# Learning to Listen: A Journey to Encourage Respect

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## Introduction:  Meet Our Class

Second grade classrooms tend to be chaotic; students work in many areas of the classroom, which hums with noise.  Kids check in with adults, and adults check in with kids.  There is constant motion.  Then it is time to meet as a whole group, a time to listen to each other.  What happens when the constant chatter never seems to stop?  We decided to do our inquiry together because we both saw a need in our second grade classroom.  Join us--Heather Franklin, a year long Penn State intern, and Linda Margusity, a second grade teacher for 15 years—as we struggle to improve listening and behavior during whole group lessons.  Perhaps the difficulties we face may give you insight into your own experiences with children.

In mid-fall a teacher recommended a book called, Learning to Trust by Marilyn Watson in collaboration with Laura Ecken.  By December we were both hooked on the authors' idea of creating an atmosphere where kids do what they are expected to do because they want to and not because they have to.  Much of the book dealt with why these at-risk students were behaving in a particular way and the response of Laura, their classroom teacher, to their behavior.  We appreciated the efforts and ideas of a practicing teacher who focused on ways to allow students to understand how their behavior affects others as well as themselves.

Our class of 18 students is evenly split between boys and girls.  Seventeen

of them have been with us all year, with one boy moving here on January 3, 2005. We started off the school year with a 12-week unit designed to build community. Building community is <u>not</u> a focus of the remaining units, although we do continue to have morning meetings, and occasional read alouds designed to produce discussions about getting along with others.  At the beginning of the year we did not witness as much of this disruptive behavior as we did when we came back after winter break.

Our class has always been a fairly chatty bunch, with several kids who seem to be constantly talking. After break, either the amount of talking worsened, or we became more sensitized to it.  This same bunch can also become silly easily, infecting each other with laughter at the slightest hint of humor.  It is very difficult to have any whole group discussions because of these issues.  Even morning meetings, done in the same way since September, can collapse into giggles and talking.  They are more attentive in smaller groups, especially when we carefully design the groups.  And yet, there are moments when they focus and work together; at those times the work quality is better.  This inconsistency leads us to wonder how we could create more regularity.

One area that really concerned us is their lack of regard for each other. These same 4 to 6 kids interrupt each other, hang on each other, and annoy each other.  Our classroom atmosphere is often disrupted by their rude behavior.  The

other kids in the class will join in occasionally. At other times they try their best to ignore the disruptions.  This lack of community, the lack of caring for each other is what leads us to our inquiry.

This lack of caring caused us to wonder if the behavior we noticed in January was a product of the shift in emphasis away from community building activities. Another possibility could be the expectations we have that students can choose appropriate behavior, and therefore, they should.  Or, was our classroom structure affecting their behavior in some way?  We had many questions, but not a clear focus.

Inspired by Laura's example, we wanted to focus not just on what the disrupted behavior is, but why they might be choosing to use it. We wanted to explore better ways as teachers to respond to their behavior and to help eliminate disrupted behavior over time.

> Knowing that all children want and need to belong—to be loved and
> protected by caring adults and to fit in with their peer group—can
> help us look through their troublesome behavior to see the vulnerable
> child behind the bothersome or menacing exterior.  It's not easy to
> think of children who are misbehaving, particularly children who
> misbehave frequently, as vulnerable and needy… (Watson, 2003, p. 30-
> 31.)

This gives her insight into how to best help her students.  This may seem like an obvious thing to do; yet we truly believe we do not do this as often as we think we do, and there are probably other teachers in the same boat as well.

We did wonder if Laura's methods would be attainable, since she kept at least half of her students for two years.  She also had the author, Marilyn Watson, to talk to weekly.  Since we were not sure we would be able to do what she did, we wondered if we could use some of her ideas, and look for others as well.  We had many resources from the Living in Harmony unit to utilize, which dealt with classroom community.  We reread some of those, hoping to find information that would help us decide what we needed to focus on with our class.  It's been said that teaching and inquiry is "messy"; this was apparent as we tried to figure out what our wonderings were, what we wanted to focus on, and what we wanted to try!  We finally narrowed our wonderings to the ones that follow.

## Wonderings

Our main wondering: **How can we increase the positive atmosphere of our classroom, and decrease the off-task behavior?**

Our subwonderings:

- Will using cooperative learning activities improve our students' behavior during whole group lessons and initiate an active role in the classroom?

- What is the best way to engage students during whole group activities?

- If students are introduced to leadership roles, will it help the class develop a stronger bond and community?

- Will holding classroom meetings help develop students' understandings for appropriate behavior and allow them to take ownership in their own actions, even as a class?

**What Should We Do? Our Inquiry Plan**

During the month of January both of us read books, and tried to think of ways to affect a change in our classroom atmosphere. We knew there were ways of dealing with students that we would prefer <u>not</u> to use: punishment, embarrassment, isolation of kids, and attention for negative behavior. In addition, both of us have read books by Alfie Kohn, and agreed that we wanted to try to stay away from rewards, or extrinsic motivation, and move towards intrinsic motivation. Alfie Kohn talks about rewards in his book, "Punished by Rewards".

> Rewards are often successful at increasing the probability that we will do something. At the same time, though…they also change the *way* we do it. They offer one particular reason for doing it, sometimes displacing other possible motivations. And they change the attitude we take toward the activity. In each case, by any reasonable measure, the change is for the worse. (Kohn, 1993, p. 35.)

If we were not going to reward for appropriate behavior, and we did not want to punish for misbehavior, then what were we going to do? We began by looking through our resources, and compiling lists of what we could try. There were many more ideas than either of us thought there would be. In fact, when we hit eight possibilities, we just stopped, thinking that eight would even be too many to try effectively. Once we had our list, we began to discuss how and why we might

implement them, with our main emphasis being, "Would this move us closer to having a more positive classroom?"

## A New Look at Our Class

Have you ever been read something and key words or phrases just popped out at you?  As we read, <u>Learning to Trust</u>, we realized many of the issues Laura Ecken experienced in her own classroom were occurring in ours.  Both classrooms had children who were not willing to listen to each other or the teacher, who had difficulty doing their work, and who constantly argued.  Luckily, our classroom did not have the aggressive behavior that hers did.  The first section of the book introduced the reader to the importance of attachment theory, which the author, Marilyn Watson, believes to be a main factor in creating caring classrooms.

> From the perspective of attachment theory, to build the desire of these children to be cooperative and prosocial, we need to build a responsive and nurturing relationship with them; by so doing, we help them change their working models of themselves and of relationships. The building of caring and trusting relationships becomes the most important goal in the socialization of these children.  Of course, while we are building these relationships, we must find nonpunitive ways to prevent the children who are aggressive and controlling from harming others and to encourage self-reliance and confidence in those who are withdrawn or dependent.  (Watson, p. 12.)

We began with the idea of teacher vocabulary.  We felt <u>Learning to Trust</u> had phrases, which could help us make better choices.  This would require us to monitor ourselves (and each other) and change the way we talked to the students.

For example, Laura Ecken would have her students stand up and take a bow when they did something that the students felt deserved a bow.  Instead of asking our class to "take a bow", we asked them to "pat themselves on the back". After we convinced some of them that thumping themselves on the back is <u>not</u> what we were asking, they seemed to enjoy giving themselves recognition.  Sometimes we would ask them to give themselves a pat.  For example, after completing a morning meeting we told students who had been acting appropriately to give themselves a pat on the back.  At other times, we asked them to decide if they deserved a pat. As we watched the students doing this, we wondered why those who acted disrespectfully decided to give themselves a pat on the back.  Was it because they did not want to be different from their classmates?  Or, were they not paying attention until they saw their classmates moving, and just moved their arms, too?

Over time we changed this to a different format, which moved away from public recognition and more towards personal recognition.  Further discussion about this information appears in Final Reflections and Future Directions on page 40.

Our reading of <u>Learning to Trust</u> influenced us to make an effort to think about what we were saying to students, especially when there was a problem. Helping students get to the bottom of a problem requires not only time and patience, but also a willingness to listen to the words the kids use. In one instance, we noticed three upset kids lining up after recess. The three kids first were told we would talk once the class got started with the next activity. Then we pulled the three students and gave each a chance to speak until the discussion had reached a conclusion. This allowed them to realize that there had been some confusion, and gave us time to talk with them about what they could do in the future to prevent a similar misunderstanding. The meeting took 20 minutes, which was two-thirds of the writing time we had scheduled that day.

By allowing them the time to truly work through the problem and listen to each other, we prevented this problem from recurring. If we had simply used our "teacher voices" to get them to stop yelling at each other when they were in line, most likely the argument would have continued into the hall, into the classroom, and even into the next day. One of the children involved in this particular dispute, "G.S.", has some difficulty processing information at times, which can add to misunderstandings. He was one of the children we kept track of during our calendar activities because he also had difficulty with interrupting others.

Knowing his needs and his strengths, we were able to work through the problem in a caring manner. Marilyn Watson reminds us:

> Unless our beliefs about individual children are working models,
> subject to constant revision, and unless we consciously strive to
> understand the unique qualities of each student, we are likely to
> resent children who are troublesome. Because some children thrive in
> our classrooms, we are likely to conclude that those who do not thrive
> must have something wrong with them. (Watson, p. 37)

The two of us discussed this point quite frequently, reminding ourselves that the kids who struggle need our understanding. Those who are not behaving as we want them to are typically the ones who need our guidance and care the most. Looking beyond the fact that they are misbehaving can allow us to glimpse the reasons behind the behavior, and hopefully help it to improve.

## What Our Class Needs: Five Themes to Explore

As we discussed our readings, we both realized that one of the points we returned to again and again was the idea of, "What do the students need?" What was it that we were not providing our class with, and how could we add it to our already busy day? While this question may seem simple at first, we swiftly realized it was complicated. We ended up with five areas we wanted to explore, to see if this could help change the tone in our room.

**Theme One: Making Friends**

Since our class tends to be very social, we decided that a look at our class's social skills would make a good place to start. As teachers of second graders we often forget that these 7 and 8 year-olds still need to focus on what it means to be a friend, even though we did spend the first 12 weeks of school on that very idea through our Living in Harmony unit.

> If Tralin and Shereka were preschoolers, we would consider the development of their interpersonal understanding and their social skills to be central aspects of our teaching. However, we expect our elementary and middle school students to have mastered these skills before they reach our classrooms. In fact, many of the problems we solve daily are not related to academics, but to our students' undeveloped social skills. Teasing, tattling… and hosts of other unfriendly behaviors not only interfere with student learning and well-being, but are a major source of teacher stress. (Watson, p. 56.)

In order for us to gain a better sense of what our kids thought about each other, we decided to use a sociogram. We asked them to privately list three kids in response to each of the questions, which are below. We hoped to get a sense of not only whom they would pick first, but also why they thought that person would be a good choice. From this data we made a spreadsheet so we could see how many times each child was picked, and if we had any that were isolates, in other words, someone who was not picked by anyone. (See Appendix A.)

1. If you could choose anyone from our class to play outside with, whom would you choose first?  Second? Third?  For the first person, explain why.
2. If you could choose anyone from our class to work on a project with, whom would you choose first?  Second? Third?  For the first person, explain why.
3. If you could choose anyone from our class to sit next to on the carpet, whom would you choose first?  Second? Third?  For the first person, explain why.

We found the answers to their explanations to be intriguing.  For the most part the answers to question 1 held little surprise for us.  We did, however, find out that we had two students who were isolates.  Knowing this we were able to encourage some friendships to start.  One of the isolates, Z.L., has since made a friend.  The other, K. B., does play with students outside, but we are not sure she would consider any of them "friends".  For question number 2 and 3, students were picked because they worked well with the "chooser".  This sounds like common sense to us, but we know many kids in our class who, on a daily basis, don't seem to recognize the value of choosing carefully.   We hoped to use this information to encourage better choices.

**Theme Two:  Time to Talk About School**

Our second focus tied in with social skills, because we recognized this class just needs more time to <u>talk</u>.  We hoped that by providing time for them to do that

when it was not disruptive, we could reduce the incessant chatting.  We tried to give some extra time in the mornings to "talk quietly at your tables", and allow for more "think, pair, share" type of activities. We gave each student a partner, had them think about something first, talk with their partner second, and then share with the whole class.  Sometimes we had them share what their partner said, too. While they certainly enjoyed the freedom to talk about whatever they liked in the mornings, it didn't seem to affect their over-all behavior much.  We did realize that this particular class does not do as well with whole-group situations, and have tried to include more partner or small group discussions in our planning.

Another way we gave them a chance to talk was through compliments, hoping this would also prove to be a way to improve their social skills.  This was introduced through a puppet skit, which allowed us to take the problem "out of the classroom" and put it in a non-threatening environment.  This allowed them to reflect on the puppets' problem and provide possible solutions.  Although our students were unaware of it, we did choose a problem relevant to our classroom—how to make someone feel better about themselves through what they do, not what they have. (See Appendix B.)

After viewing and discussing the skit, we practiced how to give compliments to each other, based on what we noticed that person doing.  We called them "put-

ups", which is the opposite of "put-downs". Put-ups are a kid friendly version of compliments, designed to notice what a student is doing, rather than what he/she has. A put-down could be anything negative from calling someone a name to saying something mean about a person. The students were familiar with these terms because we had previous discussions about the difference between the two. We asked them to give put-ups to those students seated at their table, but quickly realized we needed more structure since some kids did not receive any put-ups while others received two or three. On the days when we required that all students give a put-up to both of the kids at their table, each student received at least two during that day. Every time a child received a put-up they told one of us, we listened to it to make sure it actually was a put-up, and then recorded the name of the giver. This allowed us to keep track of the number and quality of the compliments. We noticed on the days when we were consistently reminding them to give put-ups, they did. However, without the adult reminders, few would continue to give their classmates put-ups.

**Theme Three:  The Specifics**

Our third focus was academic, since we knew that kids who feel they are academically "shaky" have more difficulty behaving in school.  As Marilyn Watson put it:

> Although some of Laura's students entered her classroom confident in their basic competence, a number had serious learning problems that had deprived them of a sense of competence, at least as related to academic learning.  Because they felt incompetent, these students did all they could to avoid engaging in whatever learning activities Laura devised.  (Watson, p. 113.)

Many teachers recognize that few people want to work on something when they perceive themselves as unable to do it.  We revamped some of our literature group, or "reading group", activities to provide more structure where it was needed.  For example, one group consistently had difficulty when completing the independent part of the group work.  For a few books we gave them a checklist of activities that had to be accomplished, and very specific directions as to how much needed to be done each day.  This enabled those students to produce a better quality of work not only when they were responding independently to a book, but in their group with the teachers as well.

We also considered how to better use the instructional paraprofessional who works in our room, so she could be "on call" for two of our students with the most difficulty working independently, one of whom joined our class in January. After

just a few minutes working with him to write a story, it was obvious that he did not feel capable in writing. Not only does he have some deficiencies in writing, but he also has little motivation to work on it. For example, as soon as an adult helper walks away, he immediately stops whatever he was supposed to be doing, and does not begin again until the helper comes back. We knew we would have to provide more support for him, so we began by having him dictate major parts of his story. Now we are trying to talk about his story first, then take some notes for him. He then writes sentences based on the notes. It is a slow process, involving many of the adults in our room. We have noticed, though, that he is more likely to work on the areas where he feels more competent, like math.

## Theme Four: Becoming Paleontologists

For our fourth focus area we thought about the fact that many <u>adults</u> have experienced the drive to discover something that interests them. Hours can be spent lost in thought, reading, research and other work when the end goal is important to the learner. Kohn supports this with the statement:

> If learning is a function of making one's own meanings and reorganizing one's own theories in response to and encounter with new ideas, then we need to maximize the impact of that encounter. As much as possible, students ought to discover things directly rather than just reading or hearing about them. (Kohn, 1999, p. 143.)

With this in mind as we planned our Prehistoric Life and Fossils units, we decided to try the Dinosaur Addendum written a few years ago by two State College Area School District teachers, Judi Kur and Marcia Heitzman, and their two interns, Corrine Almquist and Deb Shockey. The addendum was written around the idea of having mystery dinosaurs for the class to discover, given clues from a couple of "paleontologists".

> [Addendum] **Management**: Students work in heterogeneous paleontology teams (4-6 students to a team). The students will be working together for the 6-8 week duration of this unit, so it is important that they work cooperatively together. Each team will be trying to determine the identity of their "mystery dinosaur". The students participate in explorations and discoveries to help them make sense of the clues. They apply what they have learned to the information regarding their "mystery dinosaur". (Kur, 2000, p. 1)

Scientific inquiry refers to a different way to examine and pose explanations. Throughout this process students typically are developing their understanding through: making observations, exhibiting curiosity, defining questions, gathering evidence, researching information, posing possible explanations, publishing explanations based on evidence, and considering new evidence to add additions to their existing evidence so that they can inform the public on their discovery. (Loucks, 1999.) Humans are innately curious and this idea definitely carried into our classroom discovery on dinosaurs. The majority of

the lessons that were developed for this unit allowed students to make connections between the letters sent from the paleontologists, the books we read and the research that many students did outside of class. (See Appendix C for a sample lesson, student letters and pictures.) These activities also gave students a purpose for learning, although they were not student developed. Our students were able to make connections and lead most of the discussions through their understandings and questions.

> Learning environments that concentrate on conveying to students what scientists already know do not promote inquiry. Rather, an emphasis on inquiry asks that we think about what we know, why we know, and how we have come to know. (Loucks, 1999.)

It is evident that students have a harder time retaining information when a teacher lectures to a class compared to when the students find meaning and make connections. As we have discovered in our class through students discussions, the reflections in their paleontologist notebook and the expressions throughout their final presentations, they demonstrated that they clearly enjoyed the experience. In fact, many continued to discuss the process in the weeks following the unit.

## Theme Five: Success in Small Groups

Since we had teams of six working together on the same dinosaur, we hoped to see the students being more collaborative during this unit. We did not want to

end up with positive interdependence, where the students perceive that their performance or success is linked to that of their group members.  We did want to apply a component of cooperative learning described by Johnson and Johnson in the text, The Cooperative Umbrella.  This is called "Face-To-Face Promotive Interaction" which utilizes  "cognitive activities and interpersonal dynamics that only occur when students explain to each other how the answers to assignments are derived."

A sense of individual accountability was still maintained in the classroom since students turned in their own paleontologist notebooks. However, the goal of these activities was to make each member of the group a stronger and more vital component.  Vygotsky, an educational psychologist, once stated, "What children can do together today, they can do alone tomorrow." As students worked within their groups we noticed them take a more active role in their own learning about dinosaurs.  Their comfort level increased as they saw their successes in determining information about their mystery dinosaur.  As we noticed these successes, we began to incorporate group work into other aspects of the classroom so our students would be able to take pride in other work they accomplished.

One of the areas we decided to focus on was math. Both of us truly enjoyed the Investigations that the curriculum provided for us.  We began the year by

following the structure suggested by the Investigations curriculum, which allowed students to choose which activities to do. We did specify that they must participate in all of the choices within the allotted amount of time, typically two to three days. However, with the energy of the classroom it was often difficult to get the students started with basic instructions. In addition, students were not utilizing their math time well, creating difficulties in completing their work on time. This often resulted in them having to finish their work on their free time. Since we both recognized the importance of recess, we looked critically at our management methods and contemplated new ways to make our students more successful in math.

When we reviewed our literature group structure and the cooperative learning aspect of the dinosaur unit, we began to incorporate the two to make math time more efficient for the students and us. We restructured math choices so that they rotated at specific times and stayed within a specified group. This structured eliminated the element of choice but established more expectations on the part of the students. The students began to succeed in math by not only completing activities but also by demonstrating an element of excitement and interest in the activities. This excitement and interest was often hard to come by in a larger group setting because of the distractions and interruptions. We felt

that in a small group students were less prone to be distracted and interrupt. Also, students have more opportunity to participate and benefit from the activity and lesson.

### "What Day Is It?"  A Look At Calendar Time

It was apparent to both the students and the teachers that our math calendar time was not as efficient after winter break as it was before.  There were more interruptions, more calling out and a considerable amount of disrespect on the student's part.  To give us a sense of how long it was taking the students to settle down on the carpet and complete the calendar activities, we decided to keep track of how long it took to complete the calendar activities one day. The first day, when we timed them without telling them, it took 13:23 minutes.  We then decided to challenge the students to decrease their time. The next day their time dropped a considerable amount to 4:28 minutes.  Now that we knew it could be done, we continued to challenge them.  For the most part their times remained around four and a half minutes, with a few "off" days.  (See Appendix D.)

Once the class sustained less than five minutes for a whole week, we held a class meeting where they discussed alternate ways to conduct calendar time.  Class

meetings usually serve one or more of the following purposes:

> …to plan and make decisions, to "check in", and to solve problems or raise awareness… Their versatility makes them a valuable classroom management tool--one that helps students actively contribute to their academic and social learning. (Developmental Studies Center, 1996, p. 7.)

We suggested the possibilities of learning some components of calendar in sign language, having crazy calendar (where we would mix up the order of calendar), or having a student lead calendar.  We let the students express their concerns and comment on the positive aspects of each.  In the end we took a vote and the class decided to have a student lead the calendar each day.

Initially, students reacted pleasantly to a classmate leading them during calendar.  It was something fresh and new, a change.  However, the students were not consistently respectful to their leader.   We began to orally survey the calendar leaders to get an idea of how they felt about their time leading calendar. We asked these questions:

1. Did you enjoy being the calendar leader? Why?
2. How do you think your classmates did in following you? (Scale 1-10) Why?
3. Were your classmates respectful or respectful?  How do you know?
4. Were you comfortable in front of your classmates?
5. Is there anything you would have done differently? (Reflect)
6. Do you want to lead calendar again?

This survey allowed the students to reflect on the experience and also

enabled us to recognize whether they knew when classmates were being respectful. It also allowed us to observe how they reacted to the leadership role. We wanted to see if they would connect this experience to how a teacher might feel when students were disrespectful. We wondered if this might change their own behavior since they had "stepped in another's shoes". Upon reflection we decided that the change in calendar time did result in more appropriate behavior and less time spent on it than it previously had. However, the effect seemed to last only as long as we were timing the class. We also did not notice a significant change in disrespectful behavior at other times of the day, even when we reminded them of their experiences in front of the class.

### Pick a smart spot!

One afternoon, as we took notes on our class during an hour-long whole group activity and discussion, we realized we have four students who consistently interrupted whomever was speaking. Since it is not feasible to script their behavior choices every day for an hour, we decided to pick a short time that occurred every day, which would give us a glimpse into their overall choices. Since we were already taking a closer look at calendar time, we thought this would make a

good time to make notes about their behavior.  The observer for the day would stand to the side and make one tally for every behavior that was disruptive: talking, making noises, touching others, and excessive moving or turning in circles. Sometimes the observer moved around the outside of the group to get a better view.

After showing each of the four kids what we saw on that first day when we tallied their behavior, we kept the information in a database to see whether that knowledge would help them make different choices.  There were no rewards associated with fewer tallies, and no punishments for more.  We discussed the reasons behind why we were hoping they would choose certain types of behavior, that they would think about how they felt when they were the leader for the day. Perhaps this would encourage them to act the way they hoped the class would choose to act.

Through the six weeks in which we kept track of the tallies, we would randomly pick a day and show one (or more) of the kids what their tallies looked like for that day.  (See appendix E).  It was interesting to note one child's tallies immediately improved, and for the most part, continued to improve over the six weeks.  Two others showed some improvement, although it was not as dramatic. G.S. remained inconsistent throughout the six-week period.  This child, however,

has some other issues, and currently receives help through Learning Support.  For example, there are days when he has told the Learning Support teacher, "I left my brain at home today."   Interestingly enough, on these days it is much more difficult to gain his attention and get him to focus on the work at hand.

Occasionally those we were observing would see that we had a pen in our hands, and it looked as if we were making tallies.  We decided to use this as a non-verbal cue to remind them of our previous discussions.  We would stand where they could see us and "draw" a tally in the air.  This often helped them change their behavior, at least during the six-week period.  Once we stopped tallying every calendar time, we noticed an increase in the off-task behavior again for all four students, although P.B. was off-task less often than he had been before.  We speculated that the tallying, while effective at the moment it was done, did not cause a long-term change for three of the four boys.

# What We Learned: Our Claims

**Claim 1:** **Students are able to appreciate and benefit from experiencing what teachers do by participating in leadership roles. This type of activity also allows students to take ownership in their behavior and the behavior of their classmates.**

The students' reactions during some of the surveys we conducted allowed us to see that they were assuming the role of the teacher when they became the calendar leader. (See Appendix F.) When asked the question, "Did you enjoy being the calendar leader? Why?" V.R. responded with, "Yes. It was really fun to lead people. Sometimes people really like acting like they are the teacher. And a lot want to be like them." G.S. replied, "Yup, You get to point to stuff and the class can read it. You're the teacher." Other students had similar sentiments. Students saw themselves as a leader and often took it personally when their classmates did not act respectfully towards them. In addition they knew when their classmates were being respectful and were able to explain how they knew this by looking at their classmates' behaviors. V.R. stated, "…They were mostly respectful. I saw them being quiet, some held up the quiet sign."

This aspect of utilizing students in a leadership role allows them to express how students are respectful and how they are not. They also are able to explain how they felt during this activity. Out of the students that were surveyed, all wanted the chance to be calendar leader again. This demonstrates that students

enjoyed the opportunity to lead the class and it also shows that they would like the chance to do a better job, since we had them reflect and think about how they would do calendar differently.

**Claim 2:  Students understand why they should or should not choose certain classmates with whom to: play, sit next to, or work on a project.  They are also able to explain why that is the best person for them to be with for a particular activity.  However, students still need guidance in making the correct judgments when given the opportunity to choose their partners.**

The answers to our sociogram question about why a student was chosen demonstrate the idea that it is better to work with someone who will stay focused. Students answered like this, "Because he does nice work," "Because she thinks a lot,"  "Because we work well together," and "Because I can concentrate (sic)." They understood the need for making good choices, and yet they continued to sit next to those who distracted them.  Many times in math they were asked to do a number of activities, often over a few days.  They had the freedom to start where they wanted, and work as long as they needed to, within some guidelines.  Often they wanted to do the activity that their friends choose, which limited the amount of math work that occurred.  We frequently needed to remind them to pick an activity that was <u>not</u> one chosen by their best friends.

Our read aloud time was another area in which the idea of choice often fails for some of our kids.  As we got ready and met on the carpet, we reminded them to choose carefully where they wanted to sit.  Before beginning the story we looked at the group, and gave reminders to any who may not have been in the best spots.  Quite frequently during the story we needed to ask two or more students to separate because they talked when they needed to listen.

We added more structure to various parts of our day, hoping to increase their time-on-task, and decrease the distracting behavior.  Since our literature group time seemed to go well, we wondered if it was because it occurs in the morning, or because they are in assigned groups which move when time is up.  We decided to try doing some of our math activities in a similar fashion to see if this would enable them to focus better in the assigned group.  As long as we paid attention to which students are in which groups, it worked better.  We know where they are supposed to be and what they need to be doing, as do they.  We also usually have an adult at each activity, who can provide further structure if needed.  We disliked eliminating the aspect of choice, but needed to find a way to refocus on the math work.

On occasion we have noticed our students experienced success with self-selection.  Recently we gave them the opportunity to choose a math partner to use

for an hour's activity.  (See Appendix G.)  R.D. and G.S. asked if they could work together.  While these two do not usually make an effective combination, it had been a while since we tried having them work together.  With the warning that they would be separated if they were not doing their math, they were allowed to work together.  To our delight, they stayed focused and worked during the period.  We later asked them what made it successful.  Their replies were, "We focused on our math and didn't get silly."  When reflecting upon why they worked well this time, and not many of other times, we wondered if it was the successful partnering we had been doing for the weeks before that which helped them learn what working together looks like.  They were also motivated by the fact that _if_ they worked well this time, they might be allowed to work together another time.

**Claim 3:  When students participate in cooperative activities within a small group, they are more productive and engaged.  This causes them to take more pride in their work.**

The majority of our successful activities centered on the ideas of student discovery within a small group setting.  We observed the students' engagement in particular lessons and the students' side conversations. They thoroughly enjoyed the cooperative unit of dinosaurs when they expressed their excitement through their final letters to their paleontologist friends.  One student wrote,

Dear Pete, I know our dinosaur is an Eoraptor because it meets all the standards that our 'mystery dino' needs.  I love mysteries (sic)!  Especially (sic) this one!  This was the best ever!  But I do have to admit this was hard!  Very hard because we have to find out the dinosaur mostly by ourselves!  We had to even figure out what time period our dinosaur was in, if it was bipedal or quadrapedal, and what stride type our dino was.  It was a really cool experience!  Especially (sic) imagining (sic) back in years!  Thanks for your help!  I wish you could write us another letter! (See Appendix C.)

Just from this response it was easy to see that students took pride in what they accomplished.  They believed what they had done was hard and initially thought it was unattainable.  With the efforts of their group, however, they were able to identify their mystery dinosaurs.  After the groups unveiled their mystery dinosaurs a sense of pride surfaced in the room.  Students were not only pleased with themselves but with how their team accomplished so much together.

V.R. included in her letter, "What I liked about this was we were like real paleontologists!"  Not only did this student address that she liked being a paleontologist but others said the same. In fact some said that they wanted to be one when they grew up. When students assume the role of the scientist, mathematician, editor, etc. for what they are studying, they are more likely to want to learn the information.

We believe that another important aspect to teaching cooperative activities is providing engaging lessons through scientific inquiry.  Science through inquiry

focuses on not only being able to make a statement but also being able to prove a theory with evidence.  One group claimed that their dinosaur was a "long neck". They were able to show some evidence that supported this idea but yet they did not have all the information they needed.  We kept reminding them that it is okay to say "they think something" but without evidence we cannot "know something to be true".  One student in this group, R.D., even mentioned this component in his final letter to the paleontologist.  "At first (sic) I thought (sic) it was a long neck and then we got our (sic) skeleton (sic) and put it together".  It is interesting to notice that although he did not go into detail about why he changed his mind we can infer from his answer that the skeleton did not make sense as a long neck.  Science as inquiry is about making guesses, testing them, making observations, and finally making conclusions that are supported by evidence.

As we began our next unit on plants and animals students incorporated information that they learned through activities during the dinosaur unit.  This information has stuck and they are now making connections with other areas of study.  One example of the information that they have transferred from the dinosaur unit to the animal unit is discussing whether an animal was a biped or quadruped. (A biped walks on two legs while a quadruped walks on four.)  They have

also taken on the role of a zoologist and a botanist which helps keeps them more

engaged in the activities.

**Claim 4: Changing the time of day when we typically have certain subjects can have an effect on student behavior.  Other schedule changes like instituting ten minutes of reading after lunch allows students to refocus on academics.  Overall, our students tend to be more focused in the morning than in the afternoon.**  (See Appendix H for a weekly schedule.)

Literature groups tend to be the center of most of our mornings. Literature

group rotations are typically twenty minutes long allowing the students to meet

with the teacher, finish an assignment related to the guided reading material, work

on a unit related activity and finally meet with the paraprofessional for word study

activities.  We have noticed that this time of day runs more smoothly than math

typically does in the afternoon.  On several occasions we had the opportunity to

switch the times that math and literature groups occurred.  When math was done

in the morning we saw an increase in student engagement, participation and

achievement. Although this behavior was better it was not nearly as good as when

we conducted literature groups in the morning. This led us to think that not only

were our students more attentive in the morning than the afternoon, but also that

the literature group structure made it easier for the students to focus.  The way

that we ran literature groups depended on rotations within a teacher-designed

group, where as math time had an element of choice. We had two examples of

higher success rates when students work in smaller groups, both the literature groups and the dinosaur addendum.  We pondered whether math could be more successful if we used smaller designed groups that rotated together.  Unfortunately, it was not possible to permanently switch literature groups and math due to the amount of time students were borrowed for additional services.  When we tested this idea we found that students accomplished more because they were able to focus on the learning and not the distractions that occurred in a larger, spontaneous group.

We realized that math followed lunchtime, a time where students were allowed to be social and talkative, with limited structure.  We expected the students to come back from lunch, sit down and do a few minutes of spelling before math.  This, of course, was not typically the case.  We know that when we exercise we need time to cool down before we move on to another activity.  Our bodies need to slow down; similarly our students' socializing does too.  To allow the students' time to prepare for our next learning activity, we began to have students "cool down" by reading a book right when they enter the room after lunch.  Students went from a chaotic time at lunch to a quiet time to help them get ready for learning.

Another area of the day that we questioned our scheduling was calendar. If calendar took too long it cut into the math that followed it. We began to have calendar follow math so that it occurred before the students' recess. This way if calendar finished early they could use that extra time as additional recess. We hoped that this would encourage each student to be more responsible for his or her own behavior since it would affect the whole group. However, this is not yet consistent.

**Claim 5: Extrinsic motivation seems to be a powerful tool for helping students behave in appropriate ways. However, this seems to be temporary. Intrinsic motivation, while more difficult to achieve, can have a lasting effect.**

As we worked on this claim, it struck us that one of the strategies we had employed dealt with intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation. During our inquiry we had taken an idea from Watson's book, Learning to Trust. The teacher's idea of asking the students in her class to "take a bow" seemed to work for them, partly because as time went on, the students themselves would suggest that someone should take a bow. We decided to use "give yourself a pat on the back" as our way to help students get recognition for appropriate behavior, thinking it might help to motivate others to want to behave, too.

After just a few times of asking them to do this, we realized <u>we</u> were the ones recognizing their behavior.  This was not a chance for them to decide they <u>deserved</u> a pat on the back.  This was the teachers' telling the students they deserved it.  Therefore, we tried to shift our language again to something like, "If you believe you are doing what you should be doing, give yourself a pat on the back."  We still got a sense that the students gave themselves a pat on the back because others were doing it and not because they reflected on their behavior.  At the end of our data collecting we opted to redesign this. This also showed us how difficult it is to encourage intrinsic motivation through having students reflect on their own behavior.

At one point a problem occurred and we needed to pull three of the four boys from our calendar tally time, along with one other, to talk about <u>why</u> it is important to be respectful to our classmates.  The conversation illustrated the difficulty we were having in getting our kids to be intrinsically motivated.  After we talked about how the teacher and other students felt with all the interruptions and silly behavior we continued our conversation:

Teacher:  Why do we want to listen and not interrupt?
L.L: So we don't get in trouble.
R.D.: So the teacher won't be sad?
G.S.:  We don't want to miss our recess.
Teacher:  Not good enough.  What other reasons could there be?

(Silence)

A.L: So our classmates can hear.

R.D.: So others aren't sad.

A.L: Or frustrated.

G.S.: Because we want to do our best.

At the end of the conversation they were asked to think about how their classmates feel when people interrupt them. The hope was that they would consider how their behavior affects themselves and others, and not just focus on how the teachers wanted them to behave, since this would seem to shift towards internal reasons for behaving in more respectful ways. The authors in How to Talk so Kids Can Learn stated:

> I wanted to know how to reach inside my students and turn that "desire to misbehave" into a desire to behave appropriately. I wanted to avoid the terrible fallout of punishment and encourage the children to be inner-directed and self-disciplined. I wanted to find some effective alternatives to punishment. (Faber, 1995, p. 102.)

One of our student's previous teachers had told us in late August that this particular child responded well to the "name, check, check" method. This meant the first infraction got his name on the board, each infraction after that got a check mark, with recess time being lost. The teacher told us this was one of the best ways to get this child to behave. Our question to ourselves was, "If this was one of the best ways to get him to behave, how come this happened to him almost every day last year? Is he just a "slow learner", or does this not have the effect

desired, mainly of decreasing off-task behavior?"  Luckily, we decided the method

was not effective, instead of deciding there was something wrong with the child.

Watson writes:

> However, with children like Danny who constantly disrupt the
> classroom, it is difficult to meet the misbehaving child's needs for
> autonomy, belonging, and competence and also maintain a safe and
> productive classroom…  Children like Danny, who enter the classroom
> prone to misbehave, are bound to feel coerced and alienated when
> their teachers try to curb their unacceptable behavior with
> punishments. (Watson, p. 3.)

At the beginning of the year we spent a long time practicing procedures like

walking in the hallway quietly.  When it seemed as if our class had "forgotten" how

to do something, we would often practice it. As our community-building unit drew to

a close in November, we decided we would use practicing as a method to remind

them of how they said they should be at various times of the day.  Often we would

do this on their recess time, for a minute or two.  While this seemed an effective

reminder because their behavior would often improve, we talked about how, again,

this extrinsic motivation was designed to get them to improve their behavior.  We

did notice, however, that at times <u>students</u> would tell us the class needed to

practice.  We tried to honor that reminder if at all possible, because that shows

their reflection of the class's behavior.

## Final Reflections and Future Directions

Inquiry is a process that does not stop just because the data collection and analyzing period is over. Although we learned many useful things throughout our inquiry project there were still many unknowns. Some of our initial wonderings were not addressed because we ran out of time. Perhaps we can study these questions at another time. In addition, as we reflected on our inquiry we realized we had new wonderings.

- o Is there something else we can do to our daily schedule to promote the most efficient ways for our class to learn?

- o Will holding regular meetings affect the classroom atmosphere in away that students can be open and honest about their feelings?

- o Is there a way to schedule regular meetings in an already packed day?

- o If we focused more on "put-ups", would this allow the children to become more intrinsically motivated?

- o How can we change the design of our classroom at the beginning of the year so that this type of behavior does not begin?

Since we finished our "official" inquiry project we have tried some other methods to help the students create a sense of self-direction. During part of the inquiry we had experimented with put-ups, and since we still had questions about it we decided to take another look at this strategy with a different focus. We started with a series of class meetings to address the behavior during calendar

time because we were still having issues with disrespectful behavior.  After discussing what the problem was, the students' brainstormed solutions that were mostly punitive.

We spent long hours thinking about how to shift the students' focus from punishment for rude and disruptive behavior.  To have the students begin to think about ways to have a more positive classroom, we decided to give the kids a question the next morning to answer,  "When you are with a partner, what do you want that partner to do?  NO NAMES, PLEASE!"  They all completed the following statement on their own, "When I am working with a partner I want…"  In our afternoon meeting we tabulated the answers in front of them, then asked them what they noticed about the answers.  (See Appendix I for samples and poster.)  We then used their own answers as talking points to refocus our discussion on the ways we want our class to be, not the ways we want to punish our classmates for inappropriate behavior.

After school that afternoon we spent a long time trying to figure out how to recognize the ways we wanted our class to be.  We wanted something less public than a pat on the back, and more accountable.  We decided to try making a put-up chart, more like a name-tag necklace, to record the instances when they were caught <u>by their classmates</u> acting in any of the ways from their list.  Once someone

made a put-up statement to a classmate, they would tell us, and we would record it on the nametag necklace. (See Appendix I.)  This enabled us to make sure a put-up was truly given, and was a visible reminder to the class to keep watching for any possible put-ups.  They were so proud when they told us that someone noticed they were acting in the ways our class wanted!  Our goal was to have everyone receive at least two put-ups each day, and for the most part that happened.

After the first few days we also began to ask them if the put-up was true. For example, if G.S. came over and said, "A.L. gave me a put-up.  He said he noticed I was reading quietly," our response would be, "And are you?"  Every time the answer was yes, leading us to believe that the kids were starting to recognize their own appropriate behavior.  Our hope is that this will help them start thinking about the way they want to be, and not so much about the fact that their teachers want them to be a certain way.

Along those lines we also instituted a personal assessment called, "Check in with yourself."  (See Appendix I.)  This means they give themselves a number from 1 to 5, with 5 being the most on-task and 1 being the least.  Their honesty amazed us.  In almost every instance, the number we would have chosen for them would have been the same or only one number away from their choice.

In the most recent meeting, reflecting upon whether we were acting the way we wanted our class to be, the students thought it was going better. They enjoyed receiving the put-ups and seemed to be working better together. A few students brought up the issue of our class behavior at their specials and wanted to expand our classroom philosophy into the specials. Our hope is that these types of reflections and making connections will help them think about their own behavior, and how to make better choices. Whether this will translate into more internal motivation remains to be seen as we continue our journey to encourage respect.

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