The Effects of a Conversation Station
on Classroom On-Task Behavior

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Abstract

This investigation examined the effects of a conversation station in a special education classroom of 22 students. Ten of the students were randomly selected to have data tracked on the effect of the conversation station throughout one quarter of the school year. Five of the students were male and five were female. The procedure for this project utilized a reversal design with multiple baseline data taken across three groups of students. The data analysis showed a conversation station has a significant effect on student on-task responses and the data analysis found no difference in performance between male and female participants.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Background

Classrooms are continuing to grow in size, ethnic diversity, socioeconomic diversity, and in terms of their demands on classroom educators. In order to operate in these diverse classrooms, the students need to be able to successfully communicate and work together to complete tasks. To accomplish this many high school students need to have focused practice regarding communication skills. These communication skills will not only help students with their current educational study efforts, but will carry over into life after high school, regardless of whether the students are going to college or straight into the workforce.

Most of the research in the area of student communication success has focused on elementary-aged students. However, many students have made it into high schools who are not prepared for high school work or the communication demands of high school programs. Many high school students often get off focus and need to be redirected to succeed with their academic tasks. The question of traditional redirection techniques versus task redirection (to a conversation station) was addressed by Martlew, Ellis, Stephen, and Ellis (2010). The authors pointed out
that instead of attempting to eliminate conversation from the classroom, it is useful to encourage conversation in appropriate and constructive ways. Such a classroom leads to students engaged in their learning or on-task behavior. A natural by-product of on-task behavior is academic success. On-task behavior doesn’t always look like we may picture it. The silent classroom is not always the most productive classroom or the classroom where the most actual, useful learning is taking place. This study focused on the question: What is the impact of a conversation station on classroom communication and oral language development in high school students? Communication skills and oral language development are two important areas that tie into academic success.

**Background of Study**

Before the start of this research study, the investigator thought about how he could include a time for students to practice their oral language skills in his high school English classroom. The investigator’s educational experience includes teaching high school students of all levels and disabilities for seven years. The investigator’s experiences in teaching and observing student interaction indicated that some students still needed to work on their oral language skills and improve their interactions in the classroom. The study on Conversation Stations: Promoting Language Development in Young Children (Bond & Wasik, 2009), showed a strategy to adapt the ideas discussed in the article which could be used to improve student oral language in a high school classroom. Within the investigator’s classroom, students were using literacy centers. After reading the article, a conversation station
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(a center specific to oral language) was added to the investigator’s high school classroom. The students went to this center one time per week with a partner as a part of their literacy center rotation. The activities were game-like and revolved around oral language skill development. This was based on the idea that giving the students practice using oral language for specific purposes would help develop their communication skills.

Many of the students included in this study had a history of failure in almost all academic areas. Part of their failure was due to their lack of attention to the material and on the method of the presentation by the instructors (traditionally, there wasn’t much student interaction with instruction. The instruction was something more or less happening to them instead of being something in which they were participating). With a conversation station, the students actively participated in the instructional process.

**Purpose and Rationale of the Study**

This investigator observed a common theme over many years of high school teaching and while reflecting on classroom strengths and weaknesses as well as student learning. A pattern emerged in how much students like to talk to each other, tell jokes, or talk about what they did over the weekend, but when it came time to discuss learning targets, the students tended to have a difficult time working together and communicating their thoughts, ideas, or problems. This was problematic as teachers, to meet the needs of the students in the classroom, have a tendency to have students work in small groups with other students while the other
students were working in pairs. In such an arrangement teachers are not aware if the majority of students are completing their work or were struggling with the work, or just talking. Many students tend to resort to off-task talking. This investigation assessed the benefits of a program designed to direct students’ love for talking and utilize that passion for talking to facilitate their learning of classroom tasks.

**Guiding Questions**

The question focused on in this investigation deals with the productive use of oral language in high school classrooms. Can students’ natural urge to talk with one another be directed in such a way that behavioral and learning content gains are realized? The researcher chose the topic of oral language for this action research with the goal of creating a way for students to improve their oral language skills. The research question was: What is the impact of a conversation station on classroom communication and oral language development and does the development of these skills reduce off-task behavior in the classroom?

**Hypotheses**

The first null-hypothesis ($H_0$) was that the use of a conversation station would show no impact on communication, oral language development, or off-task behavior of high school students.

The first research hypothesis ($H_1$) was that by utilizing a center for topic-related instruction, both communication and oral language would be developed.
The second null hypothesis (H₀) was that there would be no difference in the effect a conversation station would have for male students.

The second research hypothesis (H₁) was that a conversation station would show a difference between male students' performance.

The third null hypothesis (H₀) was that there would be no difference in the effect a conversation station would have for female students.

The third research hypothesis (H₁) was that a conversation station would show a difference between female students' performance.

**Terms Defined**

**Academic Success**- Any time a student completes material with a passing grade to the extent that they receive credit on their transcript.

**Off-task**- Any time a student is engaging in an act that is not directly or indirectly related to the classroom goals.

**On-task**- Any time a student is engaged in the direction or goals of the classroom.

**Centers**- A physical space created for a specific learning purpose in the classroom (Fountas & Pinnell, 2007).

**Literacy Centers**- A physical space created for reading, writing, and language learning.

**Redirection**- Refocusing a student’s attention to the task at hand in some way; implies that the student was on some level off-task.
Chapter Summary

Although the makeup of the high school classroom has changed dramatically over the past twenty years, methods of instruction and delivery have not changed as dramatically. Many educators ban the use of students engaging in oral language in the classroom. This makes the classroom teacher oriented with some very structured participation. Research suggests that lectures are not the most effective way to educate students or to manage a classroom with students with behavioral difficulties (Farstrup & Samuels, 2008).
Chapter 2

Review of Related Literature

Overview

Oral language development has long been a major focus of educational programs because language is the learning tool that develops first and can be extremely powerful (Pinnell et al., 2007). This literature review explored the research on oral language development as it relates to the high school classroom, specifically the role it plays in literacy and the effects it has on other areas of education. Students first learn to communicate through oral language. Oral language is a predictor of later academic skills as well. Oral language, along with phonological and phonemic awareness, and alphabetic knowledge contribute to a student’s ability to read and write (Richgels, 2004). Students use language each day to communicate with their peers and share their ideas and feelings. Students learn from one-another through these interactions. In addition, teachers gauge each student’s comprehension based on their oral language responses.

Knowing how important oral language is as a predictor of reading comprehension, how it links to reading and writing, and its social implications; it is prudent to focus on intentional teaching to expand students’ oral language skills.
Most of the research related to students’ mastery of oral language is linked to the later effects of oral language on a student’s academic success. Six areas of literature formed the basis of this study including: how oral language develops, the role oral language plays in literacy development, long-term effects of oral language skills, early interventions that promote oral language skills, and learning differences that can put students at risk for oral communication difficulties.

**How Oral Language Develops**

Students begin to speak one word at a time. Teachers and linguists use mean length of utterance (the number of words spoken at a time) as a future indicator of a student’s vocabulary, indicating that a student with a higher mean length of utterance will have a stronger vocabulary when he or she is older (McGuinness & McGuinness, 2000). Bond and Wasik (2009) estimate that from the time a student is born until they are five years old they will gain about 10,000 vocabulary words. Students develop their vocabularies and learn more about the semantics of language through conversations that take place around them (Bond & Wasik, 2009). For this reason, the types of conversations the student is exposed to will have a great effect on their language abilities. Richgels (2004) lists seven functions of this language that students develop; expressing needs and wants, to control the behaviors of others, to interact with others, to share feelings, to add voices to their imaginations, to question, and to share information.

Oral language is the primary way children communicate their thoughts with those around them. Children use the language they’ve learned to play with sounds
(phonemic awareness) and to make connections to letters that make sounds (phonics), eventually forming words from these sounds they've learned to produce (Richgels, 2004). Children will then use their current knowledge based on what they know about conversations they've had, what they know about letters and sounds and apply that information to reading, writing, and spelling, and information from stories they have heard (Rader, 2010).

Oral language skills start when a child is born, hearing sounds and repeating them. They learn that the words that the combination of sounds produce have meaning and that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, as the individual sounds alone do not offer much, if any, meaning (Adger, Snow, Christian, Delta, & Center for, 2003). As children’s growth continues, they start with one word and then, like combining sounds into words, they combine words into sentences. Reading and writing abilities stem from the stories, conversations, interactions, and attention given to sounds that develop in a child over time. This development helps them when they become students. The early developing nature of oral language is the foundation that other skills, like reading and writing. For that reason, teachers need to have an understanding of how oral language develops (Adger et al., 2003).

**The Role Oral Language Plays in Literacy Development**

Rader (2010) states that language and vocabulary represent the foundation of learning to read and write. Students who do not develop strong oral language skills and vocabulary, for whatever reason, will have a difficult time keeping up with their peers. Reading and writing are basics to classroom success and these
processes are directly linked to oral communication. When learning to read, students use prior knowledge of the English language: the sounds and spoken words. Students learn the reflective nature that spoken words can be written, and what is written can be spoken, and that both forms of communication have meaning behind them (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2008).

As students read, there are a variety of things occurring to decode the words and create meaning. Students use what they know about the meaning of a word, the structure of language, and the sounds the letters make to get meaning from what is being read (Rader, 2010). If a student comes to a word that he does not know, the student might try to pronounce it, even without knowledge of what it means. In this case, the student cannot build meaning from the reading because that word doesn’t exist in their vocabulary (Beck et al., 2008). Farstrup & Samuels (2008) state the following about vocabulary:

It is a critical factor in the advancement of powerful reading and critical thinking abilities among adolescents, young adults, and adults. In short, a strong and continually growing oral and reading vocabulary is a fundamental component for the development and expansion of reading ability and sophistication at all levels (p. 1).

Developing a strong vocabulary will help students as they make meaning from the words orally as they communicate with one-another as well as with written word. DeThorne, Petrill, and Schatschneider (2010) found that students with weakness in reading comprehension skills positively correlated with oral language skills that were also weak. They also found, through formal assessments of 72 students, that oral language predicted reading comprehension more so than phonological awareness.
Often in a classroom before or after reading a story or writing a piece, students share ideas and thoughts with each other. These classroom discussions are routes through oral language in which deeper learning takes place. During these times of discussion students talk about a story or written piece and connect the text to meanings with each other in different and unique ways (Gritter, 2011). The teacher can step back and let the students lead their learning in new and exciting ways, led by discussion. Through conversations, students of all reading abilities contribute to the conversation by contributing their own experiences. This results in text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-world connections (Gritter, 2011). Students develop new, deeper learning when using their own experiences to make new connections and then share what they have learned from those with others in the classroom (Beck et al., 2008). Students expand meaning by having the opportunity to include their own experiences, make connections verbally, and hear other student's perspectives of a text through discussions (Rader, 2010).

**Long-Term Effects of Oral Language**

Students who do have a successful school experience (learn from reading, participating in conversations, have shown what they have learned through their writing) are more likely to perform well on exams, go on to college, and have professional jobs (Rose, 2011). Standardized tests in the second and fourth grades require a student to use oral and written skills correctly along with the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test in tenth grade and the Scholastic Aptitude Test in twelfth grade (McGuinness & McGuinness, 2000). Both test scores and future academic
success are impacted by a student’s ability to use their oral and written vocabulary. Students who lack the skills needed to be successful in school are more likely to be in poor jobs that do not pay well or living by collecting unemployment (Rose, 2011). Job interviews, applications, and public speaking are part of a successful adult life, and all of these are based on previous foundations in written and oral language (McGuinness & McGuinness, 2000).

**Early Interventions That Promote Oral Language Skills**

Phonemic awareness and knowing that letters make sounds is a skill that needs to be taught, it does not occur naturally (Graves & Watts-Taffe, 2008). This awareness that promotes oral language and contributes to reading and spelling is acquired by playing with sounds in speech, breaking the sounds down into their smallest parts, and eventually linking them to letters or letter combinations (Bear & Others, 1996).

Word work (also known as word play or word study) allows students to do hands on work sorting words and pictures while observing others and talking about what they are doing and why (Bear & Others, 1996). Students match combinations of letters to make sounds and then use those letters to make words (Williams, Phillips-Birdsong, Hufnagel, Hungler, & Lundstrom, 2009). Students then move to pattern words where they are seeing the larger concepts that help them decode the word and then apply those same rules creating other words that follow the same patterns (Williams et al., 2009). Providing students with opportunities to associate words with surrounding words or to use what they know about the surrounding
words to add words helps students narrow down words and then use other word strategies (DeThorne, Petrill, Schatschneider, & Cutting, 2010). Students may also sort pictures according to patterns in sounds, words by structure or sound, sort any way and explain, or find words to categorize within the classroom (Bear & Others, 1996).

Expanding students’ vocabulary can start with reading. Reading various texts and talking about the words and ideas put forth in those texts exposes students to a variety of words (Yopp & Yopp, 2007). Students expand their vocabulary through explicit instruction pertaining to the meaning(s) of words (Yopp & Yopp, 2007). Students should be provided with more than one context to use the word and encourage students to try using it in different ways (Farstrup & Samuels, 2008). Students can create a meaning for the word along with a picture to make it meaningful to them (Farstrup & Samuels, 2008). Teachers can create an environment that promotes word use and word consciousness (Yopp & Yopp, 2007). Students who are word conscious want to learn more about words, are aware of the words all around them, and think about the words they hear and write (Graves & Watts-Taffe, 2008).

Retelling is another tool to build on a student’s oral language skills. Oral language skills include the ability to speak and communicate using spoken language. Retelling allows students to tell what they know about a story while letting teachers know more about what the students knew or did not know. In retelling students have to think about what happened in the story from their own perspective, they don’t have words to reread (Rader, 2010). When retelling students may be adding
their perspective and any connections they have as they verbalize making it a more meaningful connection creating a deeper meaning. Students working with a partner will practice conversation skills working with someone to retell the events using the language from the story.

Visualization is a strategy that promotes oral language and also helps with retelling. According to Zwiers (2010) visualization is creating mental images and making connections using prior knowledge. Zwiers continues to say that visualization allows people to create a mental picture of what they have read or heard, store information, make decisions based on the information, gather information, and transfer what they understood back into words to share with others. Students use their verbal skills to share the information they perceived with others.

**Oral Language Learning and Special Needs Students**

Young students who are different from the rest of the mainstream student body, with regards to language, dialect, customs, and socioeconomic status may experience academic difficulties related to oral language learning and other areas (Gaskins & Labbo, 2007). Students who enter school and are from lower socioeconomic status tend to start school with poorer spoken language than those who come from more advantaged homes (Martlew et al., 2010). Students learn from their environments. Knowing this, students with fewer verbal interactions may have both a smaller vocabulary and ease of using conversation and fewer problem solving skill sets based on a lack of communicative experience. There is a vocabulary
gap that occurs between students because of the different experiences they have, resulting in a difference in knowledge and vocabulary (Gaskins & Labbo, 2007). Difficulty forming relationships between words and word groups could also contribute to the differences in language success for students (McGuinness & McGuinness, 2000). Knowing the connectedness of oral language and reading, it is no surprise that students with language difficulties tend to have lower reading related skills when compared with typically developing students (DeThorne et al., 2010). For students with difficulties in reading focusing on oral language may be the answer to help them succeed (Rader, 2010).

**Learning Strategies**

Small group settings allow students to work together and are small enough for everyone to converse. In classrooms a conversation station was added as a way for students to practice their oral language skills daily one-on-one or in a small group with the teacher (Bond & Wasik, 2009). These conversation stations focused on students’ individual needs as they related to oral language as well as listening skills. The stations provided an opportunity to talk in a constructive manner and naturally reduced the interruptions that take place in a situation where the teacher talks and the students listen quietly (Bond & Wasik, 2009). Some specific activities in the conversation station included sharing feelings, extending dialogue, vocabulary words, or talking about poems and stories previously read in the classroom (Bond & Wasik, 2009). An integrated, well-balanced program provides students time to read, write, present, talk about texts, and provide opportunities for students to provide
feedback with each other as directed by the teacher (Wold, 2005). A conversation station promotes these activities.

The classroom conversation station serves two purposes: first, it models thoughtful listening, which is the essential component of effective communication; second, a setting for appropriate relationships between students and teachers is created (Wasik et al. 2008). Thoughtful listening is teaching the student to listen carefully to the speaker, which helps to ensure that they can not only understand what is being said, but also can respond appropriately to the speaker. The conducive setting for children and adults to practice the art of conversation, created through the face-to-face student/teacher conversations, have allowed the teaching staff to practice new vocabulary, develop and extend theme concepts, engage students in meaningful writing experiences, and to learn more about the children’s interests and learning, which is essential in reaching them (McClelland, Acock, & Morrison, 2006).

This structure not only gives an alternative to shutting down a student’s thoughts or desire to participate when off-topic, but also creates opportunities to enhance the instruction and build relationships. The Conversation Station can be used in numerous ways to engage students in meaningful dialogue. Within each class period the students often have the need to share their feelings or a personal experience (Graves & Watts-Taffe, 2008). They often do so without a theme-related idea. The traditional classroom setting, however, does not provide the time to talk that the students may need. Additionally, students often bring up a topic that is important to them, but is not directly related to the topic being discussed. As an
example, during book reading, the teacher may be reading a book about a man hunting in the woods that briefly mentions the sight of a hawk. One of the students responds to the mention of a hawk and wants to tell the class about a YouTube video of a hawk eating a rabbit. Were the teacher to encourage an extended dialogue on the video mentioned by the student, this would take away from the meaning and theme of the story. Instead of stopping the student and making the student feel as if what they think or say isn't valuable, the teacher respectfully suggests that a more detailed exchange about the topic be taken care of at the center time in the conversation station (Gritter, 2011).

Throughout the day, the students’ comments and ideas can be added to a message board by one of the adults in the classroom and then a small group at the conversation station can address those recorded ideas. A list of student names is kept by the station and marked each time a student visits and has a dialogue at the center. During the time at the conversation station, the teacher can listen to what the student says and ask questions that allow the student to elaborate on their ideas, working to bring the train of thought around to the main ideas in the story that was initially being discussed (McClelland, Acock, & Morrison, 2006).

Not all students will be initially comfortable with the conversation station. In these cases, the teacher can invite them in to the center and initiate a conversation about a topic that was discussed in class or something less formal; for example the student’s favorite activity or food (Graves & Watts-Taffe, 2008). Students who are initially shy or reluctant have opened up in the conversation station and have shared some wonderful and enlightening information about what they know, what
they like and who they are (Wasik 2006). Typically, a student spends about 10 minutes in the station with an adult. In addition to having students share their interests and thoughts in the conversation station, this area can also be used to develop and extend theme-learning concepts and vocabulary. Because vocabulary development is vital to overall language development, it is important to focus on students learning and use of new words (Wasik 2006). This, too, can be accomplished in the conversation station.

**Chapter Summary**

From birth, students start to develop their language skills. A student’s oral language ability rapidly grows as they enter preschool and move to kindergarten. These language skills do not stop developing. They continue to grow year by year until they graduate from high school. At that point students have developed around 40,000 words (Graves & Watts-Taffe, 2008). Reading, writing, spelling, and oral language go hand-in-hand and work dependently with each other to help students acquire language skills. For a student to succeed in one area, that student has to be successful in all areas. Developing these skills can lead to a successful school experience, which leads to success after high school and then into the workforce. Because of the need for successful vocabulary development we need to intentionally teach the skills each day. Developing strong oral skills can help each student be successful. This information led the researcher to develop the research question: What is the impact of a conversation station on classroom communication and how does that impact the classroom environment and student learning?
Chapter 3

Methodology

Research Design

According to Mills (2007), quantitative research determines the cause and effect relationship using a small number of variables. This type of research uses data to show the cause and effect relationship and uses non-interactive methods to collect data. In contrast, qualitative research uses the perspectives of the participants to understand the data collected. This study used a quantitative method of research, taking data from directly observable behaviors in the classroom.

The research question to be answered in this study was: will a conversation station have an effect on language appropriate responses from students in a high school classroom. Appropriate responses included are; one that was on topic and delivered by an accepted method, such as the student raising their hand and waiting to be called on or having an on topic response when randomly called upon by the teacher. The students will learn through this experience that having discussions about the class topics in their own language and largely under their own direction enhances their ability to be on-task.
Both the researcher and an educational assistant in the room maintained the conversation station. Topics usually came up naturally, through the lecture portion or introductory part of the classroom. Any question asked by a student that was of interest to the class was deferred from the current discussion, recorded on a note card, and put to the side for the conversation station. If none came up naturally at the beginning of the class session, topics were given very broadly and the students were allowed to discuss those topics in their own fashion, as long as they maintained the proper classroom volume, that was pre-taught, and the proper classroom language, which was also pre-taught. The conversations within the station were monitored by either the researcher or the assistant in the room and left to the students as long as the above conditions were being met.

Initially, no students were using the station. After one week of baseline data collection, the first group of three students accessed the conversation station as a supplement to the initial part of the class, which was lecture based or introductory to the topic. This group of students was allowed 15 minutes of the class period to utilize the station, and then rejoined the class. The group continued using the station for the subsequent two weeks. After those two weeks the students’ access to the station was removed (back to baseline) for one week. This cycle of two weeks in, one week back to baseline continued throughout the quarter and the data was recorded.

A second group of students were under baseline for two weeks, then had two weeks of access, followed by one week of reversal back to baseline. This group
followed the same two weeks of access and one week of baseline throughout the quarter after the initial two-week baseline period.

Finally, a third group of students had the same two weeks of access, one week of reversal plan that the other groups followed, but after three weeks of baseline data was taken. Although three weeks of baseline is quite long, the researcher thought it was important to be able to show this groups’ extended baseline results compared to the other two groups. The data from this extended baseline period could be used to demonstrate the effects of the conversation station vs. the effects of many of the other students in the room being affected by the conversation station. That is to say that there could have been unaccounted for effects attributed to the conversation station, but originating from different conditions in the classroom.

Participants

This study involved a sample of high school special education students using a conversation station. The students in the study attend a large public high school in Southeastern Wisconsin. Twenty-two students in a special education classroom were used in this study. Of those twenty-two students, ten were chosen at random for data collection. The students were given pseudo names and will be referred to as student 1, student 2, student 3, etc. The entire population consisted of nine boys and thirteen girls. All twenty-two students participated in the activities in the classroom.
Procedures

At the start of the 2nd semester of the 2014-2015 school year the researcher prepared a letter (Appendix A) for parents explaining the investigation. The letter explained that a conversation station would be added to regular classroom centers to give children a time to focus on oral language development. The letter also stated that each student’s privacy and identification would be protected.

The researcher collected data during the 4th quarter of the 2014-15 school year. A variety of methods, including parent pre-survey (Appendix B), parent post-survey (Appendix D), classroom observations, and data collection sheets (Appendix C), were used to enhance this study. According to Mills, action research circles generally accept that researchers should not rely on a single source of data, interview, observation, or instrument. (Mills, 2007).

The researcher began to collect data using a parent pre-survey (Appendix B) to gather parental insight into student learning. The survey asked about the student’s ability to communicate events from the school day, retell the events in a story after reading or listening, and any parent concerns regarding the student’s oral language development. The researcher determined what types of information would need to be collected and created a data collection sheet to use (Appendix C). The first data collection sheet was used to collect information on sharing oral ideas. The researcher recorded the times when the student raised their hand to participate, participated, did not participate and whether the response was on topic after literacy centers sharing time, and any other time.
The researcher gathered information from the students as well. Some of the conversations were formal interviews and some were casual conversations. The students shared their insights and opinions on the conversation station. This information helped determine the activities chosen for the center.

The final method of data collection the researcher used was through post-surveys (Appendix D). The researcher sent a post-survey home to parents after completing the classroom data collection. The researcher wanted to gather insight from the parents on any changes in their child’s communication observed at home.

**Expert Review**

A panel of three experts was used to review the project/procedures. Each member was given the layout of the project (discussed in Chapter 4) and then asked to evaluate the project as well as the data collection procedures. The experts were chosen based on either their knowledge of literacy and classroom engagement, data collection and recording procedures, or both. The panel included TJ George, Rick Collum, and Angela Schoepke.

TJ George’s involvement was based on his ability to utilize a conversation center in a self-contained classroom similar to that used in this research study, in addition to his previous knowledge of data recording procedures. Mr. George has a Master’s Degree in Education and is Administration certified. He teaches social studies classes currently and thought the project could carry over into helping his students better maintain focus and understanding.
Rick Collum’s involvement was based on the wide range of students that he encounters throughout an average day. Mr. Collum teaches in both the self-contained special education setting with students of all disability levels in the classroom at the same time as well as being a team member in co-taught classes.

Angela Schoepke’s involvement was based on her knowledge of data systems. Ms. Schoepke did not actually have an opportunity to implement any of the procedures in a classroom, but she was able to read the parameters and look over the data procedures and give feedback.

**Modifications to the Project**

The expert panel gave feedback based on the Capstone Project parameters (Appendix E) that was given to them. Based on the expert panel’s feedback, the researcher rewrote some sections of the project parameters to be more clear. Some of the language used in the original write up seemed to be confusing to the members of the panel. The term “on task” became more clearly defined, for example.

The other modification that came from the panel was how the data were entered into a computer for ease of converting it to chart format. The researcher was having difficulty translating the data into graphical format. This issue was resolved as the result of the expert panel’s feedback.

**Chapter Summary**

A quantitative research design was used to examine the effects of a conversation station on students’ on-task responses. The center was set up to be
run by both the researcher and the assistant in the classroom and was to be used to allow students to further discuss things that were brought up in the class, but weren’t directly on topic. Students were introduced to the center in three groups and data was taken on the students’ on-task responses before using the center and then again while using the center. A multiple baseline design was used along with reversal, so data was constantly being taken on students using the center and students who did not presently have access. The students being tracked were chosen at random and were part of an entire classroom utilizing the conversation station. The researcher gave the design to a panel of experts within the school building along with a survey that they returned. Based on the returned surveys, the researcher made modifications to the project.
Chapter 4

Results

Project Procedures

The project was set up as an A-B-A-B design, with A representing baseline data and B representing the treatment. This particular reversal design helped to validate the results by examining not only the baseline and treatment conditions, but by also reversing the process to track what happens if the treatment isn’t there again. If the reversal condition shows the same strength as the treatment condition, there may be other factors leading to the increase in on-task response rates in the classroom at that time. The project began with baseline data being taken from the entire class, specifically the rate of on-task responses per class period. This was measured with a data collection sheet (Appendix C) and entered into an Excel spreadsheet daily.

After one week of the entire class being monitored and baseline data recorded, the conversation station was explained to a group of students in the class and the procedures were then implemented for that group (students 1, 2, and 3). At this point, that group became monitored for treatment conditions whereas the rest of the group was still under baseline conditions. This condition continued until the
end of week three of the data collection and then it was reversed. During week four, students 1, 2, and 3 did not have access to the conversation station. The treatment was reintroduced in week five for this group of students and lasted through to the end of week six. Week seven was again a reversal condition for this group of students and the program was available for week eight. This resulted in a noticeably trending upward rate of on-task responses (Appendix G).

The next groups of students to have the station explained and enter the treatment condition were students 4, 5, and 6. They were under baseline for weeks one and two, then under treatment for weeks three and four with a reversal during week five. Access to the conversation station resumed for weeks six and seven, and the final week was a reversal condition for this group. As with the first group, there was a noticeable trend upward in on-task responses in weeks three and four. (Appendix H)

The final group of students to receive explanation and access to the conversation station consisted of students 7, 8, 9, and 10. This group was under baseline for the first three weeks, then had access to the conversation station for weeks four and five with a reversal in week six, but finished out the term with the treatment condition during weeks seven and eight. This group also showed a trend upward in on-task responses when they were using the conversation station (Appendix I). For weeks two and three, however, there was no significant difference in on-task responses within this group, suggesting that the conversation station itself strengthens on-task response rates rather than other classroom conditions. By the time this group got to the station, the majority of the class had
increased their on-task response rates and this group remained at the level of the entire class baseline for the most part. Once they gained access to the station, though, their rates increased in line with the other groups.

The data of the whole class confirms that while the conversation station is in use, on-task response rates increase overall (Appendix J). This set of data also shows that in the reversal condition, rates maintain higher than baseline, but dip below those under the treatment condition. The implication overall was that the conversation station was an effective means of increasing the on-task rate of the individual students, the groups of students, and the class as a whole.

**Analysis of Data**

The investigation involved conducting a number of paired t’s and t tests assuming equal variance on the sample data. In order to ensure that there was no difference between gender the first analysis was a comparison of baseline male versus female data. A two tailed t-test was completed and a t value of -.82 was found with a t critical of 2.01 needed (Appendix F). There was no difference in gender with the baseline observations. The researcher then compared the males and females at the end of the study with a two tailed t-test. A t value of 1.33 was found with a 2.01 needed to indicate a difference between gender (Appendix F). The results clearly show that the intervention affected both genders equally.
Hypothesis One

In terms of null hypothesis one, the investigator conducted a number of paired t tests between baseline week data and treatment. The baseline and finish data analysis is presented in Table 1 below.

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</table>

(See Appendix F)

The results of the data analysis clearly indicate that null hypothesis one can be rejected and research hypothesis one accepted. This means that by utilizing a conversation center for topics related to intervention increased both communication and oral language development of students.

Hypothesis Two and Three

H02 There is no difference between baseline level of males score at the end of treatments and males’ scores in use of conversation center

H12 There is a difference between baseline and results of males using the conversation center

H03 There is no difference between baseline level of females score at the end of treatments and females’ scores in use of conversation center
H13 There is a difference between baseline and results of females using the conversation center. Table 2 below shows the data analysis results for hypotheses two and three at a .05 level of significance.

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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>+/- 2.06</td>
<td>-5.29</td>
<td>2.02E-05</td>
<td>Reject H₀₃, Accept H₁₃</td>
</tr>
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</table>

(See Appendix F)

The data analysis results indicate that both null hypothesis two and null hypothesis three can be rejected and the research hypothesis for each can be accepted. This means that when broken down by gender, results were significant between baseline and end-of-treatment levels for both males and females.

**Chapter Summary**

The results of the expert review led to a couple minor, but important changes in the overall project. Once those changes were in place, an A-B-A-B design was implemented for data collection and assessment. The class was broken down into three groups and each was assessed separately, with data taken on each student as well.

All three groups showed upward trend in on-task response rates under the treatment condition with lower rates in the reversal condition. Although the last group of students to enter the treatment condition had two weeks where the other
students were increasing their on-task rates, they did not follow suit until they were under the treatment condition and were utilizing the conversation station.

As a whole, it is evident that use of the conversation station had an impact on the rates of on-task behavior and that its effect was generally maintained after the first reversal condition, with levels higher than baseline, but not quite as high as when the conversation station was in use for those students. This implies that the conversation station led to these results instead of some other factor and that the conversation station is an effective means of generally increasing on-task response rates.
Chapter 5

Implications, Discussion, Conclusions

Discussion of Data Analysis Results

The set up of the program made data collection simple and effective. The data all indicate strongly that there is a noticeable and positive effect on all measured aspects when a conversation center is utilized. The data indicated a difference in the areas of comparison between baseline and treatment phases. The data also did not differentiate between gender, further showing an effect on the classroom in general. What the data doesn't directly show, though, is how much of an effect that this procedure had on classroom management. It can, and should, be stated that a more on-task student with stronger oral communication skills is more engaged and studious. The most exciting thing that the researcher found was that teaching the class became easier with this process in place.

Conclusions

The question explored in this research project was: What impact will a conversation station have on classroom on-task response rates? Through the completion of this action research project and the analysis of the data collected, the
The researcher was able to determine that the conversation station did have an impact on classroom on-task ratings of participation. The data showed that each student had an increase in on-task rates during each treatment phase with some degree of maintenance after that phase. The students became more and more able to express on-task ideas and better facilitate classroom learning as they became familiar with the conversation station and utilized it.

**Recommendations and Questions for Further Study**

Based on the data collected, analyzed, and the findings of this research study connected to a communication station, the researcher would recommend the implementation of a conversation station as a part of literacy centers in any classroom. A communication station in the classroom will impact student participation in the classroom. The results of this project suggest that student attitudes towards on-task behavior may be influenced as well as engagement in the activities at the center. The researcher would recommend starting the school year with the conversation station as a part of the literacy area and continuing through the entire year to fully see results.

A recommendation for further study would be to study the effects of students working with the same partners on academic performance. The relationships formed while the students worked with the same partner during conversation station time showed an increase of community and focused attention to work as a non-quantified by-product. This led to the question: What effect does working with the same partner have on academic achievement of both students?
Implications of the Study

Through this project, the importance of deviating from a traditional lecture based classroom and/or call and response type of structure was affirmed. Tracking the impact of a clearly defined area where the students could analyze and synthesize class materials in their own language showed an increase in on-task behavior overall and within each smaller group of students.

In the times where the students are expected to sit in a more traditional classroom style (the baseline and reversal conditions), the rate of on-task responses from students was markedly lower than when they were give the structured opportunity to create value from the material more on their own terms. This seemed to encourage the students to take ownership of their own learning and the material presented to them.

Chapter Summary

The data analysis results all indicated that the effect of a conversation station was significant and the results did not differentiate between gender. As an added result, not assessed in this study, classroom management became automatic with the increase in on-task behavior in the classroom. The students became aware of their own verbal influence on the classroom and began to increase the number of on-task responses due to the conversation station. The students took ownership of their own learning with the structure that this study encouraged and they were participating in a positive way at a much higher rate.
References


The Effects of a Conversation Station on Classroom On-Task Behavior

Retrieved From

Retrieved From


Dear Families,

THE RESEARCHER is currently conducting research that is the final part of my Masters Degree from Carthage College. As part of my research, THE RESEARCHER is learning more about how to improve students’ verbal skills in the classroom. There is data that suggests that students’ oral language skills predict their future reading abilities as well as help students in future testing through high school. THE RESEARCHER would like to gather information to see what impact this new center has on their communication skills. THE RESEARCHER will be talking with students, observing their interactions with other students, and recording participation in whole-group meetings. We have such busy days at school and having this time for the students to focus on communication will improve their ability to talk with one another and express their ideas clearly. If you have any questions please don’t hesitate to call at (262) 619-4202.

Thanks so much,

Jon McNamara
Appendix B

Dear Family,

If you could please complete the following questionnaire, it would give me a starting point to work from as well as a better insight into your child’s skills. THE RESEARCHER may/may not use the information (no names included) in my final write-up of my project.

Thank you so much for your help,

Jon McNamara

_____________________________________________________________________

(Student’s Name)

What kinds of information does your student tell you about his/her day at school?

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

After reading a story with an adult can your student easily retell the events of the story?

_____________________________________________________________________

Does your student easily communicate wants and needs?

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

Do you have any concerns about your student’s verbal communication skills?

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________
Appendix C

ON-Task Behavior Weekly Tracking Sheet

*Any time a student is engaged in the direction or goals of the classroom
*Raised hand to participate, participated in positive direction, and/or response was on topic

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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D

Dear Families,

Thank you so much for your help as THE RESEARCHER researched oral language skills in the classroom. THE RESEARCHER has one more questionnaire that THE RESEARCHER would like parents to complete as a post gathering of information.

Thank you so much for your help,

Mr. McNamara

_____________________________________________________________________

(Student’s Name)

What kinds of information does your student tell you about his/her day at school?

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

After reading a story with an adult can your student easily retell the events of the story?

_______________________________________________________________________

Does your student easily communicate wants and needs?

_______________________________________________________________________

Have you noticed any changes in your student’s oral language skills since the beginning of the school year, if so what changes?
Appendix E

Capstone Project

-Jon McNamara

The Effect of Literacy Centers on On-Task Behavior

Please review and complete the survey attached.

Thank you in advance for your time and efforts.
Project parameters

The purpose of this project is to test the effect of literacy centers in the classroom. THE RESEARCHER has observed a common theme over years of teaching and reflecting on classroom strengths and weaknesses. In my constant reflection, I saw a pattern in how much students like to talk to each other, tell jokes, or talk about what they did over the weekend. When it came time to talk about a classroom task to complete, however, the students tended to have a difficult time working together and communicating thoughts, ideas, or problems. To meet the needs of the students in the classroom, we may have a tendency to work in small groups with students while the others were working in pairs. This practice may be problematic as teachers are not aware if students are not completing their work or were struggling. In that case, students tended to resort to off-task talking. This research attempts to see the benefits of a program designed to incorporate students’ love for talking and utilize that love for talking to facilitate their learning.

A literacy center is a space in the room dedicated to a group of students for the purpose of the students talking and not necessarily paying attention to the general environment of the room. This center must be monitored but not micromanaged. Time parameters and volume parameters must be taught before sending students to the center and they must be enforced. The difference between a literacy center and the corner of the room where students are just off task is that the center time comes with specific objectives. The students must complete a reading or a task as a group, then discuss it amongst themselves, in their own language and creating their own meaning.
The effects of the center are collected on data sheets (provided) and measured by on-task responses to the material when reviewed as a class (after center time, with the rest of the population of the room). Each on-task response is tallied under the student's name on the data sheet. An on-task response is one that is directly related to the material, whether or not it is how you, as the leader of the room would have responded is irrelevant. The purpose is to reduce off-task behavior and increase on-task behavior; therefore, a technically correct response isn’t the parameter for measurement. Rather, a response that is relative to the material is the parameter for measurement. This allows for teaching to take place as well as assessment of your presentation methods relating to student understanding.

Please return surveys to me once you have looked this over or implemented it yourself.

Survey

* Did you find the parameters easy to understand?    Yes    No

If not, what changes would you make?

* Would you implement something like this in your classroom?    Yes    No

* Please describe some advantages and/or disadvantages you would assume to implementing this in your classroom:

* Did you find the data collection sheets to be effective?    Yes    No

If not, what changes would you make?

* Did you implement this?    Yes    No

If “yes”, please continue survey.
If “no”, thank you for your time and consideration in this manner.

* Did you find the implementation of the center easy and effective based on the parameters above? If not, what were some of the issues that arose?

* Was entering and tracking data easy to implement based on the description of target behaviors (on-task)? If not, what would you change?

* Did you find that the center improved the overall environment of your classroom?
Appendix F

**t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances**

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**Males vs. Females Beginning Comparison**

**t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances**

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**Males vs. Females Start to Finish Comparison**
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### Baseline vs. Reversal

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### Baseline vs. Final Week

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The Effects of a Conversation Station on Classroom On-Task Behavior  50

### Males Start vs. Males Finish

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### Females Start vs. Females Finish

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Appendix G
Appendix H

Number of On-Task Responses

Date

Group 2 - Students #4-6

4/13/15
4/15/15
4/17/15
4/19/15
4/21/15
4/23/15
4/25/15
4/27/15
4/29/15
5/1/15
5/3/15
5/5/15
5/7/15
5/9/15
5/11/15
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5/29/15
5/31/15
6/2/15
6/4/15
Appendix I
Appendix J

Number or On Task Responses

Date

All Students

Number of On-Task Responses