many primary classrooms; therefore, he/she is the speaker during the majority of the school day. Since, "Listening is the principal medium by which students get directions and information from the

teacher and their classmates” (Brent & Anderson, 1993) it only makes sense that students would and should need early instruction on how to listen well. While I found that most educators agree that listening skills should be taught in schools, listening education has been pushed aside, because many teachers think that listening develops naturally and cannot be fit into an already crowded curriculum (Funk & Funk, 1989).

However, I discovered that another major reason that listening education has not been developed further is that teachers lack the training and knowledge to teach their students how to be better listeners. Students need more than just reminders of “using their listening ears.” Different experts suggest a variety of methods for teaching listening skills in the classroom, but the majority of the research shows that modeling of exemplary listening behaviors is one of the first steps towards encouraging better listening. Teachers should maintain appropriate eye contact and body language when listening to a student or colleague speak. Nodding and leaning towards the speaker are two physical behaviors that model paying attention and focusing on the speaker. Children can see these behaviors through class discussions and conferences with students that occur naturally throughout the day.

Another aspect of learning good listening can come from direct lessons on listening. While many teachers feel they cannot fit these lessons into their already-filled school days, these lessons “about specific listening skills can make students better listeners” (Jalongo, 1991). Children can be taught many aspects of listening; summarizing, finding the main idea from an oral passage, differentiating fact from fiction, drawing out unnecessary information, and learning how to analyze critically (Brent & Anderson, 1993). Teaching these crucial skills should be weaved into the regular school day. Mini-lessons can be used in many different sections of the day when the class is listening to another teacher or a peer. Students should also have directed lessons where they are given the task of focusing on one aspect of a speech or presentation. Debriefing after a speech about that one aspect can help students check themselves to see if they were being a good listener. The teacher can also use these debriefing sessions to ensure that students were able to listen carefully and seek out the correct information. When students have a purpose for listening, they are more apt to pay closer attention to the speech and speaker.

The literature also suggests that students should be taught and reminded many times on how to prepare to be a good listener. Eye contact on the speaker, removing distractions from the

area/person, providing a purpose to listen, and creating interesting, engaging presentations are all ways to prepare students to be attentive listeners (Funk & Funk, 1989).

After reading this literature on listening skills, I knew that these techniques would help me in structuring mini-lessons on listening, however my main goal was to focus more specifically on listening for directions. My students have not shown any serious problems when asked to find the main idea of a read aloud or to pick out information from a speaker. Their recall is quite good with that specific information. My students were having trouble preparing themselves for directions and paying attention throughout the entire time directions were being given. With that in mind, I decided to focus my inquiry more on using and implementing a variety of strategies to get students attention and continuously going over the steps and ways to be a good listener.

My Wonderings

With many ideas of how I wanted to help my students, I began to develop this major wondering about my inquiry project:

- What strategies will help my students refine and strengthen their listening skills and encourage them to listen carefully to directions the first time they are given, thereby increasing performance in the classroom, with class work, and homework?

This question prompted me to think of many other wonderings I had about this inquiry:

- Do my students know what good listening means and what it looks like in our classroom?
- Do my students need explicit instruction on good listening skills?
- What steps can I take to help my students prepare for oral directions?
- Were my students confused by my directions and needed more clarification before proceeding?
- If I implement a new positive reinforcement plan and therefore begin to work towards a tangible goal, will my students lose intrinsic motivation in trying to become better listeners?
- If the students understand the directions and know what the expectations are, will their motivation increase on assignments and projects?

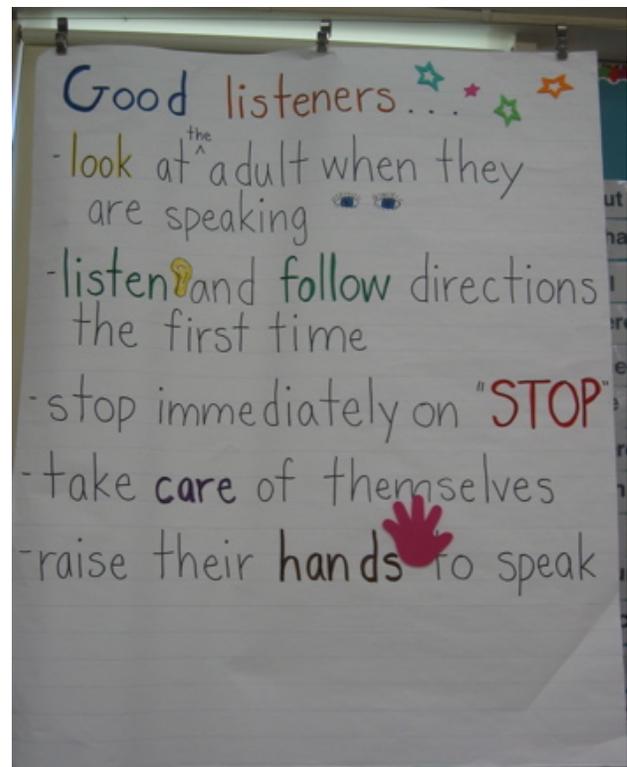
- Will my student's academic performance increase when they fully understand assignments?

With these questions in mind, I began to plan my inquiry project and design a system that promotes good listening in every aspect of the day.

My Inquiry Plan

After researching and thinking about how I could effectively change my second graders' listening abilities, I was eager to begin implementing new strategies in my classroom. Over a three-month period beginning in February 2005, I surveyed my students and their parents about their listening skills, taught specific ways to be a good listener, implemented both an individual and class positive reinforcement system, reformatted how oral directions were presented, and ran following directions activities. I began by explaining my project to my students during our morning routine and asked them to brainstorm what they knew about good listening. I was not surprised when they came up with many of the ideas presented in the literature as well as many common sense rules. I knew that my students were aware of how to be good listeners and demonstrated that when they were engaged in an exciting lesson or read aloud, but they did not apply that knowledge during transition times, one of the most important parts of the day that requires absolute attention. After brainstorming with my students, I created a list of guidelines for good listening. I created a "Good listeners . . ." poster (see picture on right) that was displayed on the board during all of our large group discussions for several weeks. We went over this poster repeatedly, having the students read and explain how they can be good listeners. This visual helped to remind the students of appropriate behavior and as the teacher, I was able to refer back to this poster several times when students displayed inappropriate behavior.

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After setting this groundwork for my inquiry project, I wanted to see how students thought about themselves as a listener and how their parents viewed their listening abilities outside of school. I created and had the students complete a survey about their own listening skills. (Please see Appendix A) Students answered questions about how well they thought they listened to their parents, teachers, and friends. I also gained insight on specific things in our classroom that made listening problematic and solutions for other listening problems. After surveying the students, I sent home surveys to the parents (Appendix A) through the students' nightly Homework Folders and asked them very similar questions about their child's ability to listen, follow oral directions, and the frequency of directions. I also included questions on the amount of TV watched, video games played, ear infections over the past year, hours of sleep per night, reading habits, and if they ate breakfast on a regular basis. Those questions were included as a way to have some insight on my students' daily activities and as a way for me to obtain more background information before implementing any strategies. I did not find any research that suggests that any of those characteristics positively or negatively influences listening skills, so they are there solely as informational pieces that I could use at the end of my inquiry if I found any correlations.

Using some of the strategies brainstormed by the class to promote good listening, my mentor teacher and I emphasized our words during transition times. When one of us wanted the whole classes' attention, we would say loudly "Please STOP" and wait for every student to pause what he/she was doing and look at the speaker. Prior knowledge I had and information highlighted in the literature reminded us that eye contact before giving directions is imperative. We would wait as long as necessary to make sure that each student gave us eye contact and maintained that eye contact while we spoke. As students turned and looked at us, we would say, "Bob, I have *your* eyes; Sally, thanks for turning your head," etc. This seemingly simple part of my inquiry project was probably one of the most effective ways to develop good listening skills. Even though my formal inquiry period has ended, we still require eye contact and reward students with verbal praise when they are one of the first students to stop what they are doing and turn towards us.

Prior to my inquiry project, there was no positive reinforcement system in place in the classroom. Good cooperation and behavior during Book Time earned one sticker; however, accumulation of these stickers did not earn any reward until the end of the school year.

Inappropriate behavior, listening related or not, meant their name up on the board and ten minutes of recess was spent at their desk with their heads down. I felt that this current system needed to be changed, as it did not promote good listening.

After instructing my students on proper listening behavior and obtaining baseline data on how they and their parents thought about their listening ability, I implemented an individual positive reinforcement system to motivate my students to try harder with these new listening behaviors. Using an idea I had seen in a teacher supply magazine, each student received a weekly “Punch Card” (Appendix B) that worked similarly to a frequent shopping card. Students were evaluated two times per day, after lunch and at the end of the day, on their ability to listen to directions. They were awarded a hole-punch on their card if the adults in the room agreed that they tried their best to be a good listener. If a student did not display good listening a certain period, or did not earn their sticker during Book Time, then they did not get a punch. Each week there was a set number of punches needed to earn the reward. My original plan for the first week of this system was that each student needed to earn eight punches out of ten possible opportunities (twice per day over a five-day school week) to earn the reward. However, during that first day, I realized that eight punches was an absurd goal for the first week of implementation. The students needed practice and guidance before they would really understand and apply good listening during transition times and other points of the day.

After conferring with my mentor teacher, who also agreed that eight punches was too much, I quickly chatted with the students about the change and my decision to lower the required number of punches that week to five. I explained to them that due to the newness of the system, it is common that changes might need to be made to help the system run smoothly. This change helped my students succeed during that first week, which is a key component of any new system. Students need to experience success in the early stages of a project or system for them to develop a strong sense of confidence and faith that they will continue to succeed. This change also allowed my students to see flexibility and my concern for them as they worked towards changing their behavior. That first week all twenty-three students earned their reward!

For this punch card system, students that had earned the set amount of punches were able to visit the “Fishbowl of Awards.” In this fishbowl, I had cards with a variety of art activities related to the Land of Make-Believe (the unit we were studying), magnet activities (the science unit) and special privileges that the students could experience. During the afternoon recess,

students would get the chance to fulfill their reward by randomly pulling out a card from the bowl. (Appendix C) Students made laminated bookmarks of their favorite fairy tale characters, spent time in Dreamland (a comfortable reading spot) with a friend reading a fairy tale book, and made castles out of clay. We had “Guest (student) Teachers” run our morning routine and act as line leaders for the day. The students loved taking on extra roles in the classroom and enjoyed using art materials that were not previously used.

Several changes occurred over the course of my inquiry project with this punch card system. In the beginning, I did not see any dramatic change in their behavior and my students were not taking ownership or pride in their cards and earning punches. My mentor teacher suggested that if I made the actual “punching” of the cards into a more formal presentation in front of the students, they might have more desire to earn their punches through good listening. I had previously been punching their cards when I had extra time, during specials and after school. That next day, I created a special punch card time after lunch, before read aloud, and another time at the very end of the day. During that first punch card time, I had the students bring their punch cards to the rug and I publicly punched every student’s card along with praise for their good listening. I made specific comments about students that did extremely well that morning/afternoon and also read over and explained why certain students did not earn a punch. Quoting from my reflective journal submitted to my Professional Development Associate,

“During our little “punching ceremonies”, as they have been dubbed . . . the students are even clapping for each other when I announce who receives a punch . . . While I am not in favor of public embarrassment of any sort, I have not seen the students boo or tease the students that are not getting all of the punches every time.” (Journal, 17 February 2005)

As described above, I was wary that this public display of praise/criticism would upset students if they were the ones who did not earn punches, but I was surprised to see quite the opposite. Students cheered for each other’s successes and handled disappointment quite well. It seemed that students were embarrassed of their own lack of good listening. However, I slowly discovered that that embarrassment worked to an advantage as those students took control over

their own behavior and became much better listeners as shown through their progress on their cards.

Over the next three weeks, the amount of punches needed to earn a reward increased from five to seven, and eventually to nine punches out of ten opportunities. Students became much better listeners as they earned their punches, yet my reward failed to live up to my expectations. During the third week, the rewards had lost their newness and students were reluctant to stay indoors during a recess to draw a picture or play with clay. I began to realize that the punch card ceremonies were probably enough for most of my students. Students that picked a reward they did not want were allowed to pass on it, as long as they understood that they could not use the reward later. I continued to give out rewards however, because there were several students who made sure they got their reward as they earned them.

Another additional change to my system was to add on a whole class reward if a specific number of punches were earned during one day. Using a technique I had seen from many guest teachers, I had the students brainstorm a large reward (they chose a pajama day) and wrote up stars on the board, one per letter (** *** = PJ DAY). If the class earned at least 85% (all but three students) of the possible punches in both the morning and the afternoon, they would earn a letter. They could earn the PJ day in as quickly as five days, but the reward was gone if they had not earned all of the letters after ten school days. The students earned the PJ Day in only six days! This new addition to our punch card system re-motivated the students and provided a reason for them to help each other become better listeners.

Combining both directed listening activities and data collection; I used three oral following directions activities over this three-month period: mid-February, mid-March, and mid-April. These activities were planned as part of our day's schedule and designed to focus the children's attention on listening for short, intense periods. Using a classroom resource on following written directions, Following Directions, I photocopied and cut off the written steps on the worksheets. (Appendix D) Instead, I read those directions aloud. Students had to color circles green, put lines under rectangles, or count certain words during these activities. My goal with these worksheets was to provide a method of collecting data over the course of my inquiry and to see how well they were able to hear the directions and process that information to the action of coloring, circling, etc. I created a specific listening atmosphere during these lessons by

closing the classroom door and allowing the students to have folders open on their desks for privacy.

During the first activity, I would only repeat the directions twice, which proved to be very difficult for me. From facial expressions and inaction from several students, I could tell that they needed to hear the directions again. It pained me that these students needed the directions again; however, for the sake of my inquiry project, I did not want to modify my method of data collection. With the second and last activity, I only said the directions once. I did this to remind students that they should be listening the very first time directions are given and not wait until they are repeated several more times before complying.

To conclude my inquiry project, I wanted to assess and gather information about what my students thought of these new activities in the classroom, the punch card system, and their opinion on their overall growth in listening. I revised the initial student and parent surveys and included some questions exactly as before as well as questions based around their progress in developing good listening skills. (Appendix A) I asked the students if they felt they had changed as listeners and the causes that contributed to those (possible) changes. I also sent home a final parent survey to see if the parents had seen any of the growth in good listening transfer to their homes. Just like the student survey, I asked the parents if they felt their child had become a better listener. I was curious to see if the parents saw the changes that had occurred in the classroom through my inquiry project.

While intense and expansive, each part of my inquiry project has helped me learn more about my students, instruct them on good listening skills, reward them for their growth and positive behavior, and reflect back on this experience.

Data Collection & Analysis

Over the course of this inquiry project, I amassed an incredible amount of data on my student's listening abilities and their progress in becoming better listeners. Through my collecting and analyzing phases of this inquiry, I was able to make some exciting and surprising claims about my students and my own growth. My first set of data came directly from my students' mouths as I learned what they already knew about being a good listener. During the first morning when I introduced my inquiry project and talked about listening in the classroom, they replied that good listening means "looking at the speaker when he/she is talking, not playing

with things in your hands, not talking to your friends or neighbors on the carpet, and raising your hand if you have something to say.” I immediately congratulated them for knowing many of the key ways to be a good listener. Analysis of their answers came very quickly as I created a poster to be hung and referred back to about good listening (Good Listeners Poster, pg. 8). That poster was discussed and reviewed each time we gathered on the back carpet over that following week and a half.

Establishing a baseline of their listening abilities before implementing any strategies was an early goal of mine. By giving out student surveys (Appendix A), sending home parent surveys (Appendix A), and giving an initial following directions activity (Appendix D), I was able to know how to begin and structure this inquiry. From the student surveys, I knew if my students felt they were “bad, alright, good, or awesome” listeners, what kept them from listening, and suggestions for what might help them become better listeners. I read every survey and used color-coding with highlighting to notice any trends in problematic behaviors that inhibit listening as well as possible suggestions for improving listening. Students’ distracting other students was the most common response to a question on the causes of poor listening. That specific information influenced me in adding, “Taking care of yourself” onto the Good Listeners poster. All of this information helped me decide what strategies to eventually implement in my classroom.

Using the same analysis strategy for the parent surveys, I read through them for a general sense of how they perceived their child’s listening ability and any trends between poor listening and any of the extraneous questioning (reading, TV/video game habits, ear infections, etc.). I also took note of any suggestions or comments parents provided about listening skills in general or about their own child’s habits. Several responses on the parent surveys amazed me. Many parents responded that their son/daughter would blatantly ignore them when they are giving a direction or asking their child to do something. I also inferred from the surveys that this behavior was continual. Their honest and candid responses both pleased and shocked me. Furthermore, I was surprised to see that a couple of parents felt that their son or daughter listened well in respect to their age and developmental stage. I felt that these were excellent comments to provide as it reminded me that these children are only seven or eight years old and will not have perfect listening skills. This data became part of the initial picture I had of my students as I began this inquiry project.

The first following directions activity I administered with my students was also part of my initial baseline data that I collected to determine how well the students did in a controlled setting when asked to listen and follow specific steps on a worksheet. After completing the activity, I graded the worksheets with a star meaning everything was correct and took off one point for each missed direction. Because I wanted to write comments on these sheets, they were not returned to the students. I recorded the scores for each listening activity on a spreadsheet I was keeping as part of my data collection. Now that I had several different types of baseline data and analyzed them to see where my students were, I began implementing the various strategies over the course of the next several months.

My next set of data came from the punch cards that were used each week in the new positive reinforcement system. At the end of the week, the students turned in their cards and those that had enough punches were able to pick from the fishbowl for their reward. At the end of my listening project, I sat down with all of my students' cards and began to organize to help make sense of how my students were progressing. I alphabetized each week's cards, marked them with a one through four corresponding to what week they were used, and reshuffled them so that I had all four of each students' cards together in order of weeks one through four. With information beside me of how many punches were needed that week, I began to notice trends among certain students. I put aside the students' cards that had above the required number of punches each week, as these students were most likely already good listeners. I concentrated more on the specific students who needed more guidance and help with their listening. Even though this was a whole class intervention, a handful of students were the key target students for this project, as determined through conversations with my mentor teacher and other professional staff in our room. I also pulled aside and carefully examined students who made incredible growth and tried their best to become better listeners.

When analyzing the punch cards, I took note of the students that started to go downhill around the end of week three and week four. Students did not seem to try hard to earn their punches and had lost interest in the reward. Because of that, I started the whole class reward system (PJ DAY) and after week four, we eliminated the punch card system and instituted a new system of earning money. Students earned money for both good listening and overall positive, helpful behavior. While this change is not part of my inquiry, the students were refreshed and showed more positive behavior.

The last data sets that I collected and analyzed were my final student surveys, parent surveys, and the final listening activity. Reading over the final student surveys, also color-coding with highlighting, I took note of any trends in the various sections of whether they felt they had become a better listener and why, and what techniques or strategies actually helped them become better listeners. I coded any student responses about punch cards in pink and any quotes or interesting comments to be reviewed later were coded in yellow. The parent surveys provided both delight and disappointment as mixed results came in about student improvement. Some changed their answers about whether their son/daughter listens well and follows oral directions well. After another reading of the surveys, I looked for any quotes or additional comments that would help explain their responses. I am extremely glad I decided to use surveying as part of my data collection because I felt that it gave me background information on my students, baseline data, as well as ending data for comparison. I also had both qualitative and quantitative data I could use to help support my claims and findings.

One way I was able to notice my student's progress over the three months of my inquiry project was through my analysis of the last listening activity. I graded and posted the scores on my student spreadsheet, which helped me view their progress and growth over this extended time frame. Now that I had completed collecting and analyzing all of my data and determining what that meant in terms of my listening project, I was able to make claims on what I learned from this experience.

Claims and Evidence

Claim #1: Using a positive reward system (punch cards) helped my students become better listeners.

"I think that earning stuff makes people try there (sic) hardest." This comment from a final student survey helps to portray the excitement that ensued at the onset of the punch card system. They were motivated to try their best to work and apply the good listening guidelines to get their punch. Students were anxious to know how well they did after each section of the day and asked frequently if they were earning a punch. Several days into this system, however, my students began to have varied responses. A handful of students, many of whom were already good listeners, were thrilled and extremely proud of their punches, while many other students

were upset with themselves for not earning as many as possible. The change in the project on the third day to create the “punching ceremonies” drastically affected how my students viewed this program and its importance in our classroom. They took ownership of their cards and began trying much harder to earn punches. Students who did not earn a punch during a morning or afternoon session knew that they had to work harder the next day to make up for that. They wanted the applause from their classmates after their name was called, reinforcing the fact that they had done a good job as a listener. I was surprised to see just how effective this “peer praise” was in motivating my students.

The punch cards acted as a motivator for my students to become better listeners even after the thrill of the rewards wore off. Around week three, I noticed that as the expectations were raised (to a level close to perfection) the influence of this punch card system decreased over time. Students seemed to be less excited about fulfilling their reward and punches were not earned as easily. This became evident as I analyzed the data, calculating how many punches were earned per week per student, and how the class progressed as a group. The first week there was a 100% success rate as every student earned the reward. The amount of punches needed rose to seven during the second week and we still had a high rate of success, around 95% with only one student not earning the reward. The third and fourth weeks were exceptionally difficult for many of the students as the expectations were close to perfection, which is unrealistic. They needed five punches out of six opportunities during week three and nine punches out of ten opportunities during week four. The success rates for weeks three and four were 78% and 70%, respectively.

When looking at this data, there were two ways I interpreted the results. It only made sense that as the system became progressively harder, the goal would be harder to obtain. The last week was extremely trying for many students, as more than one poor attempt at listening would eliminate them from the reward, whether this occurred in the beginning of the week or towards the end. Therefore, I looked at the data in terms of how great it was that 70% of the class had great listening over an entire week. This was a dramatic improvement from the beginning of the year as nearly all of the class missed at least one major direction each day.

The second way I interpreted this data was in terms of individual growth and improvement with listening skills over this four-week system. Several students had extremely poor listening skills at the beginning of my inquiry and so I was thrilled to see growth and

improvement through this data. Student cards B through D are just a few of these examples (Appendix B). One student in particular improved tremendously since the implementation of my inquiry project. This student, Student A (advanced in reading and math), is an extremely poor listener who has a great deal of trouble focusing on directions and then following them through. When looking at Student A's cards (Appendix B), I saw that he had gotten the reward for three out of the four weeks. This was remarkable for this student because of his previous listening issues. Student A would consistently be the student who was off-task and would not have any idea what he should be doing at any given time. He needed re-direction on simple tasks and constantly talked to his friends. He was very honest about his own poor listening skills, yet he continually forgot the good listening strategies. Towards the end of the punch card system, he knew he had improved markedly and expressed that through this comment, "I think these punches have really done the trick for me" (Student A Comment, 3/23/05). His parents are also extremely pleased with his growth as written on their parent survey.

Another student did not stand out in my mind as one of my successes with this program until a conversation with my mentor teacher before that child's conference. My mentor teacher remarked that this student was a horrible listener in the beginning of year, never knowing what was going on and always relying on friends for assistance. She always moved after hearing the first direction in a series instead of waiting until the end. As I was not in second grade full-time until January, I was unaware of this growth in her listening skills. I have always seen her as a wonderful listener, never asking for directions and always doing what was required. She earned her reward every week of this program, a 90 to 100 % success rate. During our conference, her parents even remarked that her strong listening skills have transferred at home and that she is much better with multi-step directions and eye contact. While I had other feedback from parents on their surveys about listening at home, this comment proved that this system not only worked in our classroom, but also had far-reaching positive effects into some of my students' lives.

Claim #2: Students' academic performance improves when they are forced to listen more carefully to directions.

Through my three controlled listening activities, I noticed a wonderful trend of improvement in the scores. Students who missed two to three directions on the first listening activity (about 40% of the class) had perfect scores three months later on the last activity. Seven

students, 30% of the class, had perfect scores on all three listening activities, yet continued to grow and improve through the punch card system. I attribute this level of success to the controlled atmosphere of these activities. Students knew that this was a specific activity on their listening skills and therefore focused intensely on my oral directions. Almost every student made eye contact in order to be an attentive and active listener and overall they tried their best to raise their hands if they needed assistance. Through this calm, quiet atmosphere, my students were able to listen better and follow through on the directions to achieve success on these worksheets. I feel that this atmosphere could be replicated and used sparingly during other activities to remind the students that good listening should occur at all times. While many lessons do not require complete silence or personalized workspace, using some of those techniques might help remind students of their good listening skills and use them in that setting.

Claim #3: The students in my class are more aware of their listening ability and the majority feels they have improved as listeners.

Over this three-month project, my students became more conscious of their own listening ability through the accumulation (or lack) of punches and survey questions about listening behaviors. They were constantly being reminded of good listening behaviors and corrected when they were having difficulty with them. Comparing their punches with other students let them know how well they were doing. This information helped spur and promote positive behavior. Through both the initial and final student surveys, the students were asked the same questions about their ability to listen to their parents, teachers, and friends. They answered questions about needing directions repeated and other listening issues.

In the final listening survey, my students overwhelmingly decided that they had become better listeners. Twenty-one students (91%) said yes and two students (9%) said they have not become better listeners. Their reasoning for becoming better listeners varied from “earning stuff”/punch cards to using more verbal signals (e.g. “Please STOP” or Teacher = “1, 2, 3, Eyes on ME” Class = 1, 2, Eyes on YOU) to getting older. However, the majority of the class (13 students, 56%) responded that the punch cards were the reason behind their improved listening, showing the cards’ success and importance in my inquiry project.

Claim #4: Parents' perception of their children's listening ability improved through this inquiry.

The parent surveys helped uncover information about my student's listening abilities at home. The surveys also allowed the parents to process and think about their child's listening skills and their role in helping their children develop them further. With that processing came the realization for many parents that change was necessary and could possibly come from trying out some the strategies implemented in school.

Several parents were quite honest about how often their children display inappropriate behaviors. One parent commented that they changed their son's video game habits after the last survey because they watched how son's behavior and listening ability changed after spending hours with electronic games. With 22 out of 23 final surveys returned, the majority of the parents (12 or 52%) felt that their children had improved and become better listeners, while five parents (22%) felt that their child had not improved. Three parents (13%) had not noticed any change in their child's listening ability and one parent (4%) said their child had improved somewhat. Many of their reasons included that their children seemed to be complying quicker with parent requests and there were fewer arguments overall. One parent commented, "It's harder to separate listening issues versus willingness to follow them. I think the latter may be our issue." when explaining why they felt their child had not become a better listener. This helped to illuminate other reasons why parents may have marked no this question. While I have heard success stories, as described in Claim #1, I knew that many students retreated to their old ways when they went home every evening. This seems to make sense as the classroom is a much different place and has a different stigma than students' homes. Overall, this inquiry helped both the students and the parents become more aware of good listening, which can lead to better listeners at home and in school with positive encouragement and support.

Implications for Future Practice as a Teacher

When looking back on everything that I have learned through my inquiry project, I have embraced the importance of good listening and the need for its education in every school setting. Students enter school with listening abilities that range from keen to extreme inattentiveness. In any situation, this can create frustration in every activity and lesson to be taught. As a teacher, I plan to introduce good listening skills in the beginning of school just as I would with my

community building activities. Tying together those two aspects in my first weeks of school can emphasize that good listening shows the speaker you care about what they are saying and you are interested in hearing their message. In my classroom, I want my students to have a strong sense of community and respect and I feel that begins with good listening. I will use structured lessons to model what good listening looks like and how students can be good listeners. Many classrooms have a bulletin board or large poster designated to school rules or a classroom pledge. I would use that space to also include key features of good listening: eye contact, body language, hand raising, etc.

Through my inquiry project, I have also found that while teachers may do a wonderful job of explaining and teaching these rules and guidelines in the beginning of the school year, many forget to review them as the year progresses. In my own classroom, we had our “Bare Facts” of ways to be a good citizen and they were reviewed and re-taught for the first month of school, until time ran out as we began to get more into our curriculum. For that reason, I ideally would like to continually remind and insist on these good listening behaviors in my classroom. As I am repeatedly asking my students for good eye contact and hand raising in my current second grade classroom, I hope that I will be able to continue this diligent behavior in my future classroom.

Another aspect of my inquiry project that will affect my future teaching is that positive reinforcement motivates and spurs children to try their best in a variety of situations. While I do not want to use this to any extremes or at the beginning of the year, I would like to be very aware of and open with my positive praise and role modeling. I think students respond immensely to these comments, especially if they are made public so that others can see this praise and strive for better behavior. I have also seen the effectiveness of peer praise through this inquiry. For the majority of my students, they truly care about how others view them. If they are not receiving the highest comments, they are upset with themselves and attempt to change their behavior. Because I had public punching ceremonies, students clapped and cheered for their peers when they earned a punch. This positive praise encouraged other students to try just a bit harder to earn their own punches. This could be incorporated into my classroom in many ways, especially through peer feedback on their writing and reading. This feedback can enable my students to be proud of their best work and to fix up whatever their peers suggest. While I have only seen this in my own classroom, I feel that some students have more of a desire to please their friends than

their teachers or their parents. With that as a goal, I hope to see my students embraced in a warm, caring community of learners who push each other forward for success.

New Wonderings

While my punch card system and listening activities have ended in my classroom, my inquiry project continues as my students continue to work towards good listening. We still insist on eye contact before giving directions and frequently remind students of the good listening rules. As my students are still progressing and developing their listening skills, several new wonderings have surfaced:

- Did my students lose their intrinsic motivation to become better listeners and are now solely working on them because of the reward system?
- Can students change their behavior in an extreme way without any external reward? If so, how can this be done?
- What should or could I do with several of my students that continue to exhibit poor listening?
- Has my student's motivation or academic performance actually increased due to better listening?

The learning process never ends as I continue to investigate my own teaching and practices through teacher inquiry. I will take what I have learned from conducting this inquiry project with me as I enter the teaching profession. I think this process has helped me grow as a learner and as an educator as I now feel more prepared to be able to handle various problems that will face me in these upcoming years.

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APPENDIX A
Student & Parent Surveys

Initial Student Survey

Name: _____

This top portion will be removed.

Initial Listening Survey

Please circle the answer to each question. Please answer honestly.

1. How well do you listen to your teachers?

Bad Alright Good Awesome

2. How well do you listen to your parents?

Bad Alright Good Awesome

3. How well do you listen to your friends?

Bad Alright Good Awesome

4. How well do you think you follow directions?

Bad Alright Good Awesome

5. How often do you need directions repeated?

Never Sometimes Always

6. How often do you sit still when listening to directions?

Never Sometimes Always

7. How often do you listen carefully to directions the first time they are given?

Never Sometimes Always

8. How often do you look at the teacher when you are asked to?

Never Sometimes Always

9. What keeps or STOPS you from listening? **Circle all** that apply.

Teacher speaks too fast.

I daydream.

Teacher repeats too much.

I am distracted by other students.

Not enough time to think.

I do not care.

Not interested in the subject.

I am tired.

Classroom feel: too hot/too cold.

I am distracted by other noises.

List any other things that keep you from listening:

10. What helps you listen?

Initial Parent Survey

Your Child's Name: _____

Your Name: _____

This top portion will be removed to preserve anonymity.

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Over the next few months, I will be working on a listening skills project with your students. Please take the time to answer the following questions about your child and return it to school in their homework folder by Friday, February 18th.

Thank you!

Miss Bratt

1. In general, I feel my child listens well.

Strongly

Strongly

Disagree

Agree

1

2

3

4

2. In general, I feel my child follows oral directions well.

Strongly

Strongly

Disagree

Agree

1

2

3

4

3. How often do you have to repeat oral directions to your child?

Never

Sometimes

Often

Always

4. What behaviors does your child exhibit to show that he/she is not listening?

5. Do you talk about school with your child?

Yes No

6. Do you read with your child?

Seldom Once a week 3-4 days a week Daily

7. How many hours does your child spend watching TV each day?

1 or less 2 3 4 5 or more

8. How many hours does your child spend playing video/computer games each day?

1 or less 2 3 4 5 or more

9. How many ear infections does your child normally get each year?

0 1-2 3-4 5 or more

10. On average, how many hours of sleep does your child get each night?

6 or less 7 8 9 10 or more

11. How often does your child eat breakfast?

Never Most days Always

12. Please feel free to write any additional comments or suggestions that you think would help your child become a better listener.

Final Student Survey

Name: _____

This top portion will be removed.



Final Listening Survey

Please circle the answer to each question. **Please answer honestly.**

1. How well do you listen to your teachers?

Bad Alright Good Awesome

2. How well do you listen to your parents?

Bad Alright Good Awesome

3. How well do you listen to your friends?

Bad Alright Good Awesome

4. How well do you think you follow directions?

Bad Alright Good Awesome

5. How often do you need directions repeated?

Never Sometimes Always

6. How often do you sit still when listening to directions?

Never Sometimes Always

7. How often do you listen carefully to directions the first time they are given?

Never Sometimes Always

8. How often do you look at the teacher when you are asked to?

Never Sometimes Always

9. Do you think you have become a better listener?

Yes No

Why?

9. What has helped you become a better listener?

10. You can write anything you would like about this listening project below!
Comments/Suggestions/Ideas, etc.

Final Parent Survey

Your Child's Name: _____

Your Name: _____

This top portion will be removed to preserve anonymity.

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Thank you for all of your support with the listening skills project. Your children have made so much growth over these past few months! I am so proud of them!! In addition to working with your students in class on their listening skills, I am curious if their improved listening skills have transferred into your homes. I have revised the initial survey and I am hoping you will be able to take just a few minutes to answer the questions and return it to school in your student's homework folder by **Friday, April 8th**.

Thank you!

Miss Bratt

1. I feel my child listens well.

Strongly

Disagree

1

2

3

Strongly

Agree

4

2. I feel my child follows oral directions well.

Strongly

Disagree

1

2

3

Strongly

Agree

4

3. How often do you now have to repeat oral directions to your child?

Never

Sometimes

Often

Always

4. Has your son/daughter showed any behaviors that show that **they are listening** to you?

If so, what are they?

5. Has your son/daughter showed any behaviors that show that **they are NOT listening** to you?

If so, what are they?

6. Have any of the following daily habits changed over the past few months? Please circle yes or no for each of these and explain briefly.

Hours of TV watched: Yes No

Hours of video games played: Yes No

Ear infections: Yes No

Hours of sleep each night: Yes No

Breakfast habits: Yes No

If yes to anything of the above, please explain briefly below.

7. Do you think your child has become a better listener?

Yes

No

Why?

8. Please feel free to write any additional comments/suggestions you have about this listening project.

APPENDIX B

Punch Card Examples, Students A through D



Student A's Punch Cards

Week 1 – Earned 5 out of 10 opportunities.

Week 2 – Earned 8 out of 10 opportunities.

Week 3 – Earned 6 out of 6 opportunities.

Week 4 – Earned 8 out of 10 opportunities.

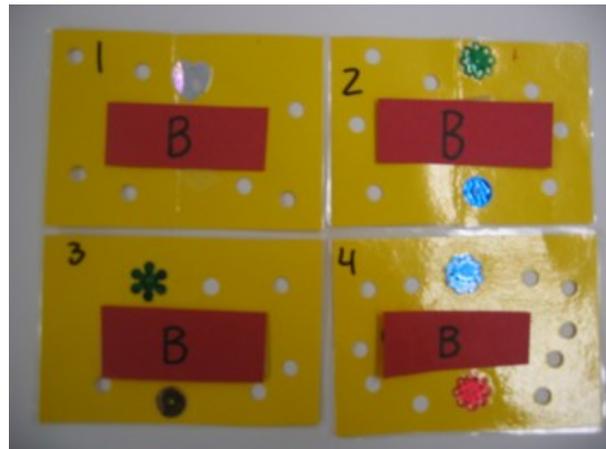
Student B's Punch Cards

Week 1 – Earned 7 out of 10 opportunities.

Week 2 – Earned 7 out of 10 opportunities.

Week 3 – Earned 5 out of 6 opportunities.

Week 4 – Earned 10 out of 10 opportunities.



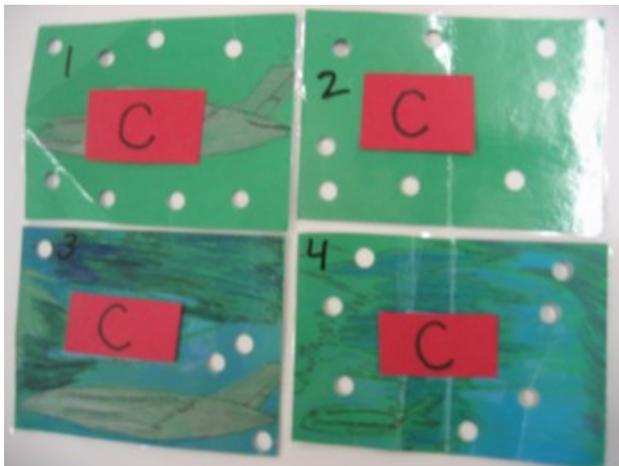
Student C's Punch Cards

Week 1 – Earned 8 out of 10 opportunities.

Week 2 – Earned 8 out of 10 opportunities.

Week 3 – Earned 4 out of 6 opportunities.

Week 4 – Earned 7 out of 10 opportunities.



Student D's Punch Cards

Week 1 – Earned 7 out of 10 opportunities.

Week 2 – Earned 7 out of 10 opportunities.

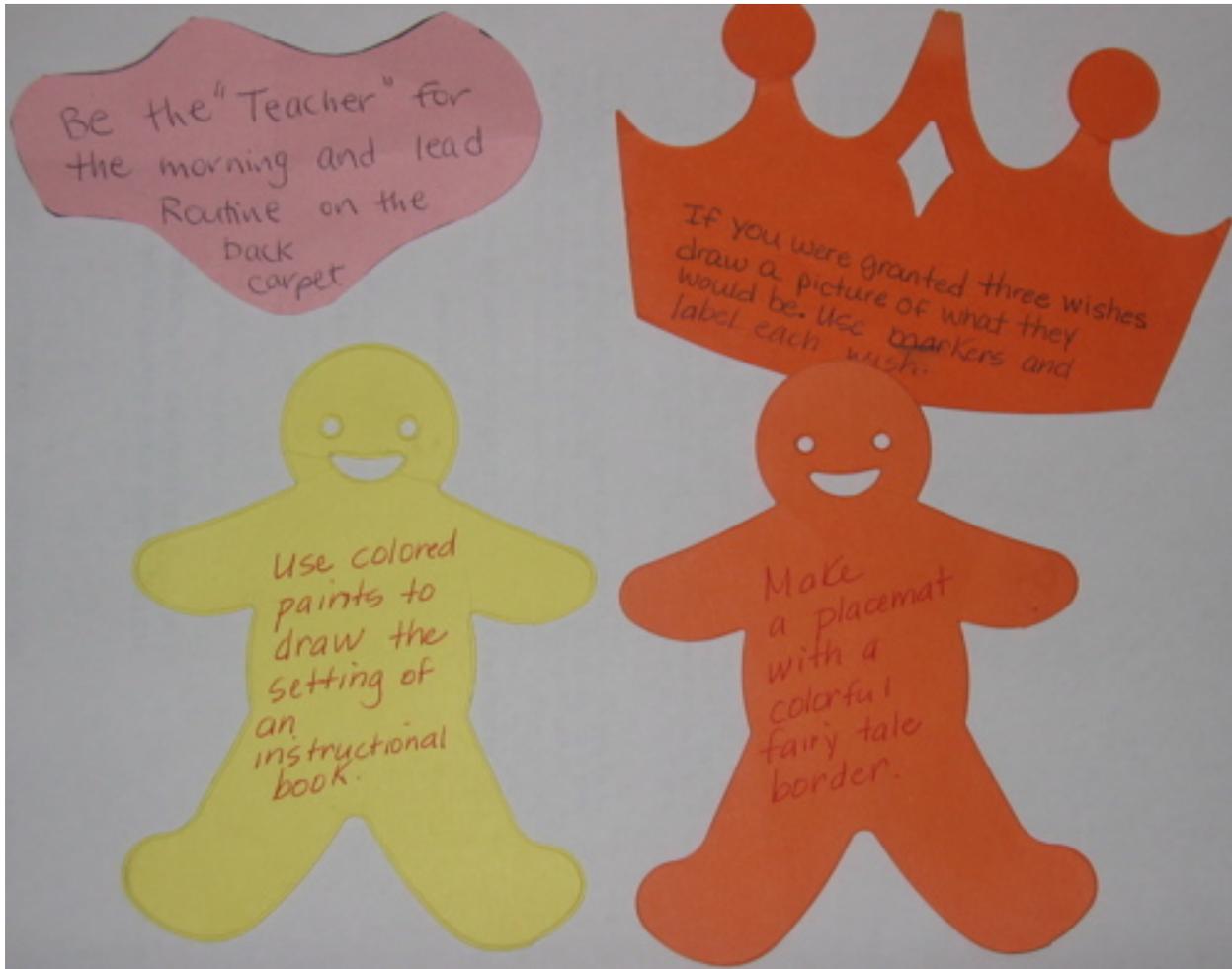
Week 3 – Earned 3 out of 6 opportunities.

Week 4 – Earned 8 out of 10 opportunities.



APPENDIX C

“Fishbowl of Awards” – Sample Rewards



Sample of rewards found in "Fishbowl of Awards"

APPENDIX D
Following Directions Activities

Following Directions Activity #1

Name _____

Following Directions Vocabulary

Monday *★* red nine
seven six September
July May green
orange Tuesday white
three Friday blue four
December Thursday
March yellow

not a summer month
→ months
-1

6

Following Directions Activity #2

Name _____ -2 Following Directions

only 5 trees!

diff Capital letter on each hat!

Following Directions Activity #3

Name: [Redacted]

The worksheet contains a grid of shapes for a listening activity. The shapes are arranged in a roughly rectangular pattern. The shapes include:

- Smiley faces (circles with two vertical lines for eyes and a curved line for a mouth).
- Rectangles (one is filled with yellow).
- Triangles (one has a small blue dot).
- Diamonds (one is filled with green).
- Squares (one has a small red circle inside).

A cartoon girl with blonde hair in a bun, wearing glasses, a red shirt, and a green vest, is holding a white tray with various geometric shapes on it. Above the grid, there is a hand-drawn star.