Teaching Context

Lemont Elementary School is one of the oldest schools in the State College Area School District. It is located in Lemont, which is a rural area in central Pennsylvania. It is a blue-collar town. Many community members are part of The Pennsylvania State University staff or are associated with the university in some way.

My first grade classroom at Lemont Elementary School consists of nineteen students. There are seven girls and twelve boys. Students range in age from six to seven years old. Six male students receive Title I reading instruction. One student is identified as ESL however English is his primary language. Two male students are on IEPs, one for behavior and one for academics. Two students receive speech therapy twice a week. Four students, two males and two females, attend sessions with the school counselor. In these sessions, one student is working towards controlling his emotions, especially anger. Another student is a constant attention seeker. She seeks adult attention in inappropriate ways and shuts down emotionally. These two students and four others make up the six dominant personalities in the room. These students are the most outspoken and influence student behavior in the classroom. While my classroom is academically and behaviorally diverse, it is not very culturally diverse. Sixteen out nineteen students are Caucasian. One student is of Russian descent and speaks Russian, which is his primary language at home. One student is of Persian descent and another student is Peruvian.

Rationale

This inquiry began by asking the question, “What works best to help first graders learn to control their own behavior with regard to calling out?” As a new teacher, I was looking for a behavior management plan or tools that would create a collaborative
learning environment. I noticed during whole group and small group instruction that students would call out answers and talk while someone else was speaking. I decided that this particular behavior, “talking out,” should be the focus of my inquiry. I wanted to know if students were aware of their own behavior and if they could become conscious of controlling it at such a young age. I was looking to find and implement new tools in the classroom to aid students in this endeavor. When I had received a negative report from a guest teacher about how disrespectful my students were to her, I realized it was necessary to do more than just manage student behavior. The focus of my inquiry is respect. After all, listening while others are speaking and waiting your turn to speak are social skills that demonstrate respect for another person. I wanted to know if respect was a skill that could be taught and how to effectively teach it in the classroom. I believe in a classroom where students are respectful, the learning environment is a much safer and happier place. With a positive social environment, students can focus most of their attention on the academics.

Wonderings and Questions

Main question:

What works best to help first grade students become more respectful in class?

Sub-questions:

How can students calm down before reacting to a situation?

By using a self-monitoring tool, can students control their talking out behavior?

Is respect a social skill that can be taught?

Data Collection

My initial question was “What works best to help first graders learn to control
their own behavior with regard to calling out?” I began collecting baseline data on how often students called out and talked while other people were speaking. I recorded this baseline data for about two full weeks by using a sheet with student names down one column (See Appendix B). I put a tally mark next to the student’s name when he or she talked out in class. I observed this behavior throughout the day during morning meeting, math, and spelling. By the second week, I started recording actual student statements and teacher reminders. Teacher reminders included statements such as “Remember to raise your hands.” Many times my mentor or I paused lessons to give these verbal reminders to students. I continued using these sheets throughout my inquiry so I could compare the number of times a student talked out throughout the course of the data collection period to determine whether this behavior increased, decreased, or stayed the same.

During the second week of data collection, I conducted student interviews, which I audio recorded. The interview questions are included in Appendix C. I focused the questions on calling out at that time. The purpose of this interview was to find out if students were conscious of their own calling out behavior as well as that behavior of other students in the class. I expected to use the responses from the interview to help me determine whether it was possible for students to control their own behavior.

On the third week, I gave students a self-monitoring tool. It was a sheet of paper that listed each of the subjects for the day (See Appendix D). In each column, there were three faces to interpret how students felt about their own behavior. After each subject, I would remind students to circle which face represented their talking out behavior. As I stated above, I continued making tally marks about the calling out behavior on my own chart to compare it to how the students recorded their own behavior.
At the end of the third week, I decided to give a student survey about how they perceived the effectiveness of the self-monitoring tool. I also felt it was necessary to ask students if they even liked these at all. Students tended to moan when I introduced these each morning. For example one female student remarked, “Oh not this again!” This prompted another female student moan and repeat what the other student had said. If the majority of students did not like the self-monitoring tool then that could lead to the tool being ineffective in changing their behavior. If students find something a nuisance then they may not put a lot of thought into completing the behavior self-analysis.

During the fourth and fifth weeks of data collection, my main question began to change to a more general idea of classroom respect. Through a journal reflection, I describe my exchange with a guest teacher. She told me she felt my students were disrespectful. She said the students were asked to stop talking about an inappropriate topic for school and did not stop. She said many students “talked back” to her when she would give directions for an activity. The guest teacher also explained that at recess when she blew the whistle to signal line up, students completely ignored it and continued to play. This week was also the second week of full-time teaching for me and I had been feeling the same sense of disrespect that this guest teacher felt.

At this point, I decided to address this issue of respect of adults and their fellow peers through a large group discussion, which I recorded in a reflective journal (Appendix I). My mentor and I also decided that students should write an apology letter to the substitute. Also, I began introducing relaxation techniques from Conscious Discipline by Dr. Becky A. Bailey. S.T.A.R. (Stop and Take a breath And Relax) was a tool to help students calm their initial reaction of frustration or anger with work and peers
so they could control their verbal tones with one another. We also spent time before
math class to physically exercise to lessen the emotions of stress, frustration, or anger.
This allowed students to demonstrate respect through their interactions with one another
and the teacher.

**Data Analysis**

I began analyzing my data by entering the number of tallies for each student
during each subject into a spreadsheet using the program Excel. I wanted to determine
the time of day in which the students talked out the most. Morning meeting was the time
of day when most students called out. I chose this time to measure if the calling out
behavior had increased, decreased, or stayed the same over the course of my inquiry. I
cannot make a clear conclusion concerning this behavior based on the graph (Appendix
F). Students called out more on some days than others. If their behavior decreased, then
it likely increased the following days.

In this inquiry, calling out is defined as not raising a hand to answer a question.
From the interview questions I determined that nine students defined calling out as “not
raising your hand.” Four students associated calling out with shouting, yelling, or being
too loud. Two students defined it as interrupting. Three students did not know what it
meant and one said, “Put your listening ears on.” That is a direct quote from the audio
recording of the interview. The answer to this question revealed the students’
interpretations of the words “calling out.” It implies whether students understand the
teacher when they receive verbal reminders. Students received verbal reminders such as
“No calling out” on February 5 and “Don’t call out” on March 18, which were recorded
anecdotally on the tally sheets. Another question asked in the interview was “Do you
ever call out.” Two students answered yes and five students answered sometimes. Twelve students said they did not call out. I totaled the number of call outs for each student in every subject of the day over the course of the data collection process (See Appendix G). Two of the students who claimed they did not call out were according to the totals, two of the students who called out the most.

From the self-monitoring tool the students completed each day, I compared the faces the student circled to what I had recorded on my own sheet for the day. In this data, the total number of students is eighteen instead of nineteen because one student was absent. Appendix H shows “Student Recordings” and “Teacher Recordings.” The “Student Recordings” chart shows that the majority of students circled happy faces for every subject of the day. The “Teacher Recordings” chart shows how many times each student in the class actually called out on each day of the week. On March 24, seventeen students circled a happy face in every subject of the day. I recorded that six of these seventeen students called out at least once on this day. These students should have circled a straight face for one of the subjects on March 24 but did not. The pink numbers in the “Teacher Recordings” chart represent the student who gave himself/herself straight and frown faces on days when I recorded that he/she did not call out. On March 27, I recorded an exchange with a student. He/she said to me “Why does everybody always circle smiley faces when it’s not always true?” This student asked an excellent question yet he/she only circled happy faces on every day of the week. I recorded that this student called out on three of the days.

After analyzing the self-monitoring tool, I wanted to know if students found this tool helpful and if they actually liked using it. In the morning when I would pass the self-
monitoring tool out, students would groan and make statements such as “Not this again!” Sixteen out of eighteen students felt that the tool helped them to remember to raise their hands. Five students did not like using the tool. Only one of these five students had expressed this concern to me verbally in the week, which I recorded. Two students felt that the tool did not help them to raise their hand. These students liked using the tool though. The student in the class who calls out the most is one of these two.

In a reflective journal from March 30, 2008 (Appendix I), I began to record the incidences of disrespectfulness that were occurring in the classroom. In this journal I discuss a guest teacher’s report on behavior in the classroom. Students were speaking about an inappropriate topic, students talked back to the guest teacher, and students ignored the whistle outside at recess. The following day we had a class discussion about respect. One student defined it as “Treating others the way you would want to be treated.” I gave examples of students reading their stories to the whole class and other students talking at the same time. We also discussed hand-raising in order to give other students a chance to speak. During a Language Arts center that day, students worked in their guided reading groups to write an apology letter to the guest teacher.

The following week I began to introduce the idea of stress reducing activities. This preventative measure allowed students to calm themselves before reacting to a situation. The ideas for the stress reducing activities came from Conscious Discipline by Becky A. Bailey. Through morning community building activities, S.T.A.R, and various physical exercises, I attempted to give students more tools to maintain their composure through stressful and frustrating assignments and conflicts with one another. I was hoping these ideas would build respect because it would eliminate negative verbal
exchanges between students. I took a student survey to determine if students have used them and if they find them helpful (Appendix J). Eleven students said that they have not used it and that it did not help them. Eight students said they have used it and that it was helpful.

**Explanation of Findings (Claims & Evidence)**

1. *The self-monitoring tool was not effective in helping students to raise their hands.*

   The self-monitoring tool with the faces did not help students become more respectful of one another by raising their hands. There was no clear pattern in the graph in Appendix F. The calling out behavior was very inconsistent throughout my entire data collection process. During the week of March 24-28 when the students began the behavior self-analysis, the calling out behavior increases, decreases, and finally increases again. Through a student survey (Appendix E), the student who calls out the most in class admitted that the self-monitoring tool did not help him/her to raise a hand to answer questions.

2. *Students did not take the self-monitoring tool seriously.*

   Students did not take the self-monitoring tool seriously, which is why they are ineffective. Student recordings did not always match my recordings. For example on March 24, six students should have circled a straight face according to my data; instead, they circled a happy face. In a student survey (Appendix E), sixteen students believed the self-monitoring tool helped them yet I recorded that students continued to call out. The student who called out the most felt the tool did not help him/her to remember to raise a hand. In a conversation with a student one day, the student told me that he had recognized that his fellow classmates do not always circle the face that best represents
their behavior.

3. *Effective tools to lower stress exist but have not helped my students in creating a more respectful environment.*

   Through research I have found tools to lower stress levels, which in turn can help students calm down before reacting to a situation. Only eight students in my class actually used these tools to help improve classroom exchanges, which in turn would create a more respectful environment. Through continued observations in my classroom, my students continue to struggle with respect. They continue to call out, speak when others are speaking, and struggle with how to compose themselves during conflict. Thus far in my classroom, respect is a social skill that cannot be taught.

4. *My first grade students are unaware of their own behavior.*

   Through the interviews, students D. and L. did not believe they called out in class (Appendix G). The top five students who do call out the most in class circled the happy face for every subject of the day through the whole week. Their self-monitoring tool responses do not match my data, which recorded how often they called out. These students should have circled straight faces at different times throughout the week.

**Reflections & Future Practice**

The inquiry process helped me conclude that classroom management begins with respect. I began my inquiry by asking a question that focused solely on one aspect of behavior management. As I collected and analyzed data, I discovered the problem in my classroom was actually a lack of respect between students and their peers as well as students and their teachers. This process allowed me to get to the real source of the issue, respect.
Through this process I learned the value of student input on my teaching as well. Through student interviews and surveys, I gathered the students’ opinions which gave me the knowledge to implement and change activities to meet the needs of the students. Inquiry allows for students to motivate change in the classroom after their responses have been analyzed.

In the future I plan to continue conducting inquiry. I know student interviews and surveys will be an integral part of that process. Next year, I would like to begin the year by building a community and teaching the stress reduction techniques. I believe the students in my classroom will benefit from learning about respect from day one. Research shows that respect can be taught, especially through community. It is much more difficult to try to change the classroom culture in the middle of the school year. I believe in the future I will be able to successfully teach respect.

Appendix A
Inquiry Brief

Ashley Campbell

Context

I plan to conduct my inquiry in a first grade classroom. There are nineteen students in this class. There are seven girls and twelve boys. Students range in age from six to seven years old. Six male students receive Title I reading instruction. Two male students are on IEPs. Four students, two males and two females, attend sessions with the school counselor.

Rationale

The students in my first grade classroom tend to talk out of turn instead of raising their hands. This occurs during my own instruction as well as my mentor’s instruction on a daily basis. It happens both during large group instruction as well as small group. This behavior has been occurring since the beginning of the year and does not appear to have subsided. Some students call out more frequently than others. By calling out, a student is ruining the chances of a fellow classmate answer the question. My mentor and I give constant verbal reminders to prevent the calling out behavior. The flow of the lesson is disrupted by this behavior. I believe the calling out behavior is a problem that needs to be addressed in my classroom. I feel in order to solve this problem I need to understand what motivates this behavior. If I am able to find out why this behavior is happening then I may be able to help students control this behavior. Finding out why students call out will help the overall learning environment in my classroom.

Questions

What works best to help first graders learn to control their own behavior with regard to calling out responses?

Subquestions

- Why do students call out?
- By using a self-monitoring tool, can students control the calling out behavior?
- How often is the flow of a lesson disrupted?
- Are first graders developmentally able to control their “blurts?”
- Is calling out an issue during specials?

Timeline

February 18-22
- Collect baseline data on the number of times students call out

February 25-29
- Continue to collect baseline data and anecdotal records about how often a teacher gives verbal reminders

March 3-7
- Conduct the first interview with students to determine their initial thoughts
- Continue to collect baseline data and anecdotal records about how often a teacher gives verbal reminders
- *Inquiry brief and Annotated bib due on the 27th*

March 17-21
- Give students self-monitoring tool
- Collect data on the number of times students call out using tally sheet and anecdotal records about the teacher’s verbal reminders
- Attend art and library this week to collect calling out data in these specials

March 24-28
- Students continue to use self-monitoring tool
- Collect data on calling out behavior using tally sheet
- *Data analysis to class due on the 19th*
- Attend art and library this week to continue collecting data

March 24-28
- Students continue using self-monitoring tool or implement another method at this point (possibly a reward system based on student answers in interview)
- Survey students about calling out now and self-monitoring
- *Start writing the paper*

March 31- April 4
- *Continue writing the paper*

April 7-11
- *Inquiry draft due on the 12th*

April 14-18
- *Revise paper*

April 21-25
- *Final paper due on the 23rd*
- *Inquiry Conference on the 26th*

**Data Collection**

*Question:* What works best to help first graders learn to control their own behavior with regard to calling out responses?

*Data Collection:* I plan to conduct a student interview and record this on GarageBand. The questions in the interview will include: How often do you think you call out?; How
does it feel when someone else in the class calls out; If everyone in the class could earn a prize when all the students raise their hand, what would you want the prize to be? I plan to collect one artifact, a self-monitoring behavior analysis card from each student on a daily basis. Throughout the data collection process, I plan to tally how often each student talks out of turn on a chart as follows:

Date:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Student</th>
<th>Morning Meeting</th>
<th>Language Arts</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Spelling</th>
<th>Geography</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Question:** Why do students call out?

**Data Collection:** By conducting interviews, I will find students’ initial thoughts on why they think they call out. I plan to interview a kindergarten teacher, my mentor, another first grade teacher, a third grade teacher, and a fifth grade teacher. One of the questions I will ask is “Why do you think students call out?” Other questions will include: What is the most troublesome student behavior in your classroom?; Is calling out a problem in your classroom?; Do you believe the flow of the lesson is disrupted?; What behavior management techniques do you use to prevent calling out? Based on teachers’ responses, I may be able to determine if there is a common reason among students of all ages.

**Question:** By using a self-monitoring tool, can students control the calling out behavior?

**Data Collection:** Students will be given a self-monitoring card to describe their behavior during a particular subject. They will circle a happy face if they did not call out and a sad face if they did.

I will also continue to use the tally chart from above to monitor how often each student actually calls out. This will tell me whether the behavior has decreased, increased, or stayed the same. I will also survey the students about this tool. The survey questions will include: Do you like the tool?; Do you think it has helped you to stop calling out?; What else do you think might help you stop calling out?

**Question:** How often is the flow of the lesson interrupted?

**Data Collection:** During my interviews with teachers, I plan to ask if they feel the lesson is disrupted. On the same tally sheet, I will record anecdotal records about how often a teacher gives a verbal reminder during a lesson.

**Question:** Are first graders developmentally able to control the “blurts?”
Data Collection: I plan to interview a kindergarten teacher, two first grade teachers, a third grade teacher, and a fifth grade teacher. From these interviews, I may be able to determine if “blurting” is strictly a first grade issue. I will also consult books such as Yardsticks to determine if first graders are able to control their “blurt.”

Question: Is calling out an issue during specials?
Data Collection: I will observe the students during library and art. I will use the tally chart to collect data of how often the students call out during specials. I will also use anecdotal records to record how often these teachers give verbal reminders.

Appendix B
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<th>Read Aloud</th>
<th>Spelling</th>
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Teacher Reminders:

Appendix C
What does calling out mean?

Do you think you ever call out?

Why do you call out?

How do you feel when someone else in the room calls out?

What would help you to remember to raise your hand?
Self-monitoring tool

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Morning Meeting</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Spelling</th>
<th>Geography</th>
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Appendix E
Name____________________________________

Did the smiley faces help you to remember to raise your hand?

YES       NO

Did you like using the smiley faces?

YES       NO

Appendix F
*The break in data represents a morning meeting I was not present to collect data.

Appendix G
The total is the number of times a student called out in every subject over the entire data collection process.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Total</th>
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<td>D.</td>
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Appendix H
Student Recordings

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Teacher Recordings

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Appendix I
My first week of teaching went well. The students caught up on a lot of work in writing, spelling, and math. They worked hard and it paid off because they accomplished a lot. Unfortunately the students tested me this week. When I would transition between lessons and introduce the next one, students would moan. Students also talked a lot this week while I was speaking. I had to stop a lot during lessons and ask for the students attention. When I would ring the bell and say freeze students would just ignore me. This made teaching quite a challenge.

On Thursday, my mentor and I had to go to a meeting in the afternoon. Before I left, I reminded students about their behavior with a substitute. The response I got was “Yeah yeah we know.” When the students had left for the day, I spoke with the substitute. She told me that students did not listen when she told them to stop speaking about ghosts because it was an inappropriate topic for school. She said many of the students talked back and when she blew the whistle on the playground, many students continued to play and ignore it. I was very upset when I heard this. Students had been extremely disrespectful all week long and at this point I had enough.

My mentor and I decided that students needed to write a letter of apology to the substitute during instead of playing a game at my center. When the students came in on Friday morning I had asked students to go sit on the carpet. As usual I had students mumbling “What are we doing?” or “What’s going on?” in a disgruntled, annoyed tone. I started by telling the students that I had talked to the substitute yesterday and she told me they were excellent listeners for the fossil speaker. I then told them what she told me about the not listening to her and talking back to her. I told the students as a whole class they were going to work on something called respect. I asked students what it meant and
one student volunteered that it meant treating others the way you wanted to be treated. I liked her definition so I used it. I explained that when I am up front talking that they are to be listening. I told them to remember how they read their stories to the class the day before. When they share stories they want all the members of the class listening to them so they have to be good listeners for everyone else. I explained that everyone in the class would be writing a letter of apology to the substitute. At the guided reading center, students worked as a group to write the letter, which I wrote on the whiteboard for them and then they copied it down. The first two groups were very responsive. Some students were confused why the substitute told them to stop talking about ghosts. One of the other students was able to answer it for me by saying, “Some students were getting scared by our conversation so we needed to stop.” I tried to further discuss it in small groups to make sure students understood why they were writing letters of apology. I believe the first two groups understood why their behavior was unacceptable. The second two groups did not. In fact, with the third small group one of the students said to me, “Can we just get on with this?” This seriously hurt my feelings. I had to hold back my tears at this point. I looked at him and said this is exactly why we are discussing respect. I said “How do you think you made me feel by saying that to me? Can you imagine if I said that to you when for example you read to the small group yesterday?” He did not respond he just looked down.

I am hoping by Monday students will have adjusted to the change of me being their teaching. I understand this is the reason students are acting out. If not I will be having more discussions about respect with my class. Also as part of my inquiry, I am moving away from the behavior analysis tool because students do not take them
seriously. I would like to start implementing conscious discipline, which is what I saw in another classroom. Conscious discipline focuses on seven skills the teacher and the students must learn to create a better environment.
Name_______________________

Have you used S.T.A.R.?
  YES  NO

Has S.T.A.R helped you?
  YES  NO

Appendix K
Annotated Bibliography


   This author includes a case study about students talking out of turn. Much of the study focuses on the teacher and how he/she can impact talking out of turn with his/her “classroom talk.” She encourages teachers to also figure out the “context,” which is the reason why students may talk out of turn. The reasons students talk out of turn include: the relationship between adult and student, physical environment, rules that are established and maintained, curriculum content, and the length of time and seating organization. This source applies to my wondering because I want to learn why the students in my class are calling out. Part of my data collection includes finding out the “context.” This source has also given me the idea that I must look at my own teacher language and see if in some way I am encouraging the calling out behavior.


   This article discusses the effects of socio-economic status and temperament on a child’s ability to self-regulate. These factors affect a child’s readiness for school and his/her performance in primary elementary grades. I chose this source because of the section on temperament. By looking at the various temperaments of the students in my classroom, I may be able to determine who has the ability to self-regulate. Then I will see if that corresponds with the amount of times a students calls out.


   The authors of this book claim that students are motivated by four different goals to misbehave. Student personalities are characterized in the book. Understanding which personalities are in your classroom can help determine what motivates a student to act out. This applies to both common and serious forms of misbehavior. This applies to my inquiry because this book would be evidence that students with a certain type of personality are more likely to talk out of turn.


   This research focused helping teachers and students combat the most common disruptive behaviors. Talking out of turn was on the top of this list. The researchers deem that kind of misbehavior as a social skill. They believe that a child’s background, particularly at home, impacts how often the student
misbehaves. This applies to my inquiry because I am doing similar research of what impacts/motivates students to call out. They implemented ways to teach these social skills where I am expecting students to take control of their own behavior. Possibly I should think about teaching social skills as well as asking students to take control of their behaviors through a self-analysis.


A chapter in this book discusses the purpose behind many of the common misbehaviors students present in the classroom. The author suggests that if a teacher can understand what motivates the behavior then the teacher can better influence student behavior. The author lists four main purposes as to why students misbehave. They include getting attention, gaining power, gaining revenge, and protecting self-confidence. This author describes calling out as “active attention getting.” I chose this source because I want various expert views on what calling out can be attributed to and this source various from other sources I have found.


In a study conducted by Houghton, Wheldall, and Merrett, they found the most common forms of misbehavior among both secondary and elementary students are talking out of turn, hindering others, and slowness. The researchers gave a questionnaire to secondary students to ask them what behaviors they found most troublesome; talking out of turn was on the top of the list. This source relates to my inquiry because I am going to conduct a similar questionnaire with elementary students to find out how they feel about talking out of turn. This article proves that calling out is a problem at any grade level.


In order to enhance a student’s self-control, the book suggests students use self-analyses. The book describes one case in particular where a first grade teacher used daily smiley face self-analyses to remind his students of good behaviors. When the teacher found that good behaviors increased, he would stop the self-analyses but bring them back when students started engaging in the misbehaviors again. I want to use this idea of a self-analysis to help students in my classroom to take control of their own hand raising behavior.

This book is a quick and easy to use guide for teachers written by a licensed psychologist. It covers various topics including aggressive behavior, seatwork problems, and whining. Of course, it has a section on calling out which is how it applies to my inquiry project. The author claims the motivation behind calling out is attention seeking, annoying the teacher, or poor impulse control. There are fourteen solutions listed to prevent the calling out behavior such as role-play with the class or teach the student to self-monitor.


This source offers two responses to the calling out behavior. The first response includes praising students who raise their hands, ignoring the calling out, and contacting the parents. The second response involves holding class meetings, peer pressure, and giving the student a pad to write down ideas instead of calling out. This applies to my inquiry because while I want to start with a self-analysis, if that is unsuccessful, I will try other ways to prevent the calling out behavior. I like the idea of giving students a pad to write their ideas down.


This author suggests ways to build a classroom community among students. The book contains a model of how to build this community. The use of self-analyses among students is recommended so they can take control of their learning. This applies to my inquiry because using the ideas of building a classroom community along with teaching social skills may help students to understand why taking turns to speak is important.