“What Do I Do Now?”
Building Independence Through Responsibility

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I. Abstract

In my first grade classroom, I observed a growing problem with student independence. Throughout language arts centers, it is important for my students to work independently at times and to concentrate on their work. However, students were often interrupting my mentor or me to ask what they should do next. Assignments were listed on the board, but students did not understand which items they must complete themselves.

How could I help my students know what to do and take responsibility for completing this work? My project focuses on promoting independence in my first graders by increasing student responsibility in the classroom.
II. Teaching Context

Park Forest Elementary is located in a suburban neighborhood in State College, Pennsylvania. The elementary school building is only a few years old, and is built on a spacious campus, surrounded by nature and garden areas. The school’s population has a range of socioeconomic status. However, the school community includes an active Parent Teacher organization, afterschool care, and activities to aid families.

Park Forest is a K-5 school, with eight sections of primary (1st and 2nd grade). Each of these primary classrooms has a paraprofessional for half the school day. My classroom is a self-contained first grade, comprised of 21 first graders, 10 girls and 11 boys. The majority of the students are at grade level for reading. I have three students who are below level, and three students who are reading a year above level. There are four students who attend RTI, or Response to Intervention, to receive reading support. Differentiation is essential to meet the needs of the varying ability levels in this class.

There are behavior issues present such as calling out, walking around the room at inappropriate times, and mean language, such as name calling and “put-downs.” Specifically, there is one student with ADHD and two who can pose behavior problems at times. These two young boys are social leaders in the classroom, and they easily influence others to follow their off-task behaviors, such as talking or making noises. The student with ADHD receives additional support outside the classroom and through an aide that is provided in the beginning and end of the day to help this student’s organization. Additionally, two girls are quiet and need strong emotional support, as they can often shut
down when faced with a challenge. There is also one boy who is easy to get along with but has extreme trouble getting his work done, although he is capable.

The mix of personalities in the classroom makes for an interesting group; however, they are very respectful, supportive, and usually friendly to each other despite their differences. Challenging behavior and defiance are seen very rarely, as most talking or restlessness can be attributed to the developmental level. These students are learning how to be successful at school together, and they make up a great community (see Appendix A for full Inquiry Brief).

**III. Wondering and Sub-Wonderings**

Over the course of the school year, I have observed a consistent problem that can be contributed to the growing independence of my first grade students. I have noticed a persistent issue of students forgetting to do one or more of their responsibilities every morning\(^\text{1}\). By February of the school year, one would hope that students have internalized routines of the classroom.

Additionally, I have been concerned with the amount of work that students must complete every day during a “finish work” rotation of language arts centers. The list of work that students needed to complete was growing increasingly larger as the school year progressed. I began to wonder what could be done in the classroom to aid students in remembering and performing their responsibilities, both in the morning and during independent work time. This led me to a main wondering and several sub-wonderings about student independence in the classroom.

**Main Wondering**

- How can one motivate students to finish work independently?

\(^\text{1}\) Morning Routine includes the following: wash hands, lunch count, home/school folder in basket, and morning work.
Sub-Wonderings

- How can enrichment opportunities motivate students?
- How can responsibilities in the classroom impact independence?
- How does student attitude affect completion of assignments?
- What tools or techniques can help students to internalize routines and take independent responsibility for tasks?

IV. Data Collection and Analysis

To gather evidence for my inquiry project, I utilized varying methods of data collection. I wanted to ensure I had different types of evidence to support my eventual claims. In the following sections are my methods of accruing data and analyzing my findings to determine how to promote independence in my students.

Documentation

To analyze student work habits, I collected “finish work” checklists that I created and supplied to students at the end of February (see sample, Appendix B). These checklists showed a decrease in the amount of finish work students had to complete throughout the month of March. The amount of students who had more than 1 item of “finish work” to complete also decreased throughout the month of March. Those that had the most items on their “finish work” checklist are those students who are categorically slow workers. The data does not necessarily show that these students are poor independent workers, but rather they take more time to complete assignments. Even the amount that these students had to complete did decrease slightly through the checklists. Overall, the checklists showed what work students personally had to complete, which focused “finish work” time (see results of checklist, Appendix C).

To monitor the work completed by my one student, Logan, I implemented an assignment book that is sent between school and home. This keeps Logan and his parents
apprised of the wok he completes each day. I utilized this journal to collect data about the changes in Logan’s work ethic. This particular student seems to have the most trouble working independently and being motivated to complete any assignment, whether it is a craft, math paper, science worksheet, or language arts sheet. During February, Logan often had to be redirected several times to start doing work, and he tended to not complete any work during the fifteen-minute “finish work” time. Throughout the month of March, the amount of work he completed on his own increased greatly. This student did not have to be spoken to for the entire month of March during centers time to be on task. When speaking to Logan during the final week of March, he expressed a great deal of pride in himself because he is working hard and completing assignments (sample journal pages, Appendix D).

Furthermore, I collected student work completed at enrichment centers, and monitored how many students were able to choose activities at the enrichment centers each day. This aided me in determining how often students utilized the materials I put out for them, which materials they seemed to utilize the most, and the quality of the work produced at the centers. Students’ work at the centers was quite impressive, as they often spent the entire week focusing on perfecting drawings or creating many monsters on a piece of drawing paper (Appendix D). The same students were continually able to utilize the enrichment centers, and they chose the same activities. This leads me to believe that I perhaps need more of the activities that seem to interest the students who are getting to the enrichment centers to keep their interest and motivation to get work done. I also found that the students, who continually did not get to go to the enrichment centers, were those who are categorically slower workers.
Additionally, I tested ideas to ascertain what can aid students in the morning routine and classroom job responsibilities. I now allow students to choose their jobs for the week after considering the results of a student survey (Appendix J), and also keep a list of the jobs on the board. The documentation of the student jobs aids the adults in the room in knowing who has certain responsibilities, and also serves as a reminder to students. Additionally, students can reach the new helper board, which allows them to find their dinosaur if they forget their job. I found student participation in jobs increased, while adult reminders to do jobs decreased after the implementation of this new classroom job system. Students have even began to ask if it is time to do their job and they remind the adults of a job that needs to be completed at the end of the school day.

Finally, on several days I utilized morning messages in the form of a survey question such as, “Did you wash your hands this morning?” to aid student independence in these tasks. Those days, there was an increase of students washing hands without reminders, as each student put a tally mark on the chart paper when they had washed their hands. My observations were documented through pictures (Appendix D), and I noticed that all students present on the days that survey questions were utilized washed their hands in order to answer the survey question.

Interviews

I interviewed Sharon Kroll, the Gifted Support Master Teacher (K-12) of North Allegheny School District, about her feelings on the importance of enrichment centers in motivation. Her interview helped me to gather ideas about what types of activities to implement in my classroom in the form of enrichment centers. Her interview (Appendix E) also led me to informally interview students while giving them my final survey. I wished to
see how students felt about the enrichment center activities, and what they might like to see added to help motivate them in completing work.

Students expressed to me their enjoyment of enrichment centers, and provided me with some new ideas to include in the future. I found that the students, who did not like the enrichment centers, were those that struggle in reading and writing; however, they expressed to me a desire for more books about certain topics they enjoy. It was encouraging to see these particular students want books, although they struggle with reading, and that was an aspect of enrichment centers I did not consider.

**Observations**

To support my wondering about how one can motivate students to become more independent, I took bulleted notes on how I felt students stayed focused during a particular day of centers in a word document. Throughout the month of March, I observed my students and found they became increasingly quiet and focused on their work during centers. The difference between February, prior to implementing a “finish work” checklist, and March was quite pronounced. Through analysis of my notes, one can notice that reminders being given to students during centers to be quiet or focus on their work decreased 80% between the end of February and the end of March (Appendix F).

Overall, students’ need to be reminded of where to turn an assignment in or what they should be working on decreased significantly after a “finish work” checklist was implemented. The amount of work on the board under “finish work” also decreased throughout the month of March, and has hovered around 3 items to be finished (down from 6 or 7 earlier in the month).
I utilized a tally sheet to determine how many students did not complete the morning routine or needed reminders to complete these tasks; however, observing during an extremely busy morning proved difficult, which may have affected the accuracy of the tally count. I switched to general observations, rather than systematic tallying so that I could get an overall idea of student habits, without having to ignore student needs or classroom tasks in the morning.

I found through my observations that most students needed to be reminded about the morning routine at the end of February (only 2 or 3 students consistently completed their responsibilities). This number increased to where only 2 or 3 students forget to complete their responsibilities now, at the end of March. The number of students forgetting their responsibilities decreased as I tested morning messages in the forms of survey questions, and also as students took on jobs such as “lunch stick reminder.” With peer reinforcement, the number of students remembering to wash their hands and order lunch has increased greatly. As seen in my observations (Appendix G), a very small number of students now need to be reminded, and reminders no longer need to occur every day.

Surveys

Several surveys aided me in determining how student attitude and other factors in students’ lives affect independence. I created and issued a student survey about what they enjoy doing after they complete their work, and also how they feel about helping in the classroom at the beginning of March (results, Appendix H). Student surveys provided me with great information about what changes to make to the classroom helper board. I wanted to make the board more meaningful for students to promote responsibility and help students
remember their jobs. I hoped that responsibility would lead to an increase in independence during other points in the school day.

The results of the student survey, given at the beginning of March, showed that all students but two enjoyed helping in the classroom (Sample student survey, Appendix J). Those two who indicated they did not like to help were those who also implied they had no responsibility at home. I took the students’ suggestions and answers from the survey to create a new helper board that I hoped would motivate all to help in the classroom. I made a board that has enough jobs for everyone to do something each week, whereas only ten students were expected to help before. I hoped that an increase in responsibility in this way would help my students internalize the importance of doing a job independently.

Only eleven students on the survey indicated that they remember their jobs when they are assigned one. After visiting Jill Corkery, a primary teacher in the district, I incorporated her idea on student choice by letting students choose their own job each week; a technique, which promotes independence. Students change their job each week, by placing their dinosaur in the job they wish to complete that week (see picture, Appendix D).

I also performed a student survey informally, through a survey question written on the board when my students returned from special. I wanted to determine what sort of activities my students enjoyed or would enjoy after completing their work (picture results, Appendix D). Overall, my students showed me they did enjoy reading as an option when they had no work to finish; however, I also found that students were interested in science and writing activities. Through these results, I created enrichment centers that I introduced to my students after spring break. Students could choose to complete an activity from my centers if they had no work on their “finish work” checklist to complete (see picture, Appendix D).
I saw a large number of students using the “how-to-draw” books in one of my center bags, and I observed an increase in the number of students with no “finish work” to complete.

I issued another survey to determine if the changes I made in jobs and through the addition of enrichment centers were affective, at the end of March. The results of this survey showed me that all students now enjoyed the job board and all felt they remembered their jobs (Appendix I). Additionally, all but three students indicated they enjoyed the enrichment activities. I would like to add more activities for my students in the future.

Finally, I sent home a survey for parents/families to complete. I asked what responsibilities students are expected to complete at home, and how consistently students perform those responsibilities as well. All families indicated that their students have some sort of responsibility at home. This did conflict with two students’ survey from class. Three students indicated that they had no responsibilities at home; however, no family survey showed that any student had no responsibility. Is it possible students are unaware of jobs they are expected to complete at home? Or perhaps students don’t remember they have responsibility, which several families indicated on their surveys as a problem (sample parent survey, Appendix J).

I found through the parent surveys that several students had trouble with procrastinating or cooperating when it came to completing job expectations at home. My family surveys were anonymous to promote more responses, but I could conjecture which students procrastinate, or dislike, completing jobs at home based on attitude towards working and helping in the classroom. The family surveys helped me ascertain that students in first grade have small jobs to accomplish at home, but there are not as many demands on students at
home versus at school. Families did not circle more than two or three jobs on the surveys for any one student.

V. Claims and Evidence

Claim Number 1

- Tools, such as checklists and morning messages, aid students in determining and remembering responsibilities in the classroom.

Evidence

The results I found from analyzing the “finish work” checklists that I implemented at the end of February, confirm the value of this tool (Appendix F). My students’ work habits were affected, as work was completed quicker and without as many teacher reminders. Students were able to take responsibility for their work during this independent center, as the checklists aided them in knowing what they specifically were to accomplish.

Although it took a while for students to get used to utilizing the checklists, I saw their effectiveness as “finish work” time became more productive and quieter (Appendix F). Students were able to stay focused, rather than being off-task due to confusion over what work they were to be completing. Since a teacher cannot help students one-on-one to know what work they have in their folder and what needs to be accomplished, the checklists take on that responsibility. I had one student in particular continually ask me if an assignment should be written on their “finish work” checklist, and saw students checking off work as it was completed. This helped to reassure me that students understood the purpose of the checklists, and it encouraged me that these were valuable instruments for independence. Students are not left to determine what activities to work on, which makes it successful and focused.
The number of students who forget to do their morning responsibilities has decreased through peer reinforcement and survey reminders. I found that students felt they remembered their morning responsibilities when asked on a survey, but my observations proved otherwise (Appendix G). After a new job was implemented, “lunch stick reminder,” peers aided each other in remembering to complete their morning duties. I also asked survey questions about hand washing to subtly remind those who consistently forgot, but were not aware of their forgetfulness. I saw an increase in student responsibility in morning routine, which I believe came from two means: peer helpers and varying morning messages (Appendix D).

The final survey that I had my students complete also proves to me the effectiveness of the student job board, the “finish work” checklists, and student choice in classroom jobs. All my students indicated that they now remembered their jobs, after choosing them, and that they liked the new helper board. Since this board is more accessible to students, as it is lower to the ground, students can view their job if they forget. Additionally, students internalize their jobs once they have the choice, and I believe student choice is also a valuable tool for increasing independence in the classroom. When students have the power to choose, then they can take on more responsibility and feel confident in their choices.

I believe, from my observations, that this claim is true especially at a first grade level. Students need guidance and systems to aid them in meeting teacher expectations. However, my observations between February and March prove that these tools were effective in decreasing teacher reminders and students forgetting their responsibilities. While it is still reasonable for students to need some help being independent in first grade, it is tools such as checklists and student choice that allow all students to attain success.
Claim Number 2

- Incentives, such as assignment books or enrichment centers, motivate students to complete tasks.

Evidence

The various enrichment activities I put together for my students proved to be successful in motivating independence. My students always had the option of quiet reading once their work was complete; however, I noticed that not every student was actually reading the books or focusing on this activity. Furthermore, when a student has completed a task, he/she can easily cause another student to become off-task because he/she is no longer engaged and will begin to talk to his/her peers.

To aid my students in continuing to be productive during “finish work” time, even with no work to complete, I decided to implement enrichment centers. After an informal student survey (Appendix D), I discovered my students did enjoy reading but expressed interest in other genres as well.

I took my students into consideration, which proved worthwhile, as I saw an increase in on-task behavior with enrichment activities. More students had no work to complete during “finish work” time or finished their work in a timely manner in order to use enrichment activities. While I cannot make a one-to-one correspondence between increased “finish work” completed and utilization of my activities, I did observe a change in student behavior once they were implemented.

Students expressed a desire to complete drawing or writing activities from the enrichment centers, and during my final survey, indicated that the activities helped motivate them to complete work. These activities served as an incentive for my students and they
worked quietly and productively on these activities, which allowed others to stay focused on their work.

As Sharon Kroll stated in her interview, “students who finish their work quickly have other activities to do,” and, “enrichment activities can focus on students’ learning styles” (Kroll, 2009). I feel that the benefits of enrichment centers include motivation, increased on-task behavior, less disruption of peers, and addressing multiple intelligences. They aided my students in being more independent because they held student interest, which is a key to engagement and focus that needs to develop for an increase in independence skills to occur.

Additionally, I found that the individual assignment book that is sent between home and school for Logan has increased his motivation to complete assignments. With the parental support at home, and the praise he is receiving from teachers, I feel Logan has begun to make changes in himself as an independent worker. While teachers can affect students’ work habits and independence through tools, some students might need a device that is unique to their needs.

Logan now understands the importance of completing his work, as his parents are supporting classroom expectations, and the adults in the room are ensuring he understands that he’s done a good job. Logan has noted that he is “proud of himself for working hard and showing that he is smart” (Logan, 2009). Self-efficacy may be an important factor in this and other struggling workers’ independence; however, I would need to perform more research and interviews to determine if this is a plausible claim. The assignment book has, nonetheless, supported Logan as he develops better focus and drive to complete his work independently.

Claim Number 3
• Student age and home expectations affect work attitude in school.

Evidence

I feel that there is correspondence between home expectations and their affect on student performance at school. If students have responsibilities at home, then they will be more willing to complete jobs or tasks as asked at school. However, this is not a claim that I can support with strong evidence. I would need to conduct more parent surveys or interviews to collect more evidence for this claim.

Although this claim is not conclusive, I do feel that the parent surveys collected lead me to believe this is true. Those students, who complete tasks independently at home, are those that have no problem finishing their work or staying on-task. Likewise, those students who have more trouble getting work done without teacher reminders are those that have less responsibility at home or who do not complete tasks at home without reminders.

Perhaps those students who are identified as less dependable at home, or those that have few jobs or work expectations at home, are those that need family-teacher partnerships such as Logan’s assignment book. This is an idea that would be worth pursuing for students that struggle to be independent in upper grades, in my opinion. At a first grade level, I feel students should be allowed to develop skills with the aid of tools, but at varying paces. I believe age and developmental level cannot be ignored when determining expectations for student independence and focus.

VI. Reflections and Implications for Future Practice

After completing the inquiry project, I have discovered many implications for future practice. The process itself has taught me the importance of analyzing wonderings one has as a teacher and determining the best route of practice to address these wonderings. I feel I
would utilize the inquiry process in any of my future classrooms to aid me in improving myself as a teacher and the activities occurring in my classroom surrounding classroom management and academics.

Although I have many future wonderings, my inquiry did succeed in helping me to determine tools that aid my students in being more independent workers. My classroom’s center time is now more productive and quiet because students are aware of their tasks. I do have several questions that could be valuable to pursue in the future.

I wonder if the success I saw in my classroom would be increased even more by utilizing the helper board, finish work checklist, and subtle reminders from the beginning of the school year. Can the tools implemented in my classroom be more successful in helping students if they are provided from the beginning of the school year? I would love to use these tools I discovered in my own future classrooms to help instill the sense of responsibility and independence that my students grew over the last month, from the beginning of first grade. I feel my students would show greater growth and an increased sense of responsibility if I set these expectations in September; however, I cannot know for sure without following this wondering.

After seeing my students’ response to choosing their own classroom job, and observing the increased responsibility my students have taken upon themselves, I wonder what other forms of classroom choice I could implement. Would more student choice in the classroom promote an increase in independence? Would my students be able to have more success in working independently if they had choice as to where they worked? Could creating different spaces in my classroom for students provide them with another tool for making smart choices to get their work done? I believe pursuing the idea of student choice would
be worthwhile and could increase my student’s independence even more than I saw throughout my inquiry.

I would also like to look into the idea of family-teacher partnerships. Analyzing the effect of an assignment book on Logan’s sense of responsibility for his work has made me wonder if this sort of tool could be successful for more students. Would family-teacher partnerships in student responsibility help younger students to become independent? For those students that have the most difficulty working on their own and finishing assignments, would a stronger relationship with those students’ families ensure success? I would be very interested in using family resources to aid students in gaining a greater sense of responsibility and independence in school and for life.

Finally, I wonder after this inquiry process if I should have surveyed or interviewed intermediate or upper intermediate grade teachers. I wonder what skills teachers of intermediate and upper intermediate grades value that could be promoted at an earlier age for increased independence? Had I discussed my project with teachers in the upper grades at my building or elsewhere, would I have discovered a need for younger students to work on different skills than I focused upon? Do third, fourth, and fifth graders still have difficulty cleaning up the classroom or taking on responsibilities that are not directly put upon them? I would be quite interested in initiating conversation between the upper and lower grade teachers to discuss common goals for students. While developmental level must always be considered, I believe it would be fascinating to discover what skills transfer from first to third, or what skills are lacking in the lower grades that never quite develop in the upper grades.
My inquiry process has shown me the importance in finding answers to these wonderings and those that may develop as I continue to teach and learn. Perhaps there is not an answer or quick-fix method to my wonderings, but teaching is not always about answers. Teaching is a process of wondering, researching, and bettering myself in order to aid my students in becoming life-long learners and successful members of society. I hope to follow-through on my wonderings, as I feel they would only support my development as a teacher and inquirer.
Appendix A- Inquiry Brief

I. Context

Park Forest Elementary is located in a suburban neighborhood in State College, Pennsylvania. The elementary school building is only a few years old, and is built on a spacious campus, surrounded by nature and garden areas. The school’s population has a range of socioeconomic status. However, the school community includes an active Parent Teacher organization, afterschool care, and activities to aid families.

Park Forest is a K-5 school, with eight sections of primary (1st and 2nd grade). Each of these primary classrooms has a paraprofessional for half the school day. My classroom is a self-contained, straight first grade. My class is comprised of 21 first grade students, 10 girls and 11 boys. The majority of the students are at grade level for reading. I have three students who are below level, and three students who are reading a year above level. There are four students who attend RTI, or Response to Intervention, to receive reading support. Differentiation is essential to meet the needs of the varying ability levels in this class.

There are behavior issues present such as calling out, walking around the room at inappropriate times, and mean language, such name calling and “put-downs.” Specifically, there is one student with ADHD and two who can pose behavior problems at times. These two young boys are social leaders in the classroom, and they easily influence others to follow their off-task behaviors, such as talking or making noises. The student with ADHD receives additional support outside the classroom and through an aid that is provided in the beginning and end of the day to help this student’s organization. Additionally, two girls are quiet and need strong emotional support, as they can often shut down when faced with a challenge. There is also one boy who is easy to get along with but has extreme trouble getting his work done, although he is capable.

The mix of personalities in the classroom makes for an interesting group; however, they are very respectful, supportive, and usually friendly to each other despite their differences. Challenging behavior and defiance are seen very rarely, as most talking or restlessness can be attributed to the developmental level. These students are learning how to be successful at school together, and they make up a great community.

II. Rationale

Over the course of the school year, I have observed a consistent problem that can be contributed to the growing independence of my first grade students. Every morning, students are expected to complete a morning routine, modeled for them in the beginning of the school year. Students are responsible for entering the classroom, putting their work/home folder in the paraprofessional’s basket, washing their hands, doing lunch count, and putting a marble in our marble jar. However, I have noticed a persistent issue of students forgetting to do one or more of these responsibilities every morning.

Although it was understandable for students to forget aspects of the morning routine in September, by January and February of the school year, one hopes students have internalized the routine and understands the responsibilities placed on each them. There are even weekly classroom jobs that are assigned to students, but those with jobs often forget their responsibility

2 The marble jar is a reward system established by my mentor and I to encourage students to meet our behavior expectations. Students put one marble in the jar every morning when they arrive, working towards an established reward.
and often need to be reminded, sometimes every day. I began to wonder what could be done in the classroom to aid students in remembering and performing their responsibilities.

Additionally, I have been concerned with the amount of work that students must complete every day during a “finish work” rotation of language arts centers. Each student has a yellow “finish work” folder where they place any worksheets, writing, or math work that was not completed during instructional or morning work time. Although several students consistently have nothing in their “finish work” folders, I have begun to notice that the list of work to complete (placed on the white board each day by my mentor) is becoming longer each week. Furthermore, there are assignments that students must eventually complete at recess because they have not been finished after four or five days.

I wonder what can be done to motivate students to complete their work during the time allotted. Is there something that can be done to help motivate students to complete an assignment when it is given to them? Are my students not interested in the work given to them, or do they not know why it is important to do their schoolwork? Perhaps my students could benefit from an enrichment center, containing materials that are interesting and engaging. Maybe this center could be motivating for students to complete assignments, as it would be an option when all work is completed.

I also wonder what can be done to promote the independence of my students. Part of the issue with “finish work” time, through my observations of students, is they lose focus or do not know what work must be completed during the fifteen-minute center. How can students be reminded of what they must complete, and how can we help them to stay focused on that content during that independent center? Do the students require better understanding of what assignments are recess work if not completed on a certain day? Additionally, how can we promote responsibility in the classroom in regards to both classroom routines and assignments?

III. Main Wondering and Sub-wonderings

• How can one motivate students to finish work independently?
  o How can enrichment opportunities motivate students?
  o How can responsibilities in the classroom impact independence?
  o How does student attitude affect completion of assignments?
  o What tools or techniques can help students to internalize routines and take independent responsibility for tasks?

IV. Data Collection

In order to gather evidence and test my various ideas on how to promote independence in my students, I will utilize various methods of data collection.

Documentation

To support my wondering about how one can motivate students to become more independent, I will take bulleted notes on how I felt students stayed focused during a particular day of centers in a word document. I will also utilize a journal that one student, Logan, has to monitor what work he completes each day. This particular student seems to have the most trouble working independently and being motivated to complete any assignment, whether it is a craft, math paper, science worksheet, or language arts sheet.

3 Pseudonym for privacy reasons
Additionally, I will collect student work completed at enrichment centers, and ask that students check their names under the date each time they go to the enrichment center. This will aid me in determining how often students are utilizing the materials I put out for them when they are done with their class work, and whether the work they complete at those centers is well-done, rushed, or incomplete. I will look to see if there is a correlation between how long it takes students to complete the enrichment work and normal work.

Finally, I will see what can aid students in the morning routine and classroom job responsibilities. I will create signs that can be moved to student desks whenever someone is responsible for certain jobs. Also, I will either create a poster to hang in the classroom to remind students of all the things they are expected to do independently upon entering the classroom, or create some chart that requires students to move their name when they have completed all responsibilities. Perhaps even morning messages in the form of a survey question such as, “Did you complete your morning routine?” could aid student independence in these tasks.

**Interviews**

I will conduct several interviews to collect data for my various interventions and wondering. I plan on interviewing students for baseline and post data about how students feel about the work they complete each day, and how they feel when they get their work done. Do they enjoy getting to read or going to the enrichment center? I will interview 3 students, chosen as a cross-section of work habits. I will interview one student who tends to have many pieces of finish work to complete, one who has one or two items to complete, and one student who consistently has all their work completed.

Furthermore, I will interview students to determine how they feel about having a job in the classroom, and what they like to do in the classroom to help. I will also interview students as a follow-up to a survey on attitude of students about themselves and their work. I will choose 3-4 students with various answers on their surveys. I will choose one or two who are very responsible and have a good attitude towards themselves, and one or two who have less of a positive attitude and are not very independent or responsible.

**Observations**

I will utilize various tally sheets to keep a record of how much “finish work” students have in their folder in the morning and after centers. Also, I will keep a tally sheet at the enrichment center, and students must check their name off if they go to take anything from the center.

The jobs or responsibilities in the classroom will be recorded each week, and how many times a student must be reminded of their job. All of these observations will be conducted as baseline data and post-interventions. Additionally, observations and insights will be recorded in a word document in regards to my inquiry.

**Surveys**

Several surveys will aid me in determining how student attitude and other factors in students’ lives affect independence. I will create and issue a student survey about what they enjoy doing after they complete their work, and also how they feel about helping in the classroom. I will create one more survey to give to students to determine how they feel about
themselves and their work. This may be a difficult subject to assess, but I will word the questions as clearly as possible, and conduct follow-up interviews where necessary.

Finally, I will send home a survey for parents/families to complete. I will ask what responsibilities students are expected to complete at home, and how parents/families feel students are at remembering their responsibilities as well. I will also ask parents how long they feel students take to complete homework or any job parents assign them at home.

V. Timeline

- **Week 1** (February 9-13)
  - Collect baseline data- tally morning routine/reminders, finish work tally, jobs/reminders
  - Interview/Visit Jill Corkery, a first grade teacher, about student responsibility/independence
  - Work on Annotated bibliography

- **Week 2** (February 16-20)
  - Continue to collect baseline data
  - Fix inquiry brief and annotated bibliography from peer feedback and submit to Professional Development Associate (PDA).
  - Create parent survey and submit to principal, mentor, and PDA for feedback
  - Create student surveys (motivation and work) to submit to mentor and PDA for feedback

- **Week 3** (February 23-27)
  - Send home parent survey on student responsibilities
  - Give students survey on motivation to finish work/classroom jobs- what do they like to do, how do they feel about work/jobs
  - Continue tallies of morning routine/finish work
  - Edit inquiry brief and annotated bibliography from PDA feedback

- **Week 4** (March 2-6)
  - Survey students about how they feel about themselves and their work
  - Follow-up interviews from all surveys
  - Create morning work reminders and finish work check sheets (take pictures of any morning message or survey questions with student response)
  - Continue tallies of morning routine/finish work

- **Week 5** (March 9-13)
  - SPRING BREAK- no school
  - Create enrichment centers
  - Interview Sharon Kroll, Gifted Support Master Teacher (K-12), about enrichment

- **Week 6** (March 9-13)
  - Implement enrichment centers- explain to students when/how they are to be utilized
  - Explain enrichment center tally checklist to students
  - Continue tallies of morning routine/finish work

- **Week 7** (March 16-20)
  - Change student jobs- based off of surveys, what students like to do
• Continue to monitor student use of enrichment centers, changing materials as necessary
• Continue tallies of morning routine/finish work

**Week 8** (March 23-27)
• Survey students on enrichment centers- how do they feel about them, what would they like to see added; how they feel when others get to use them and they’re still working
• Continue tallies of morning routine/finish work

**Week 9** (March 30-April 3)
• Begin to write inquiry report while still collecting data
• Survey students on how they feel about morning work and finish work check sheets- are they helpful? Do they use them?
• Interviews with students about finishing work, how feel about themselves/their work

**Week 10** (April 6-10)
• Finish inquiry report to submit to peer editor and PDA for feedback
• Final tallies of morning routine/finish work

**Week 11** (April 13-17)
• Edit inquiry report from PDA/peer editor feedback
• Begin preparing PowerPoint and inquiry presentation

**Week 12** (April 20-24)
• Practice for inquiry conference presentation (Saturday April, 25th)
• Send PowerPoint for peer editing
Appendix B- Finish Work Folder Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work in my folder</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Finished</th>
<th>Recess Work</th>
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- Write the name of the assignment and date it’s put in your folder
- Check off when you finish the assignment
- The teacher will check recess if it is to be done then
Appendix C- “Finish Work” Checklist Analysis

*Only 19/21 students’ checklists collected, other 2 lost
*Items to do-determined by how many items were not checked off by the end of the week

**Week of 2/25/09**
- 4 or more items to do- 4 students
- 3 items to do- 3 students
- 2 items to do- 4 students
- 1 item to do- 3 students
- No items to do- 5 students

**Week of 3/2/09**
- No centers this week, same as last week

**Week of 3/9/09**
- Spring Break

**Week of 3/16/09**
- WTW from end of February made recess item if not done, 11 student names on board put down to 3 staying in at recess
- 1 item to do- 13 students
- No items to do- 6 students

**Week of 3/23/09**
- 1 item to do- 9 students
- No items to do- 10 students

**Week of 3/30/09**
- 3 or more items to do- 1 student (this student often taken out of classroom during “finish work” time)
- 2 items to do- 2 students
- 1 item to do- 8 students
- No items to do- 8 students

**Conclusions**
- Overall, this data is inconclusive
- The trend seems to be that more students had 0-1 item to complete by the end of a week
- The amount of finish work to do on the list decreased throughout the month of March
- The finish work checklist allows students to focus on what they must accomplish, rather than having to rely on the whiteboard list of all assignments that could be in folders to finish.
Appendix D

Logan Journal

Classroom Helper Board
Appendix D- continued

Enrichment Centers

Survey Questions
Appendix E- Sharon Kroll interview

-Do you believe enrichment activities can help motivate students?

Yes…usually enrichment activities address the interests, strengths or acceleration that students may need to keep their interest in education. By providing activities beyond the normal curriculum, students delve into a particular area of interest or learn more about a subject.

-How do you believe enrichment can help motivate students?

Enrichment activities can focus on students’ learning styles, which in turn usually provide an increase in motivation. Allowing students to create a different type of product or participate in a different instructional process may motivate students. Enriching a concept or topic allows those students’ to truly stretch and utilize the higher level thinking skills. It also can focus on divergent thinking which allows the students to utilize their imagination and creativity. Due to the emphasis on standards and testing, many classrooms do not have the time or inclination to work on creativity.

-Have you ever included enrichment centers or activities when you were in a straight classroom? How/Why? YES

When I taught 3rd/5th grade I utilized enrichment and learning centers. These centers were developed to match curricular themes, subject areas, or concepts which would allow students to participate in activities suited to their particular needs, strengths, or interests. It also is a great technique to help with classroom management. There are usually many student levels in one classroom and providing a learning center with different activities meets different needs is a great way to reach these students. Students who finish their work quickly have other activities to do OR if a teacher needs to work with a certain group; center activities can be assigned. I also allowed students’ to work on independent study projects. This allows students to choose a topic of interest, learn how to research, and create some type of project that interests them. Even when teaching reading, if the students had to read books at home, I would allow different types of “book projects” to meet the needs of the students (reports, shadow boxes, art type projects, “be the author”, etc.).
Appendix F- Observations of Student Focus During “Finish Work”

- 2/25/09
  - “Finish work” checklist implemented
  - Had three students interrupt my guided reading to ask me what they should do after completing an assignment, where to put some finished work. (3 reminders)
    - Need to create a special, specific place for students to put completed work that needs to be turned in
    - Quote at math time when a sheet wasn’t completed- “Ms. Kroll do I need to put this on my finish work checklist?”
- 2/26/09
  - Logan was upset when didn’t get work done- think his notebook is improving his attitude to work
  - Students overall seem to be working throughout finish work, better idea of what they’re supposed to complete? (0 reminders)
- 2/27/09
  - Had to remind blue and orange group to stay on task and stay quiet (2 reminders)
  - 6 items on board under “finish work”
- 3/2/09-3/6/09—Readers Theatre, no finish work
- 3/9/09-3/13/09- Spring Break
- 3/16/09
  - 3 students came to ask me where to put work, although a basket has been established (3 reminders)
  - 6 items on board under finish work
  - 2 students asked to be quiet/focus (2 reminders)
- 3/17/09
  - No reminders needed (0 reminders)
  - Finish work checklist on board down to only 2 items!
- 3/18/09
  - No reminders needed (0 reminders)
- 3/19/09
  - Not in room for centers
- 3/20/09
  - No reminders needed (0 reminders)
- 3/23/09
  - Implemented Enrichment activities- 10 students used drawing books
  - Students had lots of WTW to finish (list of names put on board, only 3 had to stay in for recess to finish)
  - No reminders needed (0 reminders)
- 3/24/09
  - Same 10-12 students using drawing books, have no finished work to complete! (0 reminders)
- 3/27/09
  - Blue group asked to leave independent center activity due to fighting/interrupting teacher for mediation (1 reminder)
    - Went back and worked at desks quietly and focused
Many Students Using Drawing books [all week]

3/30/09
  o  Sick Day

3/31/09
  o  Students worked independently, little finish work on board (0 reminders)

4/1/09
  o  Not in room for centers

4/2/09
  o  No reminders needed, little work on finish work checklists (0 reminders)

4/3/09
  o  No centers today

**Reminders or Redirection**

February- 5
Beginning March- 5
End of March- 1
Appendix G- Morning Routine Observations

- **February 25-27**
  - Only 2 students consistently *remembered* to do all responsibilities this week (and these are 2 students who enter the classroom early, so they have completed their jobs before others arrive)

- **March 2-6**
  - Number of students who remember their morning jobs has increased slightly since new Helper Board
    - “Lunch Stick Reminder” job seems to be effective- student with this job politely taps those who are sitting down but did not order lunch
  - Only about 10 students forgot for the entire week

- **March 9-13**
  - SPRING BREAK

- **March 16-20**
  - Number of students who are *forgetting* to do morning responsibilities down to average of 3-4
  - Students eager to help paraprofessional with other responsibilities not on the helper board, such as putting away folders or taking the lunch count down to the cafeteria.

- **March 23-27**
  - Only about 3-4 students still forgetting to do all morning responsibilities, and this is not every day
  - There were 2 days where all students did jobs (when survey questions were written on chart paper)

- **March 30-April 3**
  - Students are being more consistent with doing morning responsibilities
  - Number of students *forgetting* - 1 or 2 each day
Appendix H- Survey Results

• Students’ feelings about having a job on the helper board
  o Love- 12
  o Like- 5
  o Don’t like- 0
  o Hate- 2

• What jobs students like
  o Classroom helper-13
  o Librarians-6
  o Line leader-15
  o Floors-6
  o Chairs-10
  o Door holder-6
  o Computers-14

• What jobs students do not like
  o Classroom helper-0
  o Librarians-3
  o Line leader-0
  o Floors-9
  o Chairs-1
  o Door holder-4
  o Computers-0

• How feel at remembering jobs
  o Always-11
  o Most of the Time-3
  o Sometimes-3
  o Rarely-0
  o Never-2

• What students like to help with in classroom
  o Lunch count sticks-8
  o Reminding people about lunch count-4
  o Sharpening pencils-10
  o Mailboxes-7
  o Pushing in chairs-5
  o Other:
    ▪ Reminding teachers
    ▪ Helping Mrs. T clean up from recess

• How feel they remember morning jobs
  o Always-14
  o Most of the time-3
• Who has responsibilities at home
  o **Yes**-16
  o No-3

• Jobs done at home
  o Make bed-4
  o **Put away toys**-10
  o Feed pet-7
  o Clean room-9
  o Help shop for groceries-9
  o Wash dishes-2
  o Take out garbage-1
  o Help with siblings-8
  o Other:
    - Put clothes in hamper

• Where do best work/when
  o At set-6
  o **Alone**-10
  o On carpet-2
  o With group-2
  o With friend-7

• How they feel they get finish work done
  o Always-4
  o **Most of the time**-7
  o Sometimes-4
  o Rarely-3
  o Never-1

• Why do we have finish work time?
  o **To finish our work**-12
  o Don’t have any other time to get it done
  o Because the papers are important
  o To work hard
  o We have lots of work
  o Then we would have to always finish at recess
  o To get more time to do work on stuff
  o To learn
Appendix I- Final Student Survey Results

*19 Students took survey

1. Do you like the new activities to do when you have no work to finish?
   • Yes-16
   • No- 3
     o Those 3 that said no, when asked why, “too hard, want books to read.”

2. Do you want to finish your work any quicker to get to do these activities?
   • Yes- 19
   • No- 0

3. Do the finish work checklists help you know what you need to get done?
   • Yes- 17
   • No- 2
     o Those 2 who circled no, students that have nothing on their “finish work” checklist

4. Do you like the new jobs?
   • Yes- 19
   • No- 0

5. Which jobs are your favorites?
   • Paper Passer- 10
   • Line Leader- 17
   • Hall Checker- 10
   • Material Collectors- 6
   • Lunch Stick Lay-out- 14
   • Mailbox checker- 10
   • Librarian- 11
   • Lunch Stick Reminder- 11
   • Computer- 16
   • Door Holder- 12
   • Floor checker- 8
   • Chair Pusher- 9
   • Chairs- 11

6. Do you feel you remember your job?
   • Yes-19
   • No- 0
Appendix J- Sample Student and Parent Surveys

Student Survey:

1. What job do you like the best? (Circle one or more)
   - Classroom helper
   - Lunchroom helper
   - Library helper
   - Door holder
   - Computer

2. What job do you like the least? (Circle one or more)
   - Classroom helper
   - Lunchroom helper
   - Library helper
   - Door holder
   - Computer

3. How often do you do your job? (Circle one)
   - Always
   - Most of the Time
   - Sometimes
   - Rarely
   - Never

4. Are you happy with your job? (Circle one)
   - Always
   - Most of the Time
   - Sometimes
   - Rarely
   - Never

5. What do you like about your job? (Circle one or more)
   - Helping students
   - Making friends
   - Having fun
   - Learning new things
   - Helping others

6. Do you remember to do your morning jobs?
   - Always
   - Most of the Time
   - Sometimes
   - Rarely
   - Never

Parent Survey:

1. Do you think your child is responsible? (Circle one or more)
   - Always
   - Most of the Time
   - Sometimes
   - Rarely
   - Never

2. Does your child help with household chores? (Circle one or more)
   - Always
   - Most of the Time
   - Sometimes
   - Rarely
   - Never

3. What chores does your child help with? (Circle one or more)
   - Making bed
   - Putting away toys
   - Feeding pets
   - Helping with grocery
   - Washing dishes

4. How do you think your child is doing in school? (Circle one or more)
   - Always
   - Most of the Time
   - Sometimes
   - Rarely
   - Never

5. How do you feel about your child's performance in school? (Circle one or more)
   - Always
   - Most of the Time
   - Sometimes
   - Rarely
   - Never

6. Does your child have any responsibilities at home? (Circle one or more)
   - Always
   - Most of the Time
   - Sometimes
   - Rarely
   - Never

7. What chores does your child help with? (Circle one or more)
   - Making bed
   - Putting away toys
   - Feeding pets
   - Helping with grocery
   - Washing dishes

8. How do you feel about your child's performance in school? (Circle one or more)
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree

9. Does your child have any responsibilities at home? (Circle one or more)
   - Always
   - Most of the Time
   - Sometimes
   - Rarely
   - Never

10. How do you feel about your child's performance in school? (Circle one or more)
    - Strongly Agree
    - Agree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly Disagree

11. What do you think of your child's attitude towards school? (Circle one or more)
    - Always
    - Most of the Time
    - Sometimes
    - Rarely
    - Never
Annotated Bibliography


Jill Cole conducted a research project in her classroom to determine what motivated four very different students to read. She chose four students to be case studies, two high and two struggling students. She found that reading motivation is “multifaceted” and intrinsic motivation needs to consider three aspects of students: student beliefs, student reasons and purposes for participation and engagement, and student affective reactions. All of Jill’s findings and research techniques can help to guide me in conducting my inquiry and discovering how to motivate students in their overall class work and independence.


Jill Corkery is a first grade teacher in a self-contained classroom at Easterly Parkway Elementary School, in State College. She explained her many philosophies behind student responsibility and choice. She believes in allowing students to have structured choice in a classroom to create a sense of ownership and boost responsibility. Students are in charge of many things in the classroom, and each pick their own job at the start of the week. Through high expectations of independence, Jill has created an environment where students have responsibility and show an understanding of what that looks like in a first grade classroom.


Erika Daniels conducted this study to determine what motivates students to participate and work in school. She identifies several factors for student disengagement, including feeling a lack of skills to complete an assignment and failure to see value in an assignment. This article will be helpful in guiding my inquiry into motivation and independence. Students may have a lack of motivation to do work at independent centers when they do not value an assignment, and this article provides several strategies for discovering what students find engaging. When a student can value an assignment, then more intrinsic motivation will be present and effort put forth. The findings of this study will help me to take into consideration how I can make assignments more engaging for students, or perhaps how to make motivational materials so students finish any assignment to then partake in a more engaging activity.

Reading motivation is examined in this article, however there are further implications for the classroom from this study. Kathryn Edmunds and Kathryn Bauserman discovered several factors behind student motivation to read. These included personal interests, choice, knowledge gained, and teacher/family/peer influences. I believe this article can help me realize the importance of surveying and interviewing my students to discover what topics naturally interest them to help me create enrichment centers for motivational and educational purposes. These centers would be independent and focus on student interests and choice. I would want to consider the various results Edmunds and Bauserman discovered in their study when creating anything new for my entire class to utilize.


This book is a wonderful resource for those seeking strategies and interventions for students who are not independent learners. While the book focuses more on reading, most of the strategies can be utilized across the school curriculum, and to empower students to be more self-reliant. Including research and methods on how to promote independent learning in the classroom and at home, this book even provides checklists for students to utilize for self-monitoring. For teachers and families to utilize to try to enhance independence in all students, this book even includes student differences and various reasons that could be behind a lack of motivation or a lack of skills in self-monitoring. I can utilize several of the worksheets when trying to foster independence in my students, and I now have a better understanding of what student differences to consider when testing strategies.


This inquiry project, done by 2006-2007 Professional Development School Intern, Pamela Karwoski, addresses responsibility in the classroom. Although this inquiry was completed in a fourth grade classroom, many of the results that Pamela found can be helpful in my research with my first graders. I am seeking to promote independence through responsibility, and Pamela discovered several methods and resources that were

Sharon Kroll is the Gifted Support Master Teacher (K-12) of the North Allegheny School District, located in Wexford, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Pittsburgh. Through an interview, Sharon explained her philosophy on enrichment in the context of primary classrooms. She provided some techniques and activity suggestions, as well as addressed her beliefs on developmental appropriateness of certain types of extensions. Sharon also provided some personal anecdotes of experiences she has had in terms of first grade-gifted extensions and her classroom experiences. She provided me with several good ideas for how to motivate my students through interesting, engaging activities.


Malouff and company detail twelve categories of motivational techniques. Amongst these categories are prompt and persuade students to learn and use engaging teaching methods. The various strategies that this article mentions can be very helpful for teachers seeking to boost the motivation of their students across the school curriculum. Whether you are seeking to increase student self-efficacy to increase motivation or to discover how to reward student achievement, this article has 100 approaches. I will consider many of the methods suggested when considering how to motivate my student’s work independence, such as enrichment readings or activities to promote students to explore topics for themselves. The article also encourages self-monitoring to increase motivation and self-efficacy, two aspects that I believe could enhance responsibility and independence in learning.


Rachel Miller, a Professional Development School Intern in 2007-2008 did an inquiry project regarding how to foster independence in the primary grades. This inquiry project will help me to determine various methods that Rachel found effective in helping her second graders become more independent. Since my inquiry is similar, I feel I can learn
from her techniques and findings to guide my interventions. Rachel found that student responsibility and visual aids were effective in fostering independence, and she also has a good reminder about developmental readiness for expectations of independence.


Mary Ann Rafoth lays out many methods to inspire independent learning in students throughout school. She provides overviews of weaknesses, strengths, and abilities of children in primary, intermediate, middle, and high school. Various ways of fostering independence at an early age are discussed, with the implication of laying a foundation for later in life at an early grade. This book is helpful for me to try to incorporate different strategies into my primary classroom to reach my goal of increased independence in my students. There are also worksheets and strategies included in the book for use with students to promote independence.