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Effects of Peace Education and Grace and Courtesy Education on Social Problem-Solving Skills and Social Awareness

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Effects of Peace Education and Grace and Courtesy Education on Social Problem-Solving Skills
and Social Awareness

An Action Research Report

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Effects of Peace Education and Grace and Courtesy Education on Social Problem-Solving Skills
and Social Awareness

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In fulfillment of final requirements for the MAED degree

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Abstract

This action research studied the impact of peace education and portions of the Positive Discipline curriculum in a three-six primary Montessori classroom. During five weeks of implementing the research, sixteen students participated in class meetings for twenty minutes a day. The peace table activities and wheel of choice lessons were conducted individually and as a whole class. The peace table activities included a set of mini dishes on a tray, a rain stick, and a peace rose. The wheel of choice consisted of pictures and words of examples of what students could choose to help them solve problems. A few examples are count to ten, apologize, ask for help, and write your name on the agenda. Implementing the presentations into the classroom environment became a work for the students to use if needed and did not occur daily. As a work choice, the previous activities were available on tables and children were allowed to choose the work as many times as they felt was necessary. The research began with baseline data collection through SWIS (School Wide Information System) referral records, student interviews, and student surveys. Sources of data obtained during the study included interviews, surveys, observation tally sheets, and a field journal. The results presented an increase in social awareness and problem-solving skills through the class meetings. Students began acknowledging problems and brainstorming solutions. Class meetings will continue daily to extend the positive problem-solving capabilities and mindfulness students developed in their classroom community.

Keywords: peace education, Positive Discipline curriculum, social awareness, problem-solving skills, class meetings

A Montessori Children's House classroom represents independence, confidence, and the comfort of home. As children attain inner order, concentration, coordination, and independence, they are crafting their inner selves. In the midst of strengthening their hand muscles and hand-eye coordination, refining their eleven senses (visual, chromatic, tactile, auditory, baric, thermic, stereognostic, kinesthetic, olfactory, gustatory, equilibrium and direction), and learning how to be respectful citizens to themselves, to others, and to their environment, Montessori children acquire traditional academics. Walking into a classroom lit with soft light from lamps and humming with purposeful movements allows an observer to witness the buzzing of active work, conversation, and the pride of self-sufficiency. Ideally, the Montessori guide's (teacher's) presence fades into the background unless presenting lessons. What does a guide do when reality hits and children seek adults to intervene because of fighting, yelling, and disagreements? Teachers model and present grace and courtesy. Grace and courtesy is a phrase used to define social manners. Grace and courtesy lessons are exercises designed to help refine children's need for order. One example would be presenting a student how to walk around a rug. Rugs are used to outline a student's workspace. The work is placed on the rug to help keep the environment clean. When students walk around rugs, they learn how to exhibit awareness and socially respect for others, environment, and materials. Students internalize a sense of order when they walk around a rug without disturbing classmates or materials laid out on the rug. Children can engage in social structures surrounding them to attain an enriched sense of awareness of those around them. What happens when there are children who require additional guidance? Teachers may implement other curricula or strategies in the environment pertaining to redirection and learning new behaviors. This implementation may allow the children to become socially aware and able to solve social problems independently through the engagement of additional materials.

Based on the observations and reflections in my Children's House (preschool and kindergarten) classroom, the students lack the awareness and respect for others and their environment. Children who are not at peace with themselves and children who do not demonstrate grace and courtesy to their surroundings and others affect multiple aspects of the classroom. The consistent interruptions and disturbances affect children's concentration, space, work, and materials. Self-centered thoughts and attitudes some children have toward their peers, environment, and materials are a part of their stage of development. However, when actions of running into others, stepping on others' rugs, interrupting friends' concentration, touching others' works, and running and skipping in the classroom affect the learning of others, some children require extra attention and concentration on their grace and courtesy, and social awareness.

Normalized children have stated that it is challenging for them to concentrate on their work due to the dynamics of the classroom. A normalized child is a person who has fully internalized order, concentration, coordination, and independence (OCCI). The teacher can observe a normalized child, give a presentation (lesson), and continue observing. Children who are not yet normalized could be the result of children having difficulty controlling their whole bodies. The lack of exposure and demonstrations of respecting others, environments, and materials may be the result of behaviors non-normalized children express. Behaviors of non-normalized children could be the result of less strict guidelines they are expected to follow outside the classroom. Undesired behaviors could also be the result of children looking up to and following a non-normalized child.

The Montessori school where I work serves preschool through middle school. From September 2015 through April 2016 there was a total of 178 behavioral (office) referrals

documented between preschool and eighth-grade students. Children's House students received 26 (14.61%) of these documented referrals, which is the fourth largest number of referrals within the Montessori school. Looking at the overall findings of office referrals, Children's House increased to the second highest with 18.18%. The grade with the most major referrals was fourth grade at 21.59%. The high percentages of referrals in Children's House confirm the need for deeper direction and support for children's problem-solving skills and social awareness.

Literature Review

In many of today's schools, there is an overemphasis on test scores. This overemphasis puts pressure on teachers to teach to the test. Disregarding critical skills which lead to students' success in life may be a result of banking on test scores. One of these important factors is Social Emotional Learning (SEL) (Kendziora, Weissberg, Ji, & Dusenbury, 2011). In 2007, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL] revealed data from a recent national poll. The Partnership for 21st Century Skills conducted a national poll in 2006, which found 80% of respondents believe that today's school content should be different than the content taught 20 years ago. The poll revealed critical thinking, problem-solving, social responsibility, teamwork, self-direction, and global awareness are as important as everyday academics (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2007). With the recognition of the importance of SEL on the rise, schools have access to academic scores of children to where they have the ability to provide support and promote mental health for children. Academic tests ignore the acknowledgment of social and emotional abilities. The acknowledgment and care for students' mental health fall onto school faculty. SEL is the process of developing competencies such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness,

relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2007; CASEL, 2008; Kendziora, et al., 2001).

The 1999 surgeon general's report showed more than half of lifetime mental disorder cases begin at age 14 and three-quarters by age 24. This recognition of the increase in mental health cases, during the last two decades, within children supports the implementation of SEL programs within schools. SEL programs are a type of peace education and foster coping skills that are needed to manage daily challenges. When implementing SEL programs, the number of children who require early intervention may decrease due to the coping skills acquired; at the same time, the children's engagement in a caring school environment increases (CASEL, 2008). Although there is a sufficient amount of research supporting peace education, there seems to be a gap between the improvement of children's social skills when comparing preschool to K-12 education. The findings of a state scan of SEL standards conducted by CASEL revealed that "the preschool environment is far ahead of the K-12 educational system in establishing comprehensive standards for children's social and emotional development...49 states and the District of Columbia currently have standards for children's social and emotional development" (Kendziora, et al., 2011, p. 2). The research opens an improvement door for K-12 education. The literature stated, "Illinois is the only state that has developed a comprehensive set of free-standing K-12 SEL standards" (Kendziora, et al., 2011, p. 2). There is a cohesiveness between academics and SEL. The ability to learn social and emotional skills leads to a successful academic career. Throughout children's lives they will enter situations where social, emotional, math, reading, and science skills will be needed. Children are prepared for life and success when given proper problem-solving skills. (CASEL, 2007; CASEL, 2008; Kendziora, et al, 2011; Lemmon, & Green, 2015; Oord, 2014).

The topics discussed within the literature review are the importance of peace education, established peace curricula, a connection to the Montessori theory, Positive Discipline curriculum, I Can Problem Solve curriculum, Positive Education Foundation curriculum, Conscious Discipline curriculum, and the conclusion. These curricula are forms of SEL programs because they focus on the social-emotional health of children.

Importance of Peace Education

How and why is peace education relevant? The Peace Education State of the Field and Lessons Learned report from the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) investigates how teaching peace has changed from war to citizenship and human rights over the past several decades. With the increase of peace programs in schools, peace education curriculums range from classroom teachings and training for teachers to hands-on skill-building for students. In other words, a narrative version of teaching peace has moved to a real-life approach to peace education (Fitzduff, & Jean, 2011; Oord, 2014). Implementing peace education in schools allows teachers to begin the focus on skills for generating resolutions that will aid children through their life journeys. Social skills, peacemaking, and conflict resolutions are ongoing aspects of life. The ability to understand others' perspectives is a skill that takes daily practice, just like academic skills. The earlier we develop these skills and continue to refine them, the closer we come to being a peaceful society (Fitzduff, & Jean, 2011; Lemmon, & Green, 2015; Oord, 2014).

Established Peace Curricula

Researchers and teachers have tried to come to a conclusion for how best to guide and teach children the necessary skills for identifying social problems, fashioning solutions, coexisting peacefully in a classroom community, and attaining social awareness by

implementing various research-based programs (Bernard-Opitz, Sriram, & Nakhoda-Sapuan, 2001; Caldarella, Page, & Gunter, 2012; Chavez, 2014; Hoffman, Hutchinson, & Reiss, 2005; Gfroerer, Nelsen, & Kern, 2013; Lemmon & Green, 2015; Oord, 2014; Pickens, 2009; Vestal & Jones, 2004). A few of these curricula are the Positive Discipline curriculum, the I Can Problem Solve program, the Peace Education Foundation curriculum, and the Conscious Discipline curriculum.

The literature indicated that implementing peace lessons, modeling grace and courtesy, and changing dialogues used while working on solutions improves children's skills to resolve social conflict independently. The literature also indicated increases in children's awareness of their environments and peers (Caldarella, et al., 2012; Gfroerer, et al., 2013; Pickens, 2009; Vestal & Jones, 2004). Peace education is defined as an "attempt to reduce all forms of violence that exist in society... [with the aim] to transform a student's attitude to the world" (Oord, 2014, p. 9 & 12). Discussions center on how peace education should be open-ended, relevant, and experiential (Oord, 2014). Literature confirms that "dialoguing is a two-way conversation... [and] helps children associate how they think with what they do and how they behave" (ICPS, 2002). Concentration was also found to improve, alongside an increase in positive behavior. Early intervention is crucial for students and teachers to instill concentration and positive behavior within themselves and children (Caldarella, et al., 2012; Gfroerer. et al., 2013; Hoffman, et al., 2005; Pickens, 2009; Vestal & Jones, 2004). According to Lemmon and Green (2015), "Social skills training is most effective when it is implemented in preschool or kindergarten...because preschool education emphasizes social development rather than academic achievement" (p. 68). An imperative challenge for teachers is to provide prosocial skills to their

youngest students to increase the students' emotional and social competence (Gfroerer, et al., 2013).

Connection to the Montessori Theory

An abundance of information and strategies support the implementation of a peaceful atmosphere in classrooms. Rooted within the Montessori curriculum are some of these strategies. Other strategies the literature discussed have the ability to commingle smoothly with the Montessori theory. Some researchers (e.g., Caldarella, et al., 2012; Nelsen, Lott, & Glenn, 2013; Vestal & Jones, 2004) emphasize the spiritual preparation and role of the teacher and how it related to students' success in school. The previous literature connects to Maria Montessori's theory of how crucial it is for teachers to come into the classroom spiritually prepared. A Montessori guide extends his/her poise when his/her presence is inherently peaceful. The literature included a known quote from Rudolf Dreikurs: "It is best never to do for a child what the child can do for him- or herself" (Nelsen, et al., 2013, p. 93). This quote is rooted in the Montessori theory of the spiritually prepared teacher. Teachers prepare themselves and the environment so students can instill independence. Along with Dreikurs and Montessori, another resource emphasized the importance of a teacher's preparation. A part of this preparation is educating the teacher before educating a child. "Teachers must look to themselves for change before they expect a change in the student's behavior...teachers must practice self-composure [and] they must strengthen their ability to offer encouragement to others... [and] develop assertive behavior" (Hoffman, et al., 2005, p. 42).

Positive Discipline

Innovations of positive outcomes are rooted in the concern for others. One's accountability and cooperation are learned through the process of working together when solving

problems and coping with stressors (Gfroerer, et al., 2014). Positive Discipline curriculum (PD) helps children discover a sense of belonging, perceptions of others, coping skills, focus on solutions rather than consequences, and positive relationships (Gfroerer, et al., 2014; Nelsen, et al., 2013). Parent and teacher experiences confirm the positive impact and increase on children's social problem-solving skills learned through PD. When a person develops a sense of belonging and coping resources, he/she can acquire achievement, motivation, school success, and become mentally healthier (Gfroerer, et al., 2014). A few of the strategies embedded in this curriculum are class meetings, a positive time-out, and the wheel of choice. The first strategy is holding class meetings. These meetings consist of eight skills: forming a circle, practicing compliments and appreciations, respecting differences, using respectful communication skills, focusing on solutions, role-playing, and brainstorming, using the agenda and class meeting format, and understanding and using the four mistaken goals. During the process of brainstorming and sharing, children learn about their peers' perspectives and how to cope with life's problems (Gfroerer, et al., 2014; Nelsen, et al., 2013). Gfroerer, et al. (2014) stated that during the class meetings, children are provided with "an opportunity to experience social support and hear how others view and solve problems as well as cope with school stressors" (p. 299). The second strategy is providing a positive time-out. A positive time-out is a place that the class creates and names. A positive time-out allows a child to calm down and feel better and to acquire the skills for self-regulation. Coaching children on ways to calm down allows them to stay connected while struggling (Gfroerer, et al., 2014). Internalizing this ability to stay calm and focused teaches children how important it is to work together to resolve conflicts (Gfroerer, et al., 2014; Nelsen, et al., 2013). The third strategy is the wheel of choice. This wheel provides children with visuals and words that help students feel empowered to solve their problems. Children look

at the wheel and choose which solution they feel fits their situation. The wheel of choice is a building block that helps teach respect for others, cooperation, and confidence in one's capabilities.

I Can Problem Solve (ICPS)

ICPS implements games, role plays, and puppet experiences. These strategies all focus on developing the students' interpersonal cognitive problem-solving skills (Program Overview, April 8, 2016). The dialogue consists of asking about feelings, the problem that has arisen, solutions, and consequences. A positive effect is seen in conflict resolution skills when the teachers' instruction, based on the ICPS curriculum, changes the environment (Vestal & Jones, 2004). The results on the effect of teachers' education showed a "higher number of relevant solutions" (Vestal & Jones, 2004, p. 137). When teachers inherit students with withdrawal, tantrums, and lack of emotional recognition, the dialogues proposed in ICPS can address these social issues and improve children's social skills (Bernard-Opitz, et al., 2001).

Peace Education Foundation (PEF)

The mission of the PEF program is to provide materials and training that allow conflict resolution to be a part of children's lifestyle choices (Barnett, Adler, Easton, & Howard, 2001). The improvements of interpersonal problem-solving skills come from peer teaching. This peer-teaching allows children to solve problems in a peaceful manner (Barnett, et al., 2001). Children can increase their self-esteem, social skills, and acceptances of others' differences through peer teaching (Barnett, et al., 2001). Since 1991, there has been a 40% increase in conflict resolution programs implemented in schools (Barnett, et al., 2001). Barnett, et al. provided a variety of reported data that shows an 80% decrease of conflicts teachers needed to manage after a PEF training and a 95% decrease of conflicts principals were required to manage (Barnett, et al.,

2001). Knowing how to handle conflict is portrayed within the PEF model and enhances important relationships (Barnett, et al., 2001). To accomplish self-regulation, one needs to acquire how to conform to the social standards of a classroom (Pickens, 2009). Pickens (2009) concluded that children “improved social cooperation, social interaction, and social independence...preschoolers showed greater self-control, followed rules and took turns, exhibited more independence in play and school work, and showed more positive interaction with teachers and peers” (p. 272).

Conscious Discipline

Caldarella, et al. (2012) stated that Conscious Discipline’s main component “is a positive relational climate called the school family” (p. 592). Caldarella, et al. (2012) stated that the seven basic skills teach a design “to help individuals become more conscious of their inner state, manage their emotions in a healthy and appropriate way, and learn to be proactive” (pp. 591-592). Chavez (2014) showed that the “quality of student teacher interaction, social and emotional behavior of students, and improved classroom climate” (p. 22) improves when implementing Conscious Discipline.

Conclusion

In my action research, I was trying to determine how I can better guide and teach children the skills to identify a social problem, fashion solutions, coexist peacefully in a classroom community, and attain social awareness. Based on the research, there are numerous techniques to guide children to fashion solutions to social issues and to attain social awareness. Based on the focus of independent skills instilled within the strategies, the chosen curriculum for this action research project was Positive Discipline. Children learned how to use the Positive Discipline tools, were encouraged to help others use the tools, and are guided through situations

until they arrived at a solution. Children take ownership of their actions through discovering what tools assist them to solve a problem independently. Gfroerer (2014) states, “Positive Discipline teaches children how to become responsible, respectful, and resourceful” (p. 296). This curriculum has an outcome of instant gratification of changed behavior and an emphasis on long-term results through the focus on communication skills, problem-solving skills, sense of belonging, and self-reliance. Children learn how to be responsible, respectful, and resourceful (Gfroerer, et al., 2014; Nelsen, Lott, & Glenn, 2013). My action research contributes to the gap in previous research about the need for SEL programs in K-12 education because my research includes kindergarten students and shows that early interventions for SEL are essential.

My goal for my three to six-year-old students was to attain an awareness of their peers and their environment. I planned to accomplish this through implementing strategies based on peace, grace, and courtesy lessons daily and the Positive Discipline curriculum. The first strategy included was class meetings. I concentrated on sharing compliments and helped friends solve problems by sharing ideas for solutions. I adapted the class meetings to concentrate on the two previous categories; compliments and solving problems. I was able to shorten the time period of the meetings. The second strategy was the wheel of choice. I simplified the wheel to contain six options for students to choose from when they need help deciding what approach to us to help them solve a problem. The third strategy was the peace table. This table was a place to cool down, collect oneself, and to become peaceful. The previous three strategies are found in the Positive Discipline curriculum. This curriculum is one of many ways to implement peace education.

The research question at hand is - What effects will peace education have on social problem-solving skills in a primary Montessori classroom? The intended outcome of

implementing the Positive Discipline curriculum was for students to walk around rugs, keep hands to themselves while observing, see friends work and let them concentrate, walk in the classroom, handle materials with care, and resolve conflicts between each other. The aim of the action research was for students to come together as a community and cohesively work together. My hope was for the conclusion to reveal how to guide better and teach children the skills to identify social problems, to fabricate solutions, to coexist peacefully in a classroom community, and to attain social awareness. The intended outcome was for my students to become socially and emotionally healthier.

Methodology

Before conducting my research, I collected baseline data using the following three methods: SWIS referral report, student pre-interview, and student pre-survey. Our school takes on a “proactive approach to establishing the behavioral supports and social culture [that is] needed for all students in a school to achieve social, emotional and academic success” (PBIS, 2016). Students only receive office referrals when they exhibit major behaviors. These behaviors include physical aggression, a high degree of property misuse, and a high degree of defiance. When an office referral occurs a document is filled out by the adult handling the situation and the child involved. This document is then brought to the office, filed, and an email is sent home with a copy of the document and a description of the incident. I attained the referral report for my school from an electronic program called SWIS in April 2016 (Appendix A). The data showed that preschoolers and kindergarteners were receiving a high amount of referrals and in need of social assistance. Reviewing the data led me to my action research question How will implementing peace education and grace and courtesy education enhance social problem-solving skills and social awareness in a primary Montessori classroom?

Conducting the pre-survey and pre-interview occurred during the first full week of school. The pre-interview (Appendix B) focused on children's feelings towards problems or distractions during work time and their knowledge of classroom materials available for solving problems. The pre-survey (Appendix C) included statements about children's manners, use of respectful words instead of yelling, walking around the classroom, and their thoughts about other's feelings. The children commented on the statements with a smiley face (yes), straight face (sometimes), and a frown face (no). This inquiry data provided information on the students' choices made when handling ways to solve a social problem. I was also able to attain insight on how the children perceived emotions, perceived social awareness within the classroom and perceived their comprehension of the questions/statements.

The collection of the inquiry data allowed for the implementation of the three interventions from the Positive Discipline curriculum. The first intervention implemented was class meetings. I started with how to sit around our line. We sat in front of the line, so we were able to see the line in front of our crisscrossed legs. I then introduced a shell. The shell's purpose is to allow the person holding it the ability to talk while others respectfully listen. We passed the shell around the circle taking turns giving compliments. After two weeks had gone by, I introduced give, take, or pass with our compliments. The students were now able to choose whether they wanted to give a compliment, have a friend give them one, or pass. The second intervention was the cool down area. The classroom's peace table is where children go to cool down and collect themselves with calming activities provided. The effects foreseen with a designated zone where children can collect themselves, calm down, and be at peace was developed to increase my student's acknowledgment of handling emotions respectfully. The third intervention implemented was the agenda. I set up the agenda with a notebook and a pencil

on a tray. I placed this tray next to our calendar on the floor. Students wrote their name down on the agenda if they had something to share or a problem for which they needed help solving. When we discussed a problem, steps were taken to generalize the problem and share ideas on how we, as a class, could help a classmate solve it.

A collection of observational data for the three previously mentioned interventions focused on observations of students' responses and reactions to the interventions. I generated two tally sheets: (1) observation tally record 1 and (2) observation tally record 2. I used the observation tally record 1 (Appendix D) to collect tallies two days a week for twenty minutes. Each tally stood for students' choices of hands and feet to self/hurtful actions; helpful words/hurtful words; social awareness/social unawareness; a choice for solution and coping/choice for stress. I would mark a tally for hands and feet to self when children were keeping their bodies to themselves while they were observing, talking to friends, and walking around the room. I tallied hurtful actions when children touched others' works and disrespected them in a manner of not using the works for their purpose. Helpful words included positive reminders to friends, children offering encouragement or compliments to others, and help being offered or accepted when a classmate needed help. Hurtful words consisted of teasing, yelling, and unkind phrases said to others. Each tally for social awareness stood for when students would walk around rugs, carry trays without bumping into things or others, and allow a friend to work without interrupting. Each tally for social unawareness stood for when students interrupted others while working, bumped into others, and walked on rugs or works. The choice for solution and coping consisted of students solving problems on their own, asking for help when needed, and handling their emotions appropriately. The choice for stress included yelling, physical aggression, and defiance. I also used the observation tally record 2 (Appendix E) to collect

tallies two days a week for twenty minutes. Each tally stood for students' choice of desired behaviors: use of agenda, use of the wheel of choice, and use of cool time-out and undesired behaviors: yelling, physical response, blaming, and tattling.

The midway interview (Appendix F) occurred during the second and a half week of my research. This interview concentrated on if children felt there were problems or distractions during work time and if the classroom had materials to help them solve problems. I included two questions about if they think of their friends' feelings when solving problems and their thoughts on the usefulness of the peace table. This data provided me with the students' thoughts on how the techniques implemented were working or not working.

Acquiring artifact data occurred during the five weeks of implementing my research. An observation record field journal (Appendix G) was used daily to take notes on observations of interactions with using the agenda, interactions with the calming and relaxing zone, interactions with class meetings, and general observations. Students wrote their names on the agenda to share stories, receive help with a problem, or share a favorite page from a book. I was able to keep track of an estimated number of children using the agenda, using the calming and relaxing zone, and how the children progressed in positive thoughts and words towards other classmates and solutions.

Concluding my research was accomplished by conducting the post-survey (Appendix H) and the post-interview (Appendix I). Guiding students through the post-survey permitted me to compare similarities and differences to their pre-survey answers. I also guided students through the post-interview. This interview was related to the pre-interview and mid-interview. The questions focused on the problems and distractions children noticed during work time, the items

learned from the class meetings and the thoughts of how the three problem-solving tactics helped solve problems.

Collecting the four sources of data while introducing the three problem-solving strategies within the classroom from the Positive Discipline curriculum, helped me measure the effects of peace education on social problem-solving skills and social awareness within a primary Montessori classroom. I was able to measure the effectiveness of peace education on students' abilities to use problem-solving tools to arrive at conclusions and internalize social awareness.

Analysis of Data

The data collected consisted of three different forms of baseline data, three types of data carried out through the full five weeks of implementing my research, one collection of mid-way data, and three types of concluding data. As I analyzed the data, I was able to find promising positive connections between Positive Discipline approaches and grace and courtesy lessons, and my students' ability to become socially aware and able to problem-solve. Before my action research, the students in my classroom displayed social unawareness and the need for others to solve social problems. Beginning this year with my interventions have proved to be a challenge for a few and a good resource for others.

During the first full week of school, I collected my baseline data through my school's referral program called SWIS, as well as with pre-interviews, and pre-surveys. The referral data I retrieved for the school year 2015-2016 illustrated that Children's House carried the third highest amount of referrals throughout the school. Figure 1 shows that preschool and kindergarten acquired 26 referrals from the months of September through April.

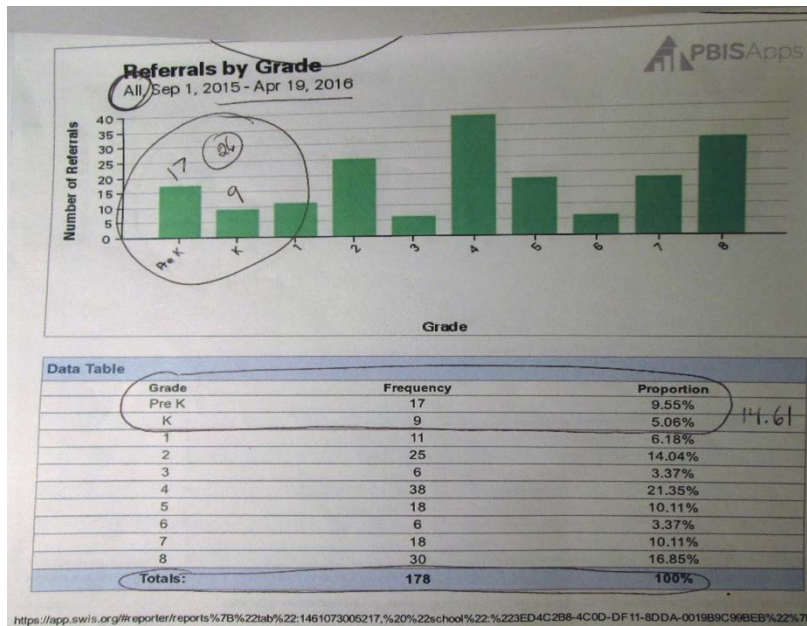


Figure 1: SWIS Referrals.

I was able to conduct a pre-interview and pre-survey during the first week so I could discover how the students viewed and comprehended social aspects of the classroom. Figure 2a-b illustrates two questions from the baseline interview. I wanted to find out if the students were able to explain what distracts them and if they were aware of materials in the classroom that could help them solve problems. Figure 2a displays the percentage of students' opinions on what is distracting to them while they work. Figure 2b shows their understanding of materials provided in the classroom available for problem-solving. Out of the sixteen students, eight of them are preschoolers. Out of the eight preschoolers, three of them are three years old. A makeup of young children provides comprehension road blocks. Many students weren't sure how to answer, didn't know, or weren't fully sure of what I was asking. For my youngest students, I reworded questions two different ways. I adjusted the questions when I verbally

asked all of my students. I wanted to make sure the questions felt like a conversation to ensure the highest comprehension.

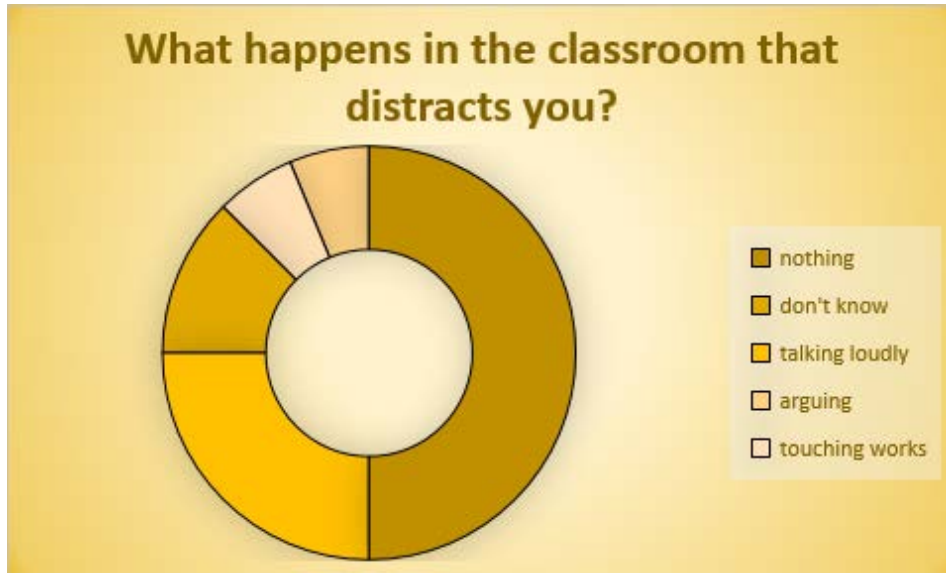


Figure 2a. Second question

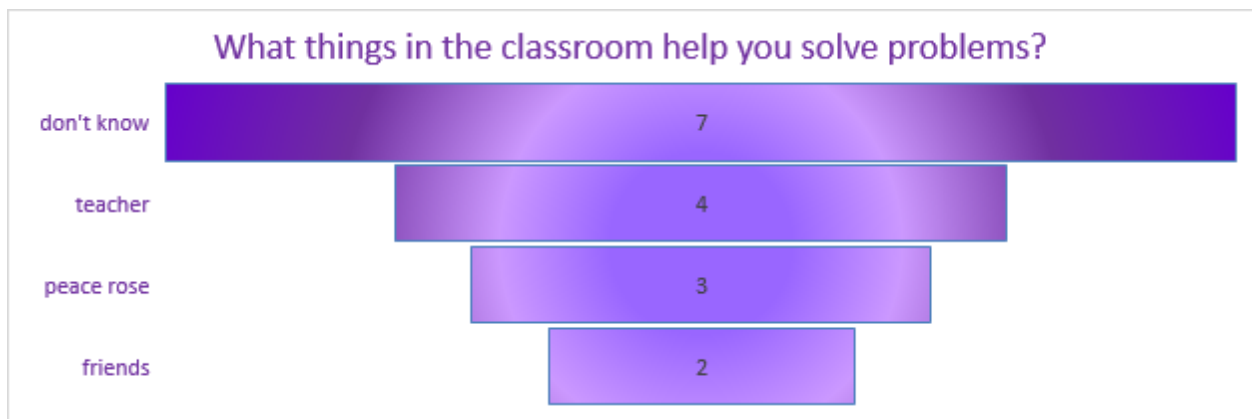


Figure 2b. Third question

The pre-survey (see Appendix C) was fifteen questions about if the students used their manners, if they used their words, if they ran or walked in the classroom, their voice volume, and their feelings. The students answered with a yes, sometimes, or no. If they answered with a yes,

I marked a smiley face. If they answered with sometimes, I marked a straight face. If they answered with no, I marked a sad face. I also adjusted the way I verbalized the statements to the children. Instead of saying the statement as if they said it, I stated the statement in question form. The pre-survey illustrated that students answered yes for the majority of the questions. I came across one complication for analyzing this data. I felt that the majority of my students were answering yes because they wanted to give the answers they have been previously taught to please me. They answered to please, knowing how they should act in the classroom, instead of answering for how they truly act in the classroom.

Two and a half weeks into school is when I conducted the midway interview. As I implemented class meetings, the wheel of choice, the agenda, and the calming and relaxing zone, I wanted to be able to check on the progress. Checking in with the students midway through my research was helpful. I was able to measure their interest in the implemented materials and check to see if their thoughts on problem-solving improved or if they became more aware of their social surroundings. Figures 3a-b illustrates two outcomes of the five midway interview questions.



Figure 3a. Question 1

Figure 3a displays the first part of the question. The second portion of the question was open-ended. This type of question was difficult for some of my children to answer. I rephrased how I asked the question to see if it helped in their comprehension.

My students gravitated away from the wheel of choice and to the agenda. The interest was not there for using the wheel of choice. The interest was higher in using the agenda. My theory for the interest in the agenda is that students get to write their names down on the notebook and receive an acknowledgment from classmates listening to and participating in reflections for solutions to problems recognized in the environment.



Figure 3b. Question 5

Figure 3b displays how students answered about how they feel about the classrooms peace table. The calming activities available on the peace table were a rain stick, a tray with tiny golden objects, a basket of peace rocks, and a virtues book about diligence.

Throughout the five weeks of my research, I collected observational data and one artifact. The observational data consisted of two tally sheets completed two times a week for twenty minutes. I wanted to concentrate on the students' choices between an appropriate choice and an inappropriate choice. One tally represented an incident where a student exhibited the choice they made in daily situations. A few cases included conversations, helping others, observing others, and playing during work time. I wanted to create a morning chart and afternoon chart to catch any patterns that may form. Figure 4a-b displays how often I would observe students carrying out social reactions. Figure 4a-b compares desired behaviors to undesired behaviors.

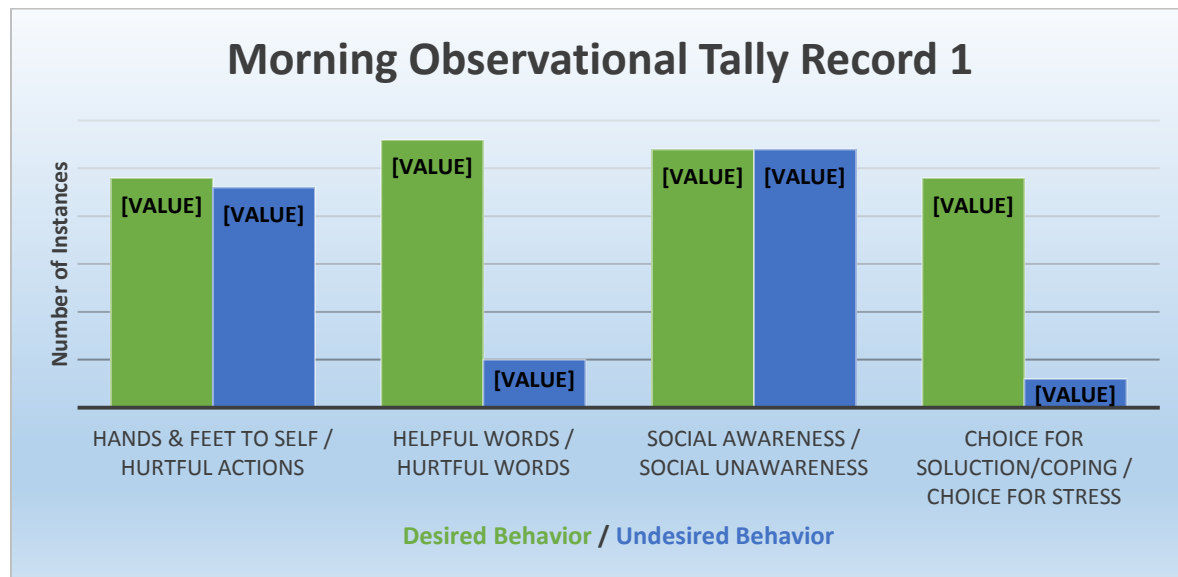


Figure 4a. Observation 1

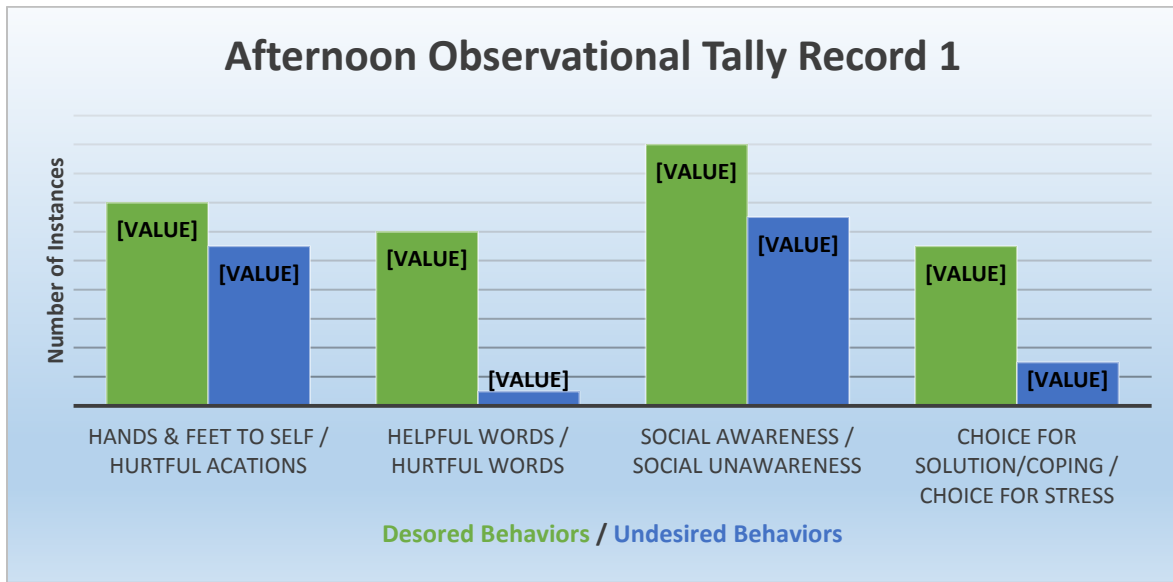


Figure 4b. Observation 1

Figure 5a and 5b illustrates how often students would use the three implemented materials (desired behaviors) and socially unaware choices (undesired behaviors). Here I also wanted to represent the morning behaviors and afternoon behaviors to see if there were any patterns.

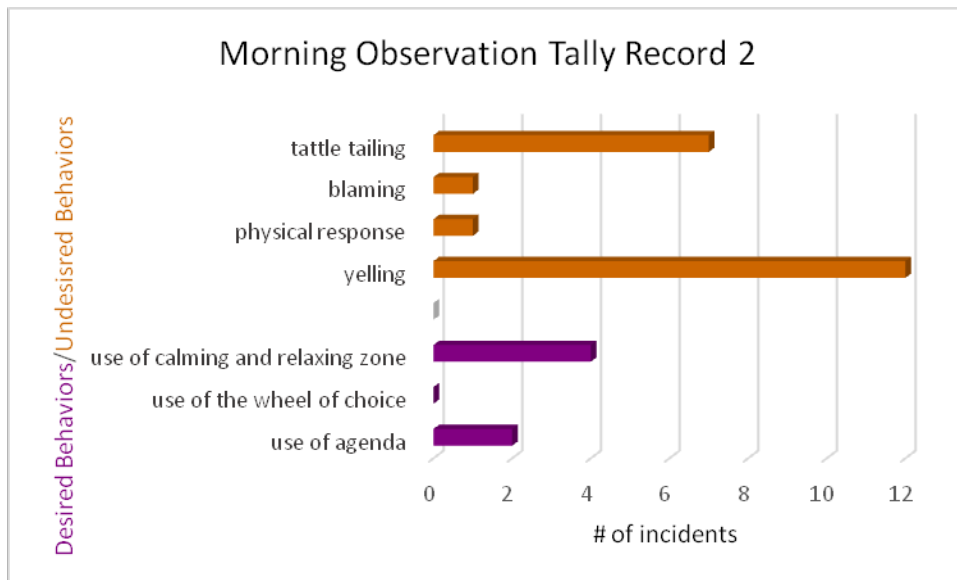
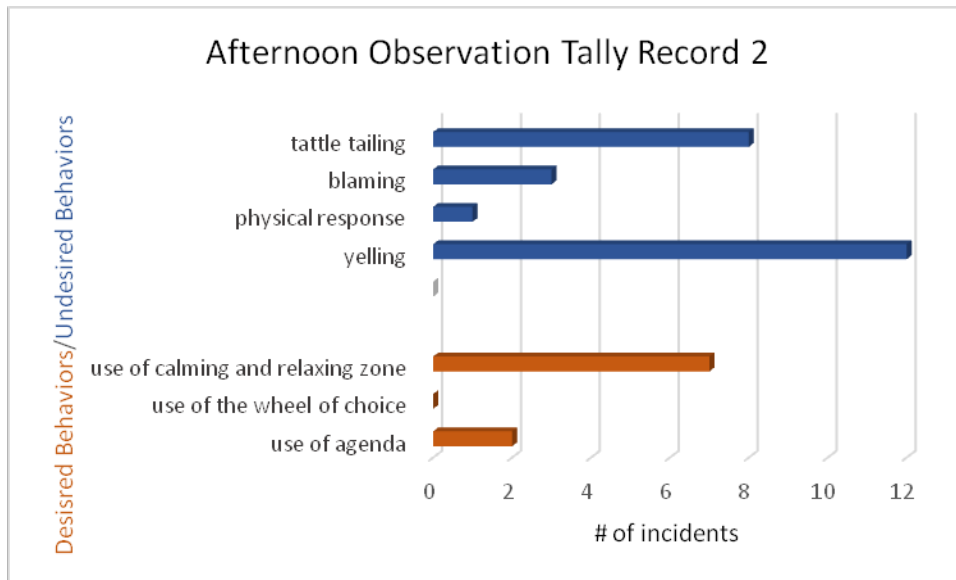


Figure 5a. Observation 2*Figure 5b. Observation 2*

After five weeks of implementing my action research, I collected two types of inquiry data and attained the SWIS referral report for the beginning of the school year 2016-2017. The inquiry data consisted of the post-interview and the post-survey. Figure 6a-d displays a few results of the students' thoughts for the same three questions that were in the pre-interview, plus two new questions which pertained to the implemented materials. I again took the printed questions and relayed them to my students in a conversational manner. I adjusted the way I stated the questions to attain the highest comprehension possible.

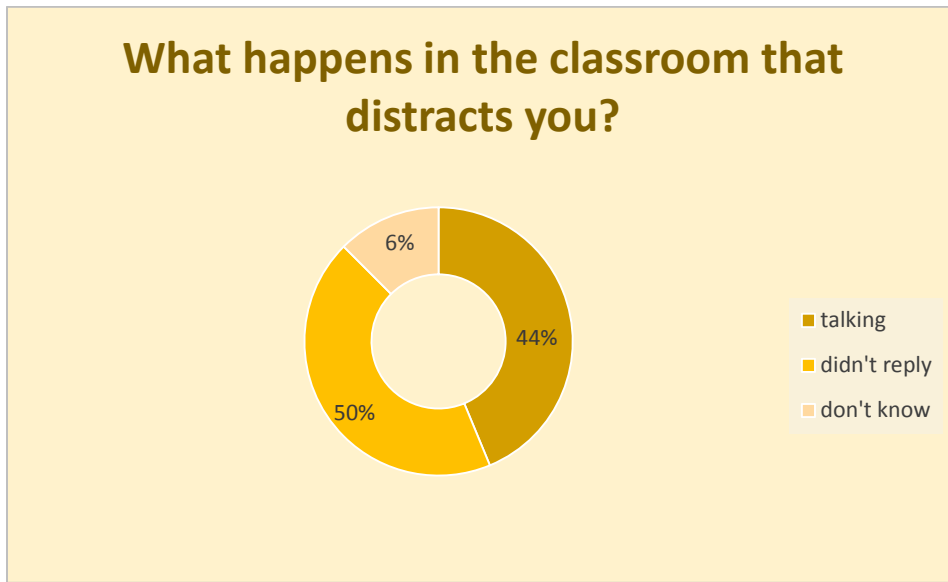


Figure 6a. Second Question

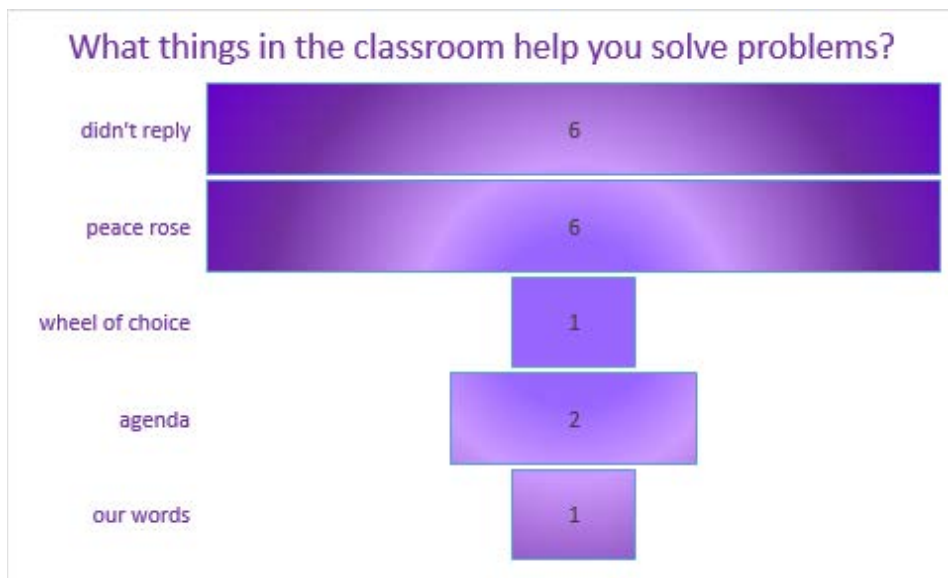


Figure 6b. Third Question

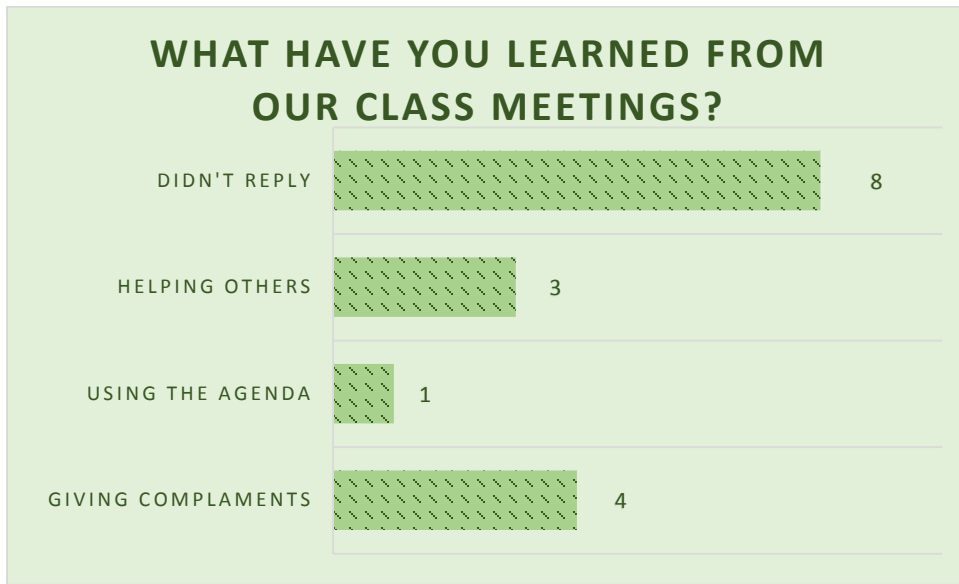


Figure 6c. Fourth Question

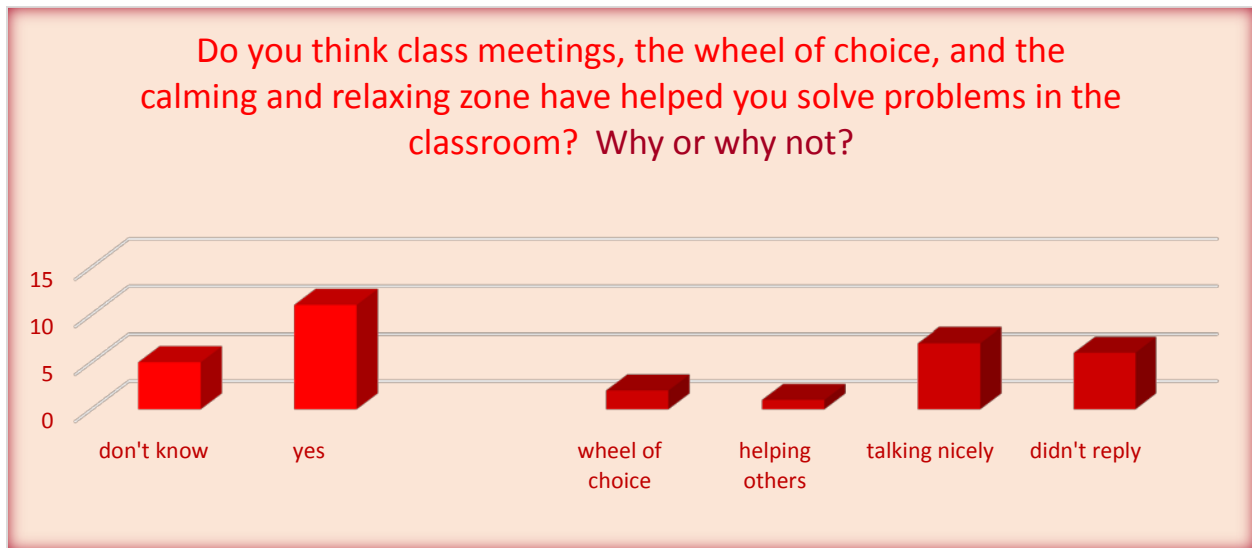


Figure 6d. Fifth Question

The second inquiry data administered was the post-survey (Appendix H). The survey included the same fifteen questions as the pre-survey. Children would answer yes (smiley face), sometimes (straight face), or no (frown face) to the statements. I rephrased the statements into

questions hoping to increase comprehension. Student responses indicated that there was a slight increase in the awareness of their actions in the classroom environment.

The SWIS referral report I retrieved was for September-October 2016-2017. Figure 7 displays preschool and kindergarten are still receiving a high amount of referrals. An explanation for this resided in a preschool student struggling with physical aggression and following directions.

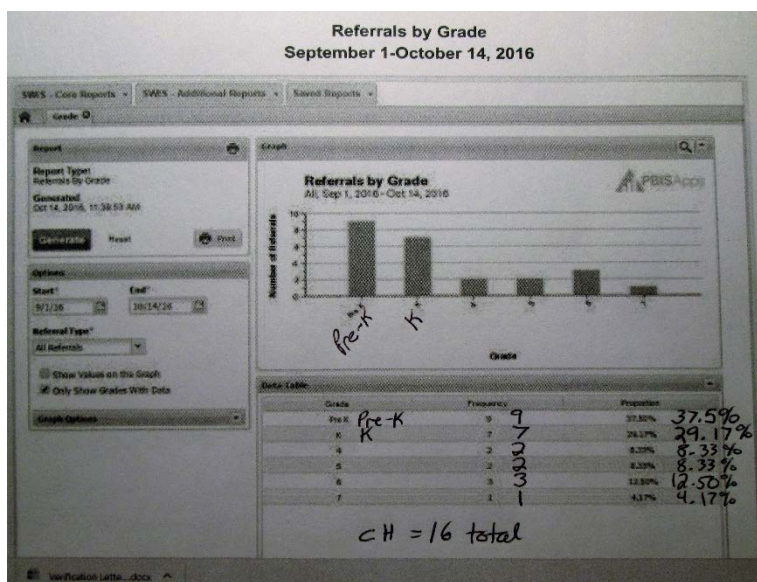


Figure 7: SWIS Report

Throughout my action research, I generated a daily observational journal. I concentrated on observing interactions with the agenda, interactions with the calming and relaxing zone, interactions with class meetings, and any general observations prevalent to my research (see appendix k). Appendix K shows that the use of the agenda had increased. Children began writing their names on the agenda to share a story. As time went on, children became more comfortable and would share problems they wanted help solving. Documentation shows that the number of students using the agenda daily went from an average of four students to 10 students.

My journal stated that the utilization of the calming and relaxing zone (peace table) was not of interest to my students. The use of the peace table consisted of respectful actions with few reminders about respecting the calming activities. My notes state that the interactions with class meetings were successful. Once children became acclimated to passing a shell around, taking turns giving compliments, sharing stories, and bringing attention to problems that needed solutions, class meetings were highlights of children's days. My notes stated that compliments started off with "I like your shirt" or "I like hair." Compliments developed into "I like how you played with me" and "I liked how you worked." My general observation provided information on how two students were struggling with listening, following direction, physical aggression, and respectful actions towards works. In my journal, I noted that students increased their usage of polite words with others. Students were nicely reminding others how they should respect activities, politely stating to others to not touch others' activities and to choose one of their own. There was a higher sense of community built between the children.

As I compared my quantitative (referral data, tally sheet 1, tally sheet2) and qualitative (journal, surveys, interviews) data, documentation showed a slight increase in social awareness and social problem-solving skills acquired by the students. Some of the data either showed a decrease or equivalency of social abilities. An explanation for these discoveries may be how the students comprehended questions. Answering "why" or "how" questions can be challenging for three and four-year-olds. Another explanation is that two students kept struggling with respecting works, following directions, and physical aggression. These children required specified attention and interventions for their needs.

Action Plan

My research showed that implementing three strategies from the Positive Discipline curriculum offers the active community effective solutions for solving social problems. The goal was to increase social awareness and solve social problems independently. The results showed that there was a slight increase in the awareness of social behaviors within the classroom environment. A few benefits of this recognition included an increase in walking around rugs, an increase in using words with others instead of actions and an increase in personal awareness of classmates' social behavior. Some of these social behaviors include interrupting others while working, touching others' works, stepping on or knocking over materials on rugs, and material misuse.

There was high interest in using the agenda for solving problems. The research results from the observational tally sheets did not reveal this interest. Although the observational tally sheets did not show the agenda being used to solve problems, the observations from the daily journal illustrated that problem solving did improve when using the agenda. A possible reason for this discrepancy is that the time frame observed was after the early morning rush of students writing their names on the agenda. The observational tally sheets did show a slight decrease of undesired behaviors in the afternoons. Yelling was the most occurring undesired behavior noted on the tally sheets. Students' frustration led to projecting words at a higher volume to others who were disturbing their work.

Through my observations and the interviews, I was surprised to discover that many students used and were aware of the peace rose as a tool for solving social problems. This finding was intriguing because the peace rose is a part of the everyday atmosphere of the Montessori classroom and not a part of the strategies implemented from the Positive Discipline

curriculum. The high interest and knowledge of the peace rose may have been a result of how the peace rose focuses on problem-solving.

The impact of utilizing the calming and relaxing zone (peace table), wheel of choice and class meetings was average. The students did not show interest or rely on the peace table to calm down and solve issues. The results of my research showed that there was understanding of the concepts of the peace table and the wheel of choice, but they were not used frequently used as a tool for solving problems. The positive impact shown through the results is evident in the class meetings. The students seized the advantages the class meetings offered. Taking turns giving compliments seems to have broadened my students' mindfulness of using kind words to others. The students' ability to give, take or pass compliments appears to have increased confidence in themselves, and they were able to acknowledge qualities of others. The agenda quickly filling up with names gave me the idea that the students' assurance and awareness of their environment were enhanced. The ability to state problems within the classroom or between classmates allowed children to be comfortable and welcoming to ideas on how to solve problems. The children were able to discuss solutions without announcing punishments. These discussions permitted the children to listen, to state, and to take part in solutions to problems of their own and others. One reason for this popularity with the agenda may be a result of opportunities for students to voice their concerns and the ability for their name to get called while going down the list of names on the agenda.

The results of my research will positively change my methods of guidance. Implementing strategies from the Positive Discipline curriculum improved the connectedness the children expressed within their learning community. The results presented insights on how children perceive their social responsiveness. I will use my findings as an inspiration for my

notion that my students required a non-Montessori approach to aid them in solving social problems and continue conducting class meetings daily. Recognizing individual and group accomplishments in solving problems have increased my students' connectedness to their environment and peers. Problems previously discussed and frequently resolved as a whole class consisted of disrespecting activities, leaving untidy activities on the shelves, using unkind words to others, and not returning pieces of activities. The students' increased connectedness to their environment has amplified the care, respect, and poise of the students to their surroundings.

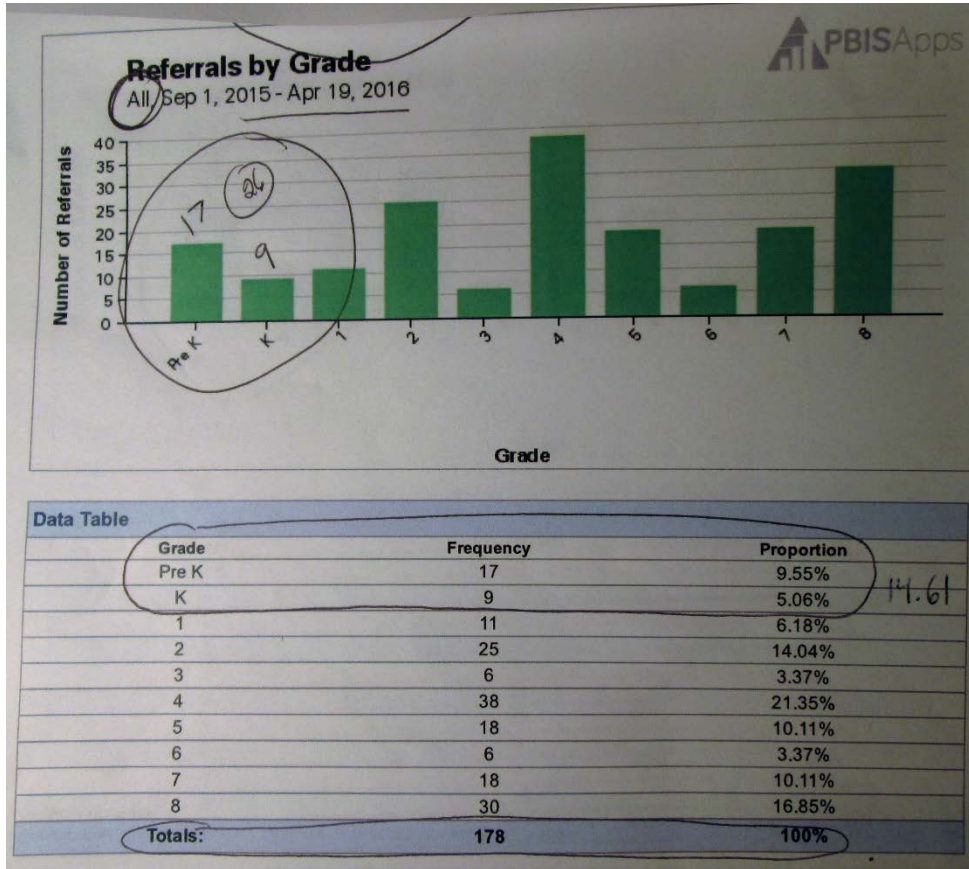
An idea for future research is to investigate the effects of mindfulness and breathing techniques on students' self-awareness. Socially, students are more capable of using tools to aid them in determining solutions. The Positive Discipline approach to solving social problems has increased the awareness of others but decreased personal awareness. Providing students with methods for becoming mindful of themselves and offering breathing techniques might positively impact my students' self-awareness. This self-awareness may lead to personal growth and allow my students to intensify their work potential. Future research would involve implementing mindful and breathing techniques into the end-of-the-day silence gathering.

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Appendix A
 SWIS data for office referrals during the 2015-2016 school year
















































Data Table

Grade	Frequency	Proportion
Pre K	17	9.55%
K	9	5.06%
1	11	6.18%
2	25	14.04%
3	6	3.37%
4	38	21.35%
5	18	10.11%
6	6	3.37%
7	18	10.11%
8	30	16.85%
Totals:	178	100%

Handwritten note: 14.61

Appendix C and H
 Student Pre/Post Survey [assessment]

- | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|
| 1. I can talk to a friend about a problem. |  |  |  |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I use my words. |  |  |  |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I know what to do when I get frustrated. |  |  |  |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I know what to do when I get angry. |  |  |  |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I use my feet or hands when I get frustrated. |  |  |  |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. I don't yell at others in the classroom. |  |  |  |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. I know how to calm myself down. |  |  |  |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. I need my teachers help to solve a problem with a friend. |  |  |  |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. I walk around friend's rugs. |  |  |  |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. I bump into other friends. |  |  |  |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. I run or skip in the classroom. |  |  |  |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12. I say "excuse me," "I'm sorry," "please," and "thank you" to others. |  |  |  |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 13. I walk in the classroom. |  |  |  |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 14. I think about my friends' feelings. |  |  |  |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 15. I listen to my friends. |  |  |  |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Appendix D
 Observation Tally Record 1
 (2 days a week for 20 minutes)

Date: _____

Time Frame: _____

Hands and Feet to Self Comment:	Hurtful Actions Comment:
Helpful Words Comment:	Hurtful Words Comment:
Social Awareness Comment:	Social Unawareness Comment:
Choice for Solution/Coping Comment:	Choice for Stress Comment:

Appendix E
 Observation Tally Record 2
 (2 days a week for 20 minutes)

Date: _____

Time Frame: _____

Desired Behaviors	5 minutes	10 minutes	15 minutes	20 minutes
Use of agenda				
Use of the Wheel of Choice				
Use of calming and relaxing zone				
Undesired Behaviors	5 minutes	10 minutes	15 minutes	20 minutes
Yelling				
Physical response				
Blaming				
Tattle tailing				

Appendix G
Observation Record Field Journal
(daily notes)

Date: _____

Time Frame: _____

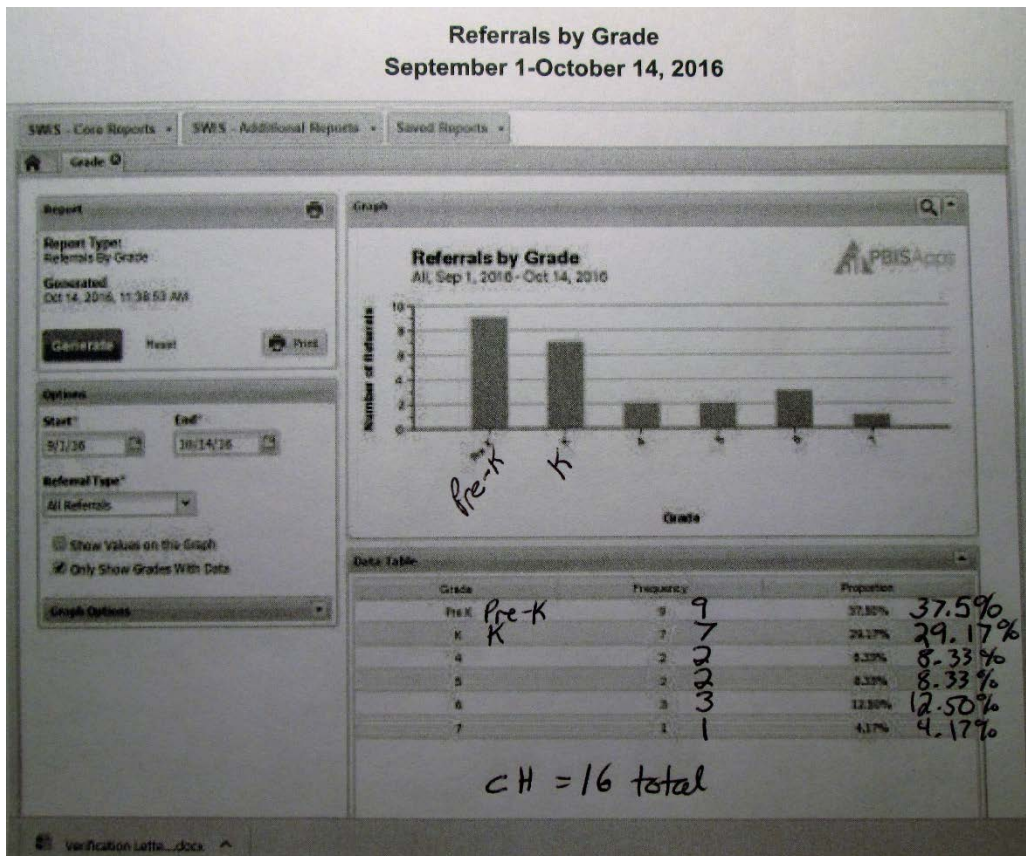
Observations of interactions with using the agenda:

Observations of interactions with the calming and relaxing zone:

Observations of interactions with class meetings:

General observations:

Appendix J
 SWIS data for office referrals during the 2016 school year



Appendix K
Observation Record Field Journal

Table 1:

Observations of interactions with using the agenda:

Week 1: not introduced yet

Week 2: writing names down to share a book or story

Week 3: children ask for help writing names; increase in writing names a few to about 5-7

Week 4: many write their name down in the morning

Week 5: about 10 write down names/need reminders to write name if want to share

Observations of interactions with the calming and relaxing zone:

Week 1: some interest in calming activities

Week 2: materials used for their purpose and loud play

Week 3: little use

Week 4: reminders of respectful usage and the purpose

Week 5: still little use/ not much interest

Observations of interactions with class meetings:

Week 1: practiced sitting by line/many compliments on clothes/few interruptions/improvement with listening to others holding the shell

Week 2: introduced give, take, or pass with compliments/interruptions decreasing/ introduced listening activity where we share and take turns with the shell; discussed solutions to a problem teacher had for first time

Week 3: need to use shell while sharing/provides tactile and visual reminders/ interruptions low

Week 4: one child having troubles being respectful/ when sharing gets long children get restless/ give, take, pass running smoothly/compliments tend to be on clothes but spreading little to other types (how you played with me or how you worked)

Week 5: taking compliments increasing; sharing stories and problems have increased/sometimes looking for a problem

General observations:

Week 1: one shows resistance/defiance; one requires guidance on work instead of “play”

Week 2: children getting acclimated to environment/ few children still “play”

Week 3: children using words has increased; child still struggling with following directions

Week 4: one still having troubles respecting works

Week 5: usage of words has increased-children telling others before coming to teachers