

*Be it! Take it! What is responsibility
anyway?*

*An Inquiry Project
By*

Pamela J. Karwoski

PDS Intern 2005-2006

Inquiry Abstract:

What are some ways a teacher can promote responsibility in the classroom so that students gain an understanding of the importance of this life long skill? This inquiry paper will take you through how fourth grade students learned about responsibility, brainstormed about what it looked like in the school, and learned ways for students to show others that they are responsible individuals.

What to Expect?

Teaching Context

Where was this inquiry project carried out?

Inquiry Rationale

What led me to this topic?

Wonderings and Questions

What questions do I have that are leading this inquiry?

Inquiry Process

How did I carry out this inquiry project?

Data Collection

In what ways did I collect data to be able to draw conclusions?

Data Analysis

How did I process all the data that had been collected?

What I Have Learned

What claims was I able to make after analyzing the data?

Teaching Implications

How will I use this information in my future teaching career?

New Wonderings

What questions do I still have or have formed as a result of this inquiry?

Teaching Context

Within the Professional Development School at Penn State University, my placement during this school year is in a self-contained fourth grade classroom at Park Forest Elementary School. This group of fourth grade students is part of a rolling community in which they remained with the same classmates and teacher for both third and fourth grade. Within the school, there are three fourth grade rooms. The school is a newly built structure that is designed for a capacity of 500 - 600 students. The class I intern in is comprised of thirteen males and thirteen females. The student roster consists of one Hispanic female, two African American females, and the remainder of the class can identify with the Caucasian racial status. Within the class, the range in academic abilities among the students varies from learning support (eight identified) students to gifted and talented students, with many students in between. In socio-economic terms, this class is also very diverse, ranging from students on a free lunch program to students with an upper middle class income. Most students live in the neighborhood of the school and are predominately middle to upper middle class. In the classroom, my mentor teacher, a learning support paraprofessional, and I support the students.

Physically, the classroom is set up with two reading tables, a reading center, a sink, a technology area with three computers, a carpet in the front of the room, and desks placed into groups. At the beginning of the year, the students collaboratively designed a set of rules for the classroom, and through teacher guidance, learned the routines and transitions of the school day. The homework policy has been the same for the students since their third grade experience, and labeled colored folders are given to the students for purposes of organization. The State College Area School District provides the students with notebook paper, pencils, markers, crayons, glue, and scissors for the students to use at school. Materials are distributed at the beginning of the year and periodically throughout the year. Extra materials are also available at designated

centers around the classroom.

Inquiry Rationale

Interning in a fourth grade classroom has allowed me to observe the behavior patterns of nine and ten year olds. There are many times during the day when students from my classroom are leaving to go to other instructional support areas and then returning to the classroom. The fourth grade classroom is full of dynamic instruction that includes individual, small group, and large group instruction. There are many times during the day when the teacher is giving students instruction for what they should be doing. Also, many resource bins are located around the room for students to access materials to use while working on their assignments.

Throughout the year, I have noticed students interrupting the teacher during instruction to solve a problem or ask for a repeat of instructions. Furthermore, I noticed that during individual work time, if I started to individually help a student, the other classmates began to talk and became off task. This led to many assignments not being completed in an appropriate time frame or the quality of the work being poor because some students were not concentrating on doing their work. In order to get students to be back on task and focus on their work again, I had to stop my instruction to refocus the group and remind them of what they needed to be doing. I also noticed that classroom events, such as morning meeting, were being affected by interruptions because the students would be talking over each other, and I would have to stop the person sharing to quiet the class. As a result of these observations, I became interested in finding out if there was a way to minimize these teacher interruptions and have the students become more self-reliant and responsible. I wondered what I could do as the teacher to help students to gain the skills of self-reliance and responsibility, not only to minimize the interruptions, but also so that these students could use the skills in their future endeavors.

Part of me wondered if it was too late to begin to work on promoting self-reliance in the classroom since we were already into the second half of the school year. From this inquiry, I hoped to find methods to increase student responsibility in terms of completing work and being part of a respectful community. I thought if I found a method that seemed to work with this group of students, I would be able to implement the strategy in my future classroom from the beginning of the year so that the students would become accustomed to it, and the patterns I am currently seeing in my classroom would not become an issue in my future classroom.

While developing this inquiry, I thought that probing into the prospects of promoting self-reliance and responsibility in the classroom to decrease teacher interruptions and classroom distractions would give me an excellent look at responsibility and self-reliance in the classroom so that I can plan better to instill these skills into my future students. To me, responsibility takes on many forms in the classroom. For example, one way I look at student responsibility is that the students are responsible for completing their own best work in an efficient and quality manner. Responsibility can also take the form of a student keeping his/her work area clean and organized so that he/she can easily find the materials necessary for a lesson. I cannot clean each student's desk every day; therefore, it is the duty (responsibility) of the students to make sure they can access all of their materials in an organized fashion on their own. Ultimately, I hoped this inquiry would lead me to find a method to increase students taking responsibility for their own learning, completing their assignments, and making smart choices, so that I can use a similar strategy in my future classroom in order to promote student responsibility and successful work habits.

Self-reliance was another important piece of this inquiry. I found my lessons to be choppy and broken up because of student interruption. These interruptions stemmed from asking students to stop talking to each other to students asking me to find them a new pencil.

Sometimes, after dealing with an interruption, I lost my train of thought in a lesson or other students became distracted and off task. I wanted to find a strategy to promote self-reliance in the classroom, which included making smart decisions and personal problem solving, so that I could use this strategy in my future classroom to prevent the same pattern I have observed occurring this year.

Wonderings and Questions

The main wondering driving this inquiry project was “How can I promote self reliance and responsibility in my fourth grade students in order to minimize teacher interruptions, decrease distractions, and increase learning and on task time?”

Within this large question, many smaller wonderings had me thinking and investigating more into my topic:

- What strategies can I use to promote this self-reliance and responsibility?
- Is there a way to instill responsible decision-making and independence in my students so that the students may benefit from these skills in their future education?
- Will classroom management be effected as a result of students making better decisions and becoming more self-reliant?
- Will the students’ work habits and work products be affected by my efforts to promote responsibility in regards to work habits?

Inquiry Process

As inquiry has been presented to the PDS interns, an inquiry project is a series of events that are the result of a question or reflection about an aspect of the school day. To answer the

question or follow up with the reflection, one must consult expert knowledge as well as experiments and collect data to find out if an intervention or idea is working in the classroom. Throughout this inquiry process, the researcher does not have any notion of the outcomes of the project. For example, in my inquiry project, I used a reflection to develop a question, consulted experts, tried different interventions within the classroom, and collected data along the way to see what was occurring in my classroom as I tried to develop responsibility among my students. My particular inquiry project had no definitive end, as it is still occurring, and I am still observing, collecting data, and reflecting on the behavior related to responsibility and self-reliance in my classroom.

I developed this wondering through a reflection. My mentor teacher suggested I reflect on something that I noticed in the classroom during my teaching that particularly stood out to me. I began to comment on how I sometimes felt completely distracted by students who needed unnecessary immediate attention. I commented that I felt my lessons were being interrupted and school routines were being disturbed by the lack of personal problem solving occurring in the classroom. I wanted to look more into these occurrences, so I began recording when the interruptions were occurring and what caused the interruption. Upon analyzing these observations, I concluded that if my students demonstrated more responsibility and self-reliance, the unnecessary interruptions in the classroom would be minimized. I was unsure of how to step in and motivate students to take responsibility and become more self-reliant. Furthermore, I was not sure if it was possible to have fourth graders be accepting to taking responsibility more often. To begin to understand how a teacher might approach this situation, I turned to research.

According to a Rose and Gallup poll in 2002, the American public believes that the most important purpose of public education is “to prepare people to become responsible citizens.” Keeping this in mind, I conducted a survey to find out what students knew about responsibility

and how they viewed responsibility in school (Appendix A). I thought that if schools were to be successful in preparing students to become responsible citizens, the students had to be aware of what responsibility meant. Upon my analysis of these surveys, I realized that my students might have an unclear picture of what responsibility meant and looked like in the school setting.

Marvin Marshall, an accomplished educator and theorist, “maintains that most students are inclined to behave responsibly but require help to do so because they either don’t know how or else peer pressure or lack of self control overrides their better judgment” (Charles, 2005). If my students did not indicate the knowledge of how to behave responsibly, I could not expect them to demonstrate responsibility and use their better judgment. I also surveyed parents at home to see if students were held responsible for completing any tasks at home and to find out how the students were rewarded for completing tasks (Appendix B).

Concluding that my students had a narrow thought of what responsibility looked like in school led me to conduct a morning meeting to share with students the results of the survey and talk about responsibility in the classroom (Appendix C). According to Marvin Marshall, 2005, exposing students to the “Raise Responsibility System,” which is a hierarchy of social behaviors, should encourage students to demonstrate responsible behavior. The “Raise Responsibility System” helped me to describe to my students in a morning meeting what responsibility meant. I shared with the students that the highest level of responsibility involved having internal motivation and initiative for learning, as well as self-discipline. As a community, we talked about what we thought making smart choices and being responsible looked like in the classroom.

From there, the class had another morning meeting in which I introduced the idea that “responsible behavior benefits both the individual student and members of the school community” (Bear, Manning, Izard, 2003). The students shared with me some ideas of what this phrase meant and how making smart choices in school could help them. I then asked the

students for ways in which we could remember as a class to demonstrate responsibility. In another morning meeting, students gave me ideas about what has worked in the past and what other teachers use in their classrooms to remind students to be responsible. In addition, at the end of the week, I surveyed the class about the past week and how they thought they demonstrated smart decision-making in the classroom and concluded the survey with an opportunity for students to tell me anything they wanted (Appendix D). Most students replied with what method they thought would work for reminding the class to be responsible.

After reviewing the morning meeting notes and suggestions from the survey on how to remind the class to be responsible, I realized that the methods the students preferred were all extrinsic motivators. According to Marshall, 2005, the highest level in the “Raise Responsibility System” includes being intrinsically motivated. Therefore, I wanted to stay away from extrinsically motivating my students with parties and prizes for getting their work done and being on task. Again, I turned to experts to find ways that did not require me to constantly reward students with material things when they showed responsibility.

According to Marshall’s theory, “Discipline Through Raising Responsibility,” teachers should think and speak positively, control conversation by asking questions, ask reflective questions, emphasize a sense of personal responsibility through stressing responsibility not rules, and avoid telling students what to do (Charles, 2005). Studies conducted on teachers to determine how to increase self-reliance also show that self-reliance is obtained through community and reflection (Bunting, 1998, 2002). I wanted to combine as many of these elements as I could to see if I could motivate my students to demonstrate responsibility, but I still was not sure how to implement the tactics or even if they would work.

I presented my findings to another fourth grade teacher who has been teaching for ten years. She suggested coming up with a method where students could reflect daily. She also

suggested reminding students about what responsibility looks like by creating and displaying a poster. A few students had also suggested this during our morning meeting, so I decided that I would try creating a poster. Then I asked a tenured third grade teacher how she promoted self-reliance in her classroom and she responded, “I develop the question back to the students so that they have to rethink the problem themselves and come up with a solution. I also suggest that they ask a friend quietly for directions or send them back to their seats if they are not prepared for a lesson so that they feel the consequences of not being responsible” (Wilson, 2006). Both teachers gave me ideas that I found to tie in with the literature recommendations because they demonstrated Marshall’s teaching tactics.

As the days and weeks passed, I implemented a few teaching tactics and strategies suggested to me. I created a poster that reminded students what responsibility looked like (Appendix E), tried to give students a positive sense of accomplishment through a letter (Appendix F), created a reflection method for students to question if they were being responsible or not (Appendix G), redirected questions and used the term responsibility more often than previously. I also desired to keep the students aware of how their actions and choices affected the community so that they remembered that demonstrating responsibility helped both themselves and each other. In order to do this, I took a risk in implementing a sharing ball during morning meeting, knowing that I have some boys that lacked self-control and would be tempted to throw the ball around and abuse the privilege of having a football in the classroom (Appendix C). Again, I tried to curb this through talking about how to responsibly handle a football in the classroom. With all of these interventions, I had to collect data on what I did, how the students responded, and what behaviors followed.

Data Collection

I collected data in many ways. I started my inquiry by recording observations I saw in the classroom about situations in which students were relying too much on me to solve problems or were being irresponsible. These observations were quick notes written down in a notebook that described the situation as much as possible. I wrote these notes so that I would remember what situations led me to my inquiry and also to be able to compare to later in the project.

I used a student survey (Appendix A) to find out what students knew about responsibility. This survey consisted of three open ended questions asking students what they think their responsibilities are as a student, what skills they think a student needs to do a good job in school, and what ways a teacher can help a student become a better student. Twenty-five of my twenty-six students completed the survey after a morning meeting in which I explained the survey and the questions.

I also sent a survey home to the parents, attaching a letter explaining my project and an addressed envelope in which to return the survey (Appendix B). The letter explained that I was completing an inquiry project as part of my professional development, and by completing the attached survey and returning it to me, they would be able to help. The survey I sent home asked parents three open-ended questions regarding student responsibilities at home. I did not ask the parents to write their name or their child's name on it. I sent this survey home with all twenty-six students in their take home folders and asked that it be returned a week and a half later. I received nine surveys back from parents.

I addressed a lot of the questions I had about student responses in surveys and talked with my students about responsibility in morning meeting. During these discussion meetings, I had my laptop with me, and I created a file where I recorded as much as I could from what I asked and told my students as well as their responses during our discussions (Appendix C). As the

inquiry project continued and the discussions in morning meeting faded away, I began to record notes about student behavior in morning meeting whenever I had a chance. The observations were short notes about how students reacted to each other, respected each other, or used the meeting ball. These observation notes were kept in the morning meeting file on my computer so that I could easily access them. Furthermore, I dated each observation so that I could refer to a particular occurrence if necessary and see if there was change over time.

After a week of morning meeting discussions about responsibility, I surveyed my students again (Appendix D). This second survey asked each student to look back on the week and reflect on something that showed responsible behavior, reflect on a time when he/she could have shown more responsibility, set a goal for demonstrating responsibility in the future, think about what they could do to achieve the goal, and make a comment to the teacher about anything discussed in morning meeting during the past week. In a Friday morning meeting, I presented and explained the survey to twenty-five students and shortly thereafter, all twenty-five of my students completed and submitted their surveys.

While my students were out of the room, I wrote a letter complimenting them on their behavior (Appendix F). After the students returned from their special, a few students noticed the letter on the board and told others to read it. I jotted this observation down in my inquiry notebook (the same notebook that had other observations written down in it). I then selected a few students to interview to find out their thoughts on the letter. I wrote down the student responses in my notebook and then continued with the next lesson in the day.

Furthermore, I used my inquiry notebook and laptop to record observations about my use of the poster or the signs (Appendix E, Appendix G). The difficult part about taking observations on these two interventions in the classroom was that I was not able to notice if students were reading the poster at a random time or using the cards without my prompting. To

try to make up for this hole in data collection, I gave the students another survey to complete, asking them to report if they used the reflection cards and poster at all, and also to tell me what they now thought about responsibility in the schools (Appendix H). Again, this survey consisted of open-ended questions and was given after I explained the questions in a morning meeting.

Throughout the inquiry process, I had been recording observations in a notebook (Appendix I). These observations spanned from early experiences with students being irresponsible to occurrences where students took responsibility, as well as any occurrences that I observed that showed an intervention working or not working. It was in this notebook that I recorded not so obvious interventions, such as direct questioning back to a student and encouragement via stickers and verbal praises. I often wrote down conversations or scenarios that happened in the classroom that I thought were pertinent to my project.

Data Analysis

Analyzing the first student survey (Appendix A) was my first step in the direction of understanding how my students viewed responsibility in the school setting. In order to thoroughly look at my survey responses, I looked at each question individually. I then created piles based on similar student responses and recorded on a blank survey sheet what I noticed among the piles (Appendix A). In the first question, “What do you think your responsibilities are as a student,” I noted that the most frequent response involved listening to the teacher and following directions. Another response that was given on a few occasions involved students doing their best work and completing work. I also made a note that no one responded that being prepared for class was their responsibility. Based on these responses, I thought my students viewed listening and completing work as something that they must do in school. The second question asked students what skills they needed to have in order to do a good job in school.

Again, the most frequent response the students gave cited that students need to be active listeners. The next most widely given response dealt with students being smart or listing subjects that a student in which a student needs to be “good.” Five students responded that they need to finish their work. From these response trends, I recognized that a close to half my class recognized listening as being important in school, about a third of my class viewed doing well in school as a skill, and some students viewed finishing work as a skill, not a task. What really caught my attention with this set of results was the third of students that think being smart in school is what will allow them to do a good job in school. The third question on the survey asked how teachers could help one to become a better student. Eleven responses indicated the students wanted more free time and choice in what they learn; five students responded that they need more clear directions, instructions, and expectations; three students answered the question with specific skills they needed help on individually; one student wanted teachers not to pressure him; five responses were left blank or stated “I don’t know.” From these results, I became interested in the responses about needing more direction. I wondered which students answered this way because I knew that my mentor teacher and I make it a point to have directions given more than once, and we also allow for an opportunity for questions about directions before a task was begun. I wondered if the students who responded with wanting more recess, free time, and choice in the curriculum were taking the question seriously or just writing what they wished school was run. After I looked at the survey results, I shared them with my mentor, who was also surprised about the students responding to needing more directions. She suggested showing the students the connection between being responsible and behaving in school to having more fun activities and privileges. She also suggested that many students might have responded to the first two questions with active listening because it has been told to them so many times throughout their school career and is a citizenship value in the school. We postulated that this

response might have been given because the students may think that is how I wanted them to respond to the question. From this survey, I had the idea that students recognized listening as being important, but there were not many other ideas in the classroom about what responsibility was or looked like. Also, I was curious as to why some students related being smart to doing a good job in school.

Upon receiving the completed parent surveys (Appendix B), I analyzed each survey on an individual basis. I did not look at each question individually and try to group the surveys as I did with the student survey. Instead, I read the parent responses to all the questions and tried to get a feel for the level of responsibility that parents put on their child at home and what their ideas of responsibility were. For example, only one parent included the child finishing his/her homework as a responsibility. This child also had to help around the house and do so without a rewards system in place. Because the parent did not list exactly what the child had to do around the house, I was not sure how much responsibility the child had, but I did get the impression that the parents held the student accountable for completing his/her responsibilities. Other parents listed feeding pets and doing specific things around the house as responsibilities that their child has at home. One parent stated that her child was naturally motivated to feed the pets since the pets were directly hers but that same child did need constant reminding to do other tasks such as cleaning the bathroom and bedroom. This parent felt that the child was becoming more responsible with age and starting to do more around the house. A couple of parents said that their children received allowances but that those allowances are not earned, rather they are given. When elaborated upon, one parent says that his/her child can have allowance deducted if he/she does not complete his/her chores. Another parent responded that he/she has given up on connecting allowance to responsibility and rather lets the natural consequences occur, such as if the child did not set the table, he/she cannot eat until it is done. Another parent responded that

his/her child received an allowance every week but instead of taking the allowance away, the parent takes game time or friend time away from the child. I did notice as a group that the response to the third question was similar throughout all the survey responses. Of the parents who responded, all of them wanted their children to do their parts in the household without reminders and prompting. From these surveys, the overall picture I made was that my students do have responsibilities at home, and responsibility in the household is often related to chores. Furthermore, I got the impression that parents were reminding their children to keep up with their responsibilities and some were doing so through a punishment system (taking away allowance, reducing time on a game system, not allowing a friend to come over etc.). These surveys gave me a window into the home life of a few of my children and let me know that responsibility and accountability was introduced to them at home and therefore was not foreign to them.

Because I was not sure about why some of my students chose to respond in the first survey as they did, I decided to conduct a morning meeting about the survey results. From there, the class began discussing the topic of responsibility, and a few more morning meetings ensued regarding responsibility and accountability in the classroom. Because I was hearing the students' thoughts, while also introducing them to some ideas about responsibility, more specifically the levels of Marshall's "Raise Responsibility System," I typed notes on my laptop as the class discussed responsibility and strategies to improve accountability (Marshall, 2005). After each day, I printed out my notes (Appendix C). Writing notes on the morning meetings at the conclusion of each day was helpful because each day's meeting was still fresh in my head.

At the end of the week, I sat down with the observations to chart if I saw any changes in thinking or if there were any clues as to where I should direct my project. I noticed that I, not the students, concluded that smart meant making good choices from looking at the list of student

responses. On the second day of morning meeting, my notes indicated that we went around the circle to answer about what responsibility means. According to my notes, twelve of my twenty-four students gave answers, and of those twelve students, only three mentioned listening was a way of showing responsibility. I recorded that this number was significantly lower than the number of students that listed active listening as a responsibility of a student or as a skill needed to do a good job in school. I also wondered if my students made the connection yet about how responsibility could help them in school because only four students gave suggestions about how it helps in school. When I looked at the question I asked near the end of the morning meeting on March 15th about connecting good choices with being a responsible student, I realized it may have been too leading, and students may have just responded in agreement that good choices means being responsible because it may have seemed like that is how I wanted them to respond. On March 17th, the morning meeting observations consisted predominantly of suggestions from the students for ideas that will remind each other to be responsible and make good choices. I categorized the choices into three headings: supplies/materials, distractions, reminders. I gave the example when I started the morning meeting, "I will make sure I have a pencil each day and remind my neighbor to have one ready too." Reflecting on this example and noticing how eight of my students, the highest response, dealt with supplies and materials, I wondered if this response was given based on my example. The next most popular response included using actual material reminders for the students to notice in order to remember to be responsible. A popular suggestion included using letters on the board to motivate students to be responsible. The students described having a second grade teacher that wrote a word on the board each week, and if students were not behaving responsibly, she erased a letter from the word. The students received a reward based on the number of letters left on the board at the end of the week. This suggestion gained popularity as the students spoke about it. Some of my students remembered

being in the class that used it. I noted that students displayed enthusiasm about the idea. This suggested to me that my students were very rewards driven. When I laid out the observations side by side at the end of the week and looked back on the observations I typed during the morning meetings and the notes I wrote on them, I saw that the students were exposed to what responsibility meant and looked like, connected making good choices with responsibility, and agreed that being smart and getting grades is not the only skill needed to do well in school. From the combination of notes and observations, I also realized that my students had been exposed to responsibility and self-reliance in the past schooling, but the introduction was done through a system of rewards and punishments, systems that were not physically in place in our fourth grade classroom.

I used the morning meeting observation analysis to help me decide what interventions I would use in order to try to promote responsibility and self-reliance in the classroom. I did not want to do the letters on the board idea because after contemplating it and considering research, I thought of too many downfalls to using that extrinsic rewards system. I did like the other ideas students submitted about having signs and reminders around the classroom.

At the conclusion of the week of morning meetings that talked about responsibility, I gave my students another survey questioning about responsibility they had shown in the past week and what they wanted to work on to show their teachers they are responsible in the upcoming weeks. Again, to analyze this survey, I looked at the responses and grouped similar responses, and then I recorded trends I saw among piles on a blank survey (Appendix D). From the results of this survey, I noticed that nine of my students finished their work that week and felt responsible because of it. At the same time, seven of my students responded that they could have done a better job and could have been more responsible with getting their work done. Other demonstrated responsible behaviors mentioned by some students included being a good

friend, avoiding talking to friends when they should not have been, and raising one's hand to talk rather than blurting out. Again, on the flip side, seven students mentioned they needed to be more responsible when it comes to talking with friends, being organized, and listening in the future. Most people used what they had listed as something they did not do very responsibly in the past week as a goal to have for the following week. To accomplish the goal, twenty students listed personal actions that directly related to showing more responsibility. Of these twenty personal actions, only two of the actions listed included making reminders for one. This second survey also confirmed an observation that I made in regards to the enthusiasm about writing an incentive word on the board and taking away letters when the students were irresponsible. Of the twenty-five people who took the survey, ten of the respondents commented on wanting the incentive word and eight people did not answer the question. This final question simply asked students to tell the teacher something if they wanted to, and I noticed from breaking down the answers into similar piles that all piles had something to do with how to remind students to be responsible.

For the next part of analyzing the surveys, I placed the first student survey results next to the results of the second survey and made some notes comparing the two surveys (Appendix D). This comparison was done with the intention of seeing if there was any change in thinking among my students after the efforts of the morning meeting discussions. I created two columns on my paper in which to take notes about each survey. I looked at what the students listed as to what responsibility entailed before the meetings and compared the responses to what actions the students described as being responsible behaviors they exhibited in the past week or want to show in the upcoming week. Because I noticed in my analysis that the final question in the second survey turned into what the teacher can do to remind students to be responsible, I compared those results with the first survey's results to the final question asking how a teacher

can help make the respondent a better student. I took notes about each survey in the survey's respective column and linked any information that I thought would be comparable with arrows and symbols, such as circles. I noticed that the second survey recognized a few more diverse behaviors as responsible behaviors than in the first survey. Fewer students gave the common answer of "active listening" than before. I linked these two notes together. Furthermore, the students telling the teacher to remind them somehow to be more responsible replaced the answers regarding the teacher giving more free and choice time to the students. Students could have told their teacher anything in the final question on the second survey and could have used the opportunity to tell the teacher again how much they wanted more free time and choice in the curriculum, but instead, the students made suggestions on how the teacher could increase responsibility in the classroom. For that reason, on the comparison sheet, I linked these observations together as well.

I used a notebook to record observations I noticed after the morning meeting discussions and throughout the process of trying different interventions. These observations were usually anecdotal notes about something that I noticed as a result of an intervention. One observation actually took the form of an interview of my students' reactions to a letter I wrote on the board commending the students for excellent behavior (Appendix F). I was able to immediately look at what I had recorded from each of the students to decide that the letter was effective in our classroom (Appendix F). At the end of the day, I read back what the students told me about the letter and decided not to pursue the strategy because I did not have very much positive feedback on it.

Throughout the weeks, I recorded many anecdotal observations about what I noticed in the classroom (Appendix I). Reading through the observations in a sequential order helped me to analyze any change in the classroom. After a sequential read through of my observations, I cut

the observations apart from each other and grouped them together according to what the observation meant (see Appendix I for groups and notes). For example, in the beginning stages of my inquiry process, I made many notes about students returning from support classes and immediately approaching a teacher to find out directions, sometimes interrupting the teacher. In my notes, I wrote about an intervention we implemented in order to try to lessen the interruption caused by the returning students. The intervention consisted of asking them to all return to and enter the classroom as an entire group, and then sit down quietly until the teacher can get to the group to give them directions. This intervention was followed by observations that students did in fact return and teacher interruptions by this group of students were reduced. These observations dealing with this particular situation were cut and grouped together.

Another group of observations included the notes I took about using the strategy suggested to me by a third grade teacher of questioning the student to have the student come up with a solution on his/her own. I noticed through these observations that often times the students were able to think of a solution and tell the solution to me, or the students were able to do a desired behavior immediately without response after I had questioned them back.

I also wrote observations about how I tried to encourage and reward students for responsible behavior. I cut these observations and placed them together in a group so that I could find out about extrinsic motivation factors increasing accountability and responsibility. In these observations, I noted what I did and the reaction to the sticker rewards or verbal praises from the students. I decided to use this intervention as a result of the morning meeting when students suggested to me to use the word on the board as a reminder to be responsible and to give them a prize if they were successful at keeping letters on the board. The stickers were my materialistic reward to them, and my verbal recognition was another attempt of mine to reward the students with praise. From looking at these observations together, I was able to determine if

external motivation factors, even if as little as verbal recognition or stickers, helped to motivate students to complete their work.

Other groups of observations that were cut and placed together were observations that dealt with using the football in morning meeting (Appendix C), student reactions to the poster (Appendix E), student reactions to the reflection signs (Appendix G), and the use of the word responsible in the classroom. By grouping my observations together, I was able to see which interventions I used, which were successful, which were not successful, and which seemed to have no pull either way on affecting students' responsibility in the classroom. Having the interventions and observations laid out in groups helped me to make claims and to decide on future teaching implications for some of the interventions used to increase student responsibility and accountability.

Because I did not have many observations regarding the reflection signs and posters, I surveyed my students to inquire about the usefulness of the signs and posters and to find out their impressions of student responsibility and accountability now that we had been emphasizing it for a few weeks (Appendix H). To analyze the results of this survey, I looked at the first question on all the surveys and then grouped similar responses together and took notes on those responses for myself. I repeated this process, grouping similar answers and recording what I noticed among the piles for the remainder of the questions on the survey (Appendix H). For question one, I noted that only nine students responded that they did find the reflection cards helpful, thirteen students said no they were not helpful, and two said no they were not helpful because they got distracted reading them. The students that said that the cards were not helpful cited that the cards were annoying to have on desks or they did not pay attention the cards. All students who responded no to question one also responded that the cards did not help to motivate them to stay on task. Of the nine people who responded yes to question one, seven said yes the cards were

motivating, and two people said no because other people did not use the cards. Question three asked students if they read the poster after the initial reading of it in morning meeting. Thirteen of the twenty-four respondents say they did not read the poster again. One girl said she did not need to read the poster because when she looked at it, she remembered what was on it. Eight students said that they did look at the poster, and most of these students said they read it again while they were on the carpet in writing or math. Two students did not respond to the third question. The fourth question asked students what they learned about being responsible in school. Answers ranged from “yes” to “you get done work faster.” Only one student left this question blank, but one student replied with “don’t know” and six students replied with “nothing.” The fifth question asked students if and how they thought they demonstrated responsibility to the teachers. The twenty-four respondents gave eighteen different responses. These answers included following directions, staying on task, keeping one’s desk clean, and getting the job done.

I further analyzed this survey by comparing the results with the results of surveys one and two. In order to do this, I looked at my two-column note page on the original surveys (Appendix D) and created a third sheet of paper for my third survey (Appendix H). Again, I linked data among the surveys to see if there was an increase in any responses or a trend among responses. I noticed that from the first survey, students identified a larger range of behaviors as responsible behaviors. In comparison to the second survey, about the same number of different responses were given for how to show responsibility or what actions count as being responsible. I was able to observe from the comparison of the three surveys that students did begin to identify more responsible behaviors and identified less with doing well in school as necessary and responsible.

What I Have Learned

Claim A: *Verbal cues can be effective tools in promoting responsibility and self-reliance in the classroom.*

Looking through my anecdotal observation data (Appendix I), I noticed that both verbal reflective questioning back to students and verbal recognition of a peer demonstrating responsibility were successful strategies in promoting responsibility. A third grade teacher suggested that I ask a student who is in need of help with problem solving skills a reflective question back to him/her to promote independence and initiative of action. As often as I could, I used this strategy and recorded its outcome in my observation notebook (Appendix I). I noticed throughout my observations that often times my questioning or prompting back the student led to the student making his/her own decision to solve the problem. For example, one observation notes that a student dropped a grape during snack time and approached me to tell me about it. Instead of telling her what to do, I asked her if she picked it up which led her to say “no” and pick up the grape. In an observation made at an earlier date, this same student dropped a cupcake and left it on the ground, not picking it up at all (Appendix I). Having this comparative data leads me to believe that the student may have been inclined to leave the grape on the ground had I not questioned her about picking it up. Another example from early February showed a student making a decision after I asked her what she should do and told her to make a better choice than not writing anything down. She then made the choice to go get a pencil, and I recognized her wise decision.

In another incident, a girl interrupted my math lesson to tell me that she did not have a pencil. At that point in the lesson we were on the carpet, and a pencil was not needed. Later on in the same class period, the class transitioned back to do seat work, and the girl approached me again to say she did not have a pencil. I asked her what she was going to do, and she responded,

“I don’t know.” I then prompted her to find out what her options were, which led her to say “get a pencil from the bin or ask a friend.” I then asked her which one she was going to choose, and she decided to ask a friend. The girl then borrowed a pencil from a friend and successfully completed the task. This record shows me that the student was choosing not to take responsibility and problem solve on her own, rather she was relying on me for an answer. My questioning led her to figure out her own options and make a decision to solve her own problem. Because the students initially responded that she did not know what to do but then was able to come up with options that she could take, I conclude that she was capable of taking responsibility to problem solve but did not, and it was my verbal prompting that led her to finding her own solution.

In addition to reflective questioning to promote responsibility in decision-making and problem solving, I also noticed that when I praised a student for being responsible, other students often reacted (Appendix I). As noted in my records, I commended three girls for staying in for recess to finish their work that was past due. I described the girls as responsible and great role models and asked students to give the girls a round of applause. Later that day, a student who normally loves to go out to recess stayed in to finish his Japanese calendar page and when I praised him, he asked if there was any other work that he should do. Furthermore, that same day, a female student in my class that is not easily motivated asked me if she could take home her snowman-writing piece to finish it. Another group of observations noted that I recognized two students in morning meeting for having all their work complete and noted them as being responsible. Because one of these students is typically the class clown, the students were shocked when I said his name. Later that day, three students asked to stay in for recess to finish their writing pieces that were due earlier in the week. Initial survey responses (Appendix A) included my students requesting more free time and recess. These responses demonstrate how

much my students value their recess. To have students voluntarily give up their recess time to complete work is very unusual. Because it occurred on days when I commended classmates for being responsible and finishing work, I conclude that recognizing responsibility of members in a peer group in front of the others in that peer group helps to promote students to take responsibility in completing their assignments.

Claim B: *Morning meeting is an effective place for transmitting information (about responsibility and self-reliance) through discussion.*

Conducting a morning meeting is part of a daily routine in my classroom. Before embarking on this inquiry project, I had not used morning meeting for anything other than community building. A typical morning meeting involved sharing, morning message, agenda, and a greeting. For my inquiry project, I wanted to talk to the students about being more responsible and self-reliant, and I chose to do so during morning meeting. I decided morning meeting would be an appropriate place for the discussions about responsibility and accountability because it is a time when the entire class is together and sitting in a circle ready to listen to each other. Furthermore, I have been conducting morning meeting since fall semester, and depending on the length of a morning meeting, there may be extra time before writing begins to engage students in a discussion. This extra time allowed me to introduce surveys and ideas in morning meeting and then have the students complete the survey without taking away valuable instructional time. I was surprised with the effectiveness of using morning meeting to stimulate ideas among the students about responsibility and to transmit information to the students about good choices and responsibility in school.

The morning meeting observations display the questions I asked my students during this time as well as their responses (Appendix C). Reviewing these notes, I noticed that through asking meaningful questions, I was able to stimulate discussion on a topic among my students.

Prior to this inquiry, when I asked a student to think about a question, it was usually to add to the greeting (say good morning to the class and tell us your favorite music genre). This inquiry led me to ask questions such as “What does it mean to be smart?” and “What does making good choices look like?” Both these questions were asked during the morning meeting, and a discussion among the students ensued about the topic. Furthermore, after I asked a question to the students, the observation notes show that usually more than one student responded with ideas. Just analyzing what occurred during the morning meeting led me to conclude that morning meeting is an effective way to generate conversation and engagement in a topic (which in my case was responsibility) related to a factor other than community building.

The morning meeting notes show how I questioned the students on their survey responses and asked them about their ideas (Appendix C). As the morning meetings were carried out throughout the week, I also began to lead a discussion about what responsibility looked like in school and why it was important. The morning meeting notes show that student participation in the discussions ultimately led to the transmitting of information and generating of ideas about responsibility. For example, on March 15, I asked students what responsibility looked like in school and twelve students made suggestions to answer the question. Similar responses were given in the third student survey (Appendix H). Comparing the third survey to the first survey, the range of responses as to what responsibility looks like in school did increase. Because the third survey results were similar to the morning meeting discussion suggestions, I propose that the morning meeting discussion helped the students to identify the different aspects of student responsibility.

Claim C: *Promoting responsibility through student reflection has the potential to be successful if the written reflection reminders are supplemented with verbal prompts.*

On each desk set, two question reflection signs displayed five color-coded questions that

prompted a student to ask himself/herself a question to determine if he/she was behaving responsibly. Often times, if the students were working independently and I saw an off task student, I referred them to the sign and directed them to read and reflect on a certain colored question. As my observational records show, if I asked the student to look at a question, it usually directed the student back on task (Appendix G). I also sometimes asked the questions directly to the students. For example, I asked a student to read the blue question and he replied “no” and began working again, this time talking less. My reflection on March 29th of using this redirection reflection technique summarizes the success and potential of this strategy: “I like these cards because I do not have to tell the students to get back on track or focus anymore. Instead, I ask them to reflect, and they redirect themselves and make their own decision to begin working again” (Appendix G).

I also created a poster (Appendix E) of ways for the students to show the teachers that they were responsible. I surveyed the students about their use of this survey after it was initially presented to the class, and over half of the students who responded to the survey question said they did not look at the poster again (Appendix H). Unlike the reflection question signs, after I initially introduced the poster, I did not point the poster out to the students again or ask them to read a particular part of it, and survey results showed that over half of the respondents did not use the poster. As shown above with the reflection signs, if I pointed out a particular question on the sign, the students were forced to look at the questions to reflect upon themselves. There was no verbal cue from me to use the poster, and so the students did not use it.

Teaching Implications

As one parent commented on his/her reply to the parent survey, “I am quite concerned with this nurtured generation of children who believe that every task assigned is open for debate”

(Appendix B). I share much of the same thoughts as this parent and believe that promoting responsibility and self-reliance in the students in my classroom will be important year after year. In order to do this, I will start in the beginning of the year so that my students do not fall into a habit of reliance on me or other adults in the room for problem solving. Furthermore, because I had success talking about responsibility in the morning meeting setting, I will use that setting to discuss with my students expectations or issues in the classroom, as well as curriculum related matters. The morning meeting setting proved to be an area where I had all the students' attention and a place that was easy for discussion because of the circular sitting arrangement.

Expert studies showed that reflection promotes self-reliance (Bunting, 1998, 2002). Furthermore, an experienced third grade teacher at Park Forest Elementary School suggested asking students reflective questions to encourage the students to create their own possibilities for solutions to the problem (Wilson, 2006). In my inquiry project, I also seemed to have success with student reflection to promote self-reliance and responsibility. In my future teaching, I will continue to ask the students reflective questions when they approach me to solve a problem that they have the ability to solve themselves. Furthermore, because the reflection signs seemed to redirect students back to being on task and completing their work, especially when I directed a student to read a certain question, I will use these reflection signs again. However, because many students responded that having the physical sign on their desk set became annoying, in my future classroom, I will add the reflection questions to the desk strip laminated on the desktop. If it is laminated to the desktop, similar to their nametags, it will not be a hindrance to whose desk it is on, and there will not be the issue of it continually falling down onto the floor. With the questions on the desktop, I will still be able to direct students to look at and think about a particular colored question on their desk.

New Wonderings

After collecting data, analyzing my data, and making claims, I still have questions related to promoting responsibility and self-reliance in the classroom.

Some new wonderings I have include:

- Does promoting self-reliance and responsibility affect the quality of student work?
- Does the amount of adults in the classroom affect how dependent students are on adults for problem solving?
- Are some students more prone to be more self-reliant than others (oldest children versus youngest children, boy versus girls etc)?
 - Is there a way to recognize these students as responsible role models so that others students will want to follow their lead?

References

- Bear, G., Manning, M., & Izard C. (2003). Responsible behavior: the importance of social cognition and emotion. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 18(2), 140-157.
- Bunting, C. (1998). Teaching with self- reliance. *Education Week*, 18(13), 26.
- Bunting, C. (2002). From direction overload to self-reliance. *The Clearing House*, 75(5), 274-276.
- Charles, C.M. (2005). Chapter six: Marvin Marshall's discipline thought raising responsibility. *Building classroom discipline*. 8th ed. Boston: Pearson.
- Hartman, Brenda. (2006). Park Forest Elementary School.
- Marshall, M. (2005). Discipline without stress, punishments, or rewards. *The Clearing House*, 79(1), 51-54.
- Rose, L.C., & Gallup, A. M. (2000). The 32nd annual Phi Delta Kappa/ Gallup Poll of the public's attitudes toward public schools. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 82, 41-66.
- Wilson, Kim. (2006). Park Forest Elementary School.