“Thumbs up if you understand.”:

Investigating Strategies to Help My Students Become Better Direction Followers

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2009-2010 Park Forest Elementary School
Second Grade Intern
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**Description of the Teaching Context**

As an intern in Penn State’s Professional Development School, I spent the 2009-2010 school year in a self-contained, 2nd grade classroom at Park Forest Elementary School, which is a part of the State College Area School District. Despite its large size, this school focuses on having a strong community.

There are nineteen students in my classroom, eight male and eleven female. The majority of these students come from middle to upper-class households, however, there are three who receive free or reduced lunches. The majority of my students are meeting expectations for 2nd grade. However, there are five students who perform above grade level in reading and math, and two students who perform at a level significantly below grade level. There are no students with IEPs, students with physical disabilities, or who are in an enrichment program. There is one English Language Learner. There are two students who are in Title 1 and have been referred to the Instructional Support Team. These students can often require individual attention when it comes to following written directions.

This classroom has looped from the year before, which means that twelve out of the eighteen students have stayed with the same teacher since first grade. There is a variety of social and behavior needs within this classroom. Four of the students consistently misbehave and need constant reminders of how they should be acting in the classroom. The class as a whole has been having problems with following directions and being active listeners.
**Wonderings and Questions**

**Main Wondering**

Spelling was the first subject that I took responsibility for since the second half of the year began. This meant that I would give a weekly preview and review, as well as a spelling packet that consisted of 3-4 activities. As I was administering these activities I was also correcting them to give back to the students. What I began to notice is that the students in my class were either a) not fully completing the activities before they turned them in or b) resubmitting activities without making the corrections I had noted. This was extremely frustrating to me. I began to wonder what interventions I could try to change these behaviors.

*How could I make my students become better direction followers?*

**Sub Questions**

- How can I be more clear with my direction giving?
- How can I help my students be more responsible?

**Data Collection**

My goal with this inquiry was to try different interventions concerning direction-giving in order to determine how to set my students up for success. In order to do that, I first looked to my colleagues in the primary division for advice and ideas on the topic. I created a survey and sent it out electronically. One questions that I asked was, “If your students have a hard time following the directions, do you ever wonder if your directions are unclear?” The general response was that yes, that is what first comes to their mind and when that happens they try to rephrase the
directions and have the students repeat it back. My next questions was, “What are some
techniques that you use to help your students follow the directions?” I was hoping that by asking
this to seasoned teachers that I would learn of some good interventions to try. What I gathered
from this question was how important teachers feel it is to break down directions into smaller
parts, give them orally as well as write them down, and to have the students repeat the directions
back to you.

I also interviewed Vanessa Tomasko, a former PDS intern and current first and second
grade multi-age long-term sub, (see appendix A) about strategies she uses to ensure her students
understand the directions. I told her about my frustration with the spelling packets and she gave
me the idea for my first intervention. She explained that she only introduces one activity per day
instead of the whole packet at once because her first and second graders cannot handle receiving
so many directions at once. This interview and the responses from my teacher survey prompted
my three solid interventions: break the spelling packet down into one activity per day, make a
reminder poster for our hand-in basket, and write directions on the board whenever applicable.

Before I started any of my interventions I also wanted to gather baseline data of how
many students were turning in spelling work without following directions (see appendix B). I
collected this data by using a sheet with the names of my students on it and made a check mark
every time I received work in which the directions had not been followed. I did this from
February 1- February 12. During that time, I also kept a checklist of how many students did not
put their names on their papers.

Additionally, I also created a parent survey with questions about whether or not their
child has chores to do, if there is a consequence if they do not do those chores, if their child is
often unclear about things they are asked to do, and about questions with homework. My purpose for this survey was to see if the students are a) responsible for things at home other than school work and b) If parents notice their child having a hard time with direction following at home.

(See appendix C for parent survey and appendix D for survey results)

During

Aside from the teacher survey, parent survey, and baseline checklist, the rest of my data collection took place during my inquiry. This data was based on my interventions and the affects that they were having on my students’ direction following skills. My initial wondering was conceived after having frustrations with the lack of direction following with spelling activities. Although some of my interventions could be used with any subject, wondering most of my data was collected on spelling activities because of my initial wondering.

I continued to record data related to direction following on spelling activities using checklists periodically throughout the inquiry process (see appendix E ). I wanted to be able to compare my students progress after I tried different interventions. The very first intervention that I tried was to introduce only one spelling activity per day from the packet. I would also collect the packet at the end of that day so that my students could not have the opportunity to work ahead. I recorded data after the first week of trying this intervention. My baseline data for the spelling activities showed 27 instances where 11 out of 18 students did not follow the spelling directions in some way. By the last week of my intervention, there were only 6 instances where 6 out of 18 students did not follow the directions on their spelling. The graph below illustrates my findings over the 8 week intervention period. Of the original 11 students, there were 3 who
consistently had difficulty following the directions. The graphs below illustrate the differences between those three students and their progress compared to the rest of the class.
The next set of data that I analyzed came from a parent survey and a student survey. The student survey had questions about how they understand directions best (oral or written), how they feel when turning in an assignment, and if they try to be active listeners (see appendix F for sample survey and appendix G for survey results). After analyzing the two sets of surveys, I noticed the following correlations: The student survey shows me that 12 out of 19 students understand best when the directions are written, and 7 out of 19 understand them best when they are given orally. When I compare these results to the parent survey, I see the majority of parents said their child is sometimes responsible for completing chores around the house but they often have to remind their children to do these chores. Seven out of the 19 parents said when they ask their child to do something, he/she sometimes does it correctly the first time. This data made me wonder if these seven children are the same seven who told me they understand directions best when they are written.

Analyzing the student survey led me to my third set of data that I collected. I curious to see if the students who were having difficulty following directions on the spelling packets were also having difficulty following directions in other areas. I also wanted to explore verbal versus written directions. In order to do this I gave my students two activities in which the directions were written and two activities where I gave the directions orally. The charts below illustrates the success that my students had with each form of activity.
As you can see from these graphs, the students received almost identical scores on the two oral direction activities, however there is a greater difference between scores on the activities where directions were written.
As my last form of data, I video taped myself giving directions for a spelling activity so that I could see if I had become more conscientious of how I was giving directions. I made a rubric that I was able to use to help me analyze this data (see appendix H).

After implementing all of my interventions over an 8 week period, I decided to go back to the original way of doing the spelling packets. At the beginning of the week I gave the students their packets and told them that it had to be turned in by Friday afternoon. I did not explain the directions, because I wanted to see if any of these interventions had made them more responsible for finding and following the directions on their own (see chart 1A on page 6).

Claims and Evidence

Claim 1: Some students benefit from written and oral directions, while others are fine with oral directions alone.

After compiling the data from my student survey, I saw that almost half of my students answered that they follow directions best when they are written. From that discovery, I tried a couple of different strategies: Creating a Hand-In poster with three reminders for students to see before they turn in their work, writing directions on the board after I give them orally, and writing more detailed notes on student work that needed to be corrected. I could see that adding that extra reinforcement of the directions helped students who weren’t able to remember them. I observed multiple students reading the poster at the hand in basket and checking their paper
before turning it in. Providing them with that extra reminder helped them to be successful in following the directions.

I utilized the opportunity to write directions on the board when I knew the activity we would be working on would result in questions later on. For example, during a math lesson that required students to rotate through the computers and use a new program, I showed the students the new program and how to use it as a whole group. I then wrote down the exact steps that they needed to follow in order to do this successfully. I only had 2 students ask me what they were supposed to do out of 19. The success that I had with writing directions on the board as well as giving them orally reassured what the teacher survey told me. The teachers who responded to my survey shared that after telling students directions, they also write them to clarify for students (see appendix I).

Having had difficulty receiving papers that have been corrected properly, I decided that maybe these students needed a note written on their paper telling them exactly what they needed to do. I started writing more detailed notes and even telling students to see me if they did not understand (see appendix J). Telling them to see me makes them take responsibility for their own success. Once I started writing these notes, I noticed that I was having to return their papers significantly less frequently. All of this data is evidence that some students need written and oral directions, while others are fine with oral directions alone. However, the data that I collected from the direction activities showed something different.

According to the scores (see graph 2A and 2B on page 8), my students did better on the oral direction activities. My reasoning behind this is because the students were doing these activities while I was giving the directions, which is different from me giving the directions and
the students having to recall them minutes, possibly hours, later. As said in an interview with Jo Morrison, our school’s guidance counselor, in primary “we are teaching children how to become students. We are trying to give them academic information, but we’re also teaching them to become students” (Morrison 2010). It is important to realize that we are teaching our students how to be students. This means finding out what students need in order to succeed. In my case, my students need both oral and written directions in order to follow them correctly.

Claim 2: Students meet with greater success with fewer steps to follow.

The initial intervention that came out of my main wondering was to cut down on the amount of spelling activities I introduced to my students at one time. Once I implemented this, I saw an immediate improvement in my students’ work. I went from having 28 instances in which students had not followed directions, to 0 in one week’s time (see appendix K and appendix L for student work samples). Over the course of my inquiry these numbers fluctuated, but never came close to the amount I collected from my baseline data. During my interview with Jo Morrison (see appendix M for transcripts), she agreed that my intervention would not change the students’ permanent behaviors overnight. “When students are learning a new behavior it takes a minimum of 20 days” (Morrison 2010). The total time I spent implementing this intervention was 27 school days, which would be just over the amount of time a child needs to learn a new behavior.

When I began this intervention I made sure that all students had their eyes on me and that they were ready to listen. I would explain the directions and then have one or two student volunteers repeat them back to me for the class to hear. I also would give an example of what an
acceptable answer would be, and let the students write that down as a reminder. I believe that reducing the amount of directions they had to retain (by lessening the packet activities), giving the directions multiple times, and also giving them an example made a dramatic difference in how well they followed the directions.

The data that I collected from before my spelling packet intervention up until the last week of my inquiry fully supports my claim that students are more successful with fewer directions to follow. The week that I did not give any directions, I only had 4 students who did not follow the directions on an activity. This shows that my students are becoming more responsible but that they still need reminders every so often.

Claim 3: As I became more aware of my students’ needs, I became more conscientious in tailoring the directions given to them.

One of my sub-questions was, “How can I be more clear with my direction giving?” Many of the teachers who answered my survey said if their students are not following or understanding the directions, they look to themselves to see if their direction had been clear enough. I began to wonder if I was part of the problem with my students’ direction following. I looked to those survey results to see what other teachers do to help them be more clear. What I took away from those responses was to give directions with a limited number of steps, as well as write the directions on the board after they are given. Through the student and teacher survey, I became more aware that my students needed this extra reinforcement and became more conscientious of their needs. I noticed that, at times, I would give directions that were lengthy and not worded clearly. I found myself having to reword what I had just said because the
students were looking at me with a blank stare. I also was not always waiting for my students to have ‘all eyes on me’ or to be giving me their full attention.

Towards the end of my interventions I had my mentor video tape me while I was giving directions to a spelling activity. While analyzing the video, I created a rubric that helped me to see if the clarity of my direction giving had improved. The chart below illustrates those results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Times that I...</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Waited for eyes to be on me</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asked the students if the directions were clear</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used an attention getter</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asked a student to repeat the directions</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redirected the class</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Throughout a 4 minute video, I used 8 direction giving strategies that ensured my students’s understanding. This evidence is reflective of my growth and supports this claim when compared with my data on student mistakes.

**Reflection and Implementations for Future Practice**

Throughout this inquiry process I have learned many things about my students and myself as a teacher. I believe that this process has helped me to think more deeply and carefully about student behavior. Before, I would have immediately assumed that my students lack of direction following as carelessness. After taking months to delv into this specific behavior, and
collect data on it, I was able to see that my students are still very young, and even at this stage of the school year, still need many reminders. I have realized that positive change can take a very small intervention that requires not much work on the teacher’s behalf.

My inquiry will certainly affect my teaching strategies in the future. I now know that I have to be extremely conscious of how many steps I am giving my students at once. In the future, I will make sure that I have my students full attention before giving directions. I plan on developing a ‘listening position’ that I can teach my students from the first day of school so that they know what I expect when it’s time for me to give directions. I am also more aware that with giving fewer steps, that these steps also need to be clear and simple. I will try to keep my directions to no more than 4 or 5 steps in order to help my students be successful. I will focus on direction giving during the beginning of the year, and show my students what I expect of them from the start.

**Future Wonderings:**

- What is the best method of teaching direction following in the beginning of the year so that I don’t have students who are still unable to do so by the end?
- Are students’ direction following skills developmental or can they be changed?
- Would students who are more likely not to follow directions benefit from having reminder cards on their desks?
- Do I need to write down every direction that I give verbally to make sure that all of my students are understand them?
Do students who have a hard time following oral directions at school also have difficulty at home?
Teacher Interview-Vanessa  
2/12/10

1. Have you ever had a problem with students repeatedly not putting their names on their papers? What things did you try to fix it?

Yes, did inquiry on it in 3rd and 4th grade. It doesn’t get any better. Same students that seem did tend to do it.

Different kind of motivations: Rewards (positive), after they handed it in she would collect it and before recess or special time and call names on the papers

Morning message: remember to put your name on your paper

In class: What’s the first thing you’re going to do?

2. Do you have any type of check list or phrase that reminds the students to make sure they are giving you their full attention when giving directions?

Listening position: criss cross, hands on lap, good spot, lips closed
“Heidi’s ready because she’s in listening position” in the beginning. I’ll wait for everyone to get back into position.

3. Do you have any type of check list or phrase that reminds the students to make sure their work is complete before turning in their work.

Finish baskets
Whole group checklists-what they need to accomplish during the day on the board
Checklist taped on their desk during the first month of school

4. Have you ever had a problem with students continuously not following the directions and in result turning in papers that needed to be given back.

2nd grade- no
1st grade-yes
Did I explain the directions well enough? Multi-step directions aren’t easy for them.
Spelling paper: a page everyday

5. Any other strategies?
Microphone for morning meeting, circle
Sharing-only allowed to sign up once a week to share-cut off the showing sharing, doesn’t let them sign up until the morning of
Star student-share all kinds of stuff
Silent hand blink if you like the same thing, have the same thing
Visual stuff-checklists on the board, pictures
An example to see what I want
Since it’s just her they might be less dependent and she doesn’t even put finish work on the board. They asked each other for questions instead of the teacher.
### Appendix B

#### Checklist to Gather Baseline Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students who turned in work w/o directions 3/1-2/12</th>
<th>Students who turned in papers w/o following directions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amber</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angelica</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brennan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coral</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kieran</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madeline</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nidhi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajeev</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ra’neesha</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rohan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shi-Anne</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C
Parent Survey

Parent Survey

Please circle the word that best describes each question.

1. My child is responsible for completing chores around the house.
   - Often
   - Sometimes
   - Rarely
   - Never

2. I have to remind my child to do his or her chore(s) regularly.
   - Often
   - Sometimes
   - Rarely
   - Never

3. If my child does not complete his or her chore(s), there is a consequence.
   - Often
   - Sometimes
   - Rarely
   - Never

4. My child asks me to clarify directions to homework assignments.
   - Often
   - Sometimes
   - Rarely
   - Never

5. When doing homework, my child asks for help.
   - Often
   - Sometimes
   - Rarely
   - Never

6. When I ask my child to do something he or she does it correctly the first time.
   - Often
   - Sometimes
   - Rarely
   - Never

7. My child gets upset when he or she does not understand the directions I've given them.
   - Often
   - Sometimes
   - Rarely
   - Never
Appendix D
Parent Survey Results

Parent Survey

Please circle the word that best describes each question.

1. My child is responsible for completing chores around the house.
   - Often
   - Sometimes
   - Rarely
   - Never

2. I have to remind my child to do his or her chore(s) regularly.
   - Often
   - Sometimes
   - Rarely
   - Never

3. If my child does not complete his or her chore(s), there is a consequence.
   - Often
   - Sometimes
   - Rarely
   - Never

4. My child asks me to clarify directions to homework assignments.
   - Often
   - Sometimes
   - Rarely
   - Never

5. When doing homework, my child asks for help.
   - Often
   - Sometimes
   - Rarely
   - Never

6. When I ask my child to do something he or she does it correctly the first time.
   - Often
   - Sometimes
   - Rarely
   - Never

7. My child gets upset when he or she does not understand the directions I’ve given them.
   - Often
   - Sometimes
   - Rarely
   - Never
Appendix E
Example of Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amber</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angelica</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brennan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coral</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kieran</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madeline</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molly</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Nidhi</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Olívia</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rajeev</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ra’neesha</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rohan</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shi-Anne</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyler</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F
Student Survey

Date:__________________

Student Survey

1. I understand directions when Mrs. Henderson or Mr. Stoddard give them to me before an activity.

2. If I have a question about the directions, I ask three friends before asking a teacher.

3. I always try to be an active listener.

4. I understand directions best when they are written on the board.

5. I understand directions best when they are said out loud.

6. After I complete an activity I am worried about how I did on it.

7. I think that following directions is important.

😊 = YES!
😊😊 = Maybe
😊😊😊 = No way!
Appendix G
Student Survey Results

Student Survey

1. I understand directions when Mrs. Hopkins or Mr. Blackburn give them to me before an activity.

2. If I have a question about the directions, I ask their friends before asking a teacher.

3. I always try to be an active listener.

4. I understand directions best when they are written on the board.

5. I understand directions best when they are read out loud.

6. After I complete an activity, I am worried about how I did on it.

7. I think the following directions is important.

Result:
- Majority understands directions.
- Majority asks before me.
- Majority tries to be an active listener.
- Majority reads written directions better.
- Majority says it isn't clear.
Appendix H
Video Analysis Rubric

Video

Waited: 11
Are you done? 11
Attention getter: 1

Asked student: 11
to read/repeat

Didn't wait: 1
Redirected: 1
Appendix I
Teacher Survey Results

6. If you think that your students have a hard time following directions, do you ever wonder if your directions are unclear?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Yes, I try to explain it a different way, or act it out, or write it on the board then.</td>
<td>Mon, Feb 8, 2010 9:02 AM</td>
<td>Mon, Feb 8, 2010 9:02 AM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Sometimes, I like to have students repeat directions back to me before I let them work independently</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mon, Feb 8, 2010 9:02 AM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Yes</td>
<td>Mon, Feb 8, 2010 9:02 AM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Yes I do wonder that. I’m always asking Emily or Cathy if I explained the directions clearly just to make sure I didn’t forget something.</td>
<td>Wed, Feb 3, 2010 10:24 PM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. For routine tasks, I find that the students who have trouble following directions are those who were distracted (e.g., talking to a friend, working on something) while I was giving them. However, today several of my students had the same confusion about directions during a craft activity. I think I had a vision in my mind about what I wanted them to accomplish, but did not communicate it clearly.</td>
<td>Wed, Feb 3, 2010 7:38 PM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. <strong>I would say about 75% of both girls and boys in my class put their names on their paper. I don’t find a difference between genders. I would say about 75% also consistently follow directions the first time. Some of my students need reminders/additional facilitation when getting started. I definitely see a correlation between putting their names on their papers and following directions.</strong></td>
<td>Mon, Feb 1, 2010 4:30 PM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Yes! If kids don’t understand my directions, my first thought is always, “What can I do or say to help them better.”

6. What are some techniques you use to help your students follow directions?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Again, I try to write the instructions on the board, demonstrate what they need to be doing, or have a peer re-explain my instructions.</td>
<td>Mon, Feb 8, 2010 9:02 AM</td>
<td>Mon, Feb 8, 2010 9:02 AM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. See above. I have learned to also break things into small steps and when doing full class activities, we go one step at a time and stop till everyone is caught up</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mon, Feb 8, 2010 9:02 AM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Have them visually presented as well as orally presented and demonstrated each time</td>
<td>Mon, Feb 8, 2010 9:02 AM</td>
<td></td>
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<td>5. I call on students to repeat the directions to me or I might write the directions on the board.</td>
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<td>6. I try to use attention-getters that require students to a) stop talking to friends (such as a call &amp; response) and b) stop using their hands (such as a clapping pattern). Doing so eliminates some distractions to help them focus on listening.</td>
<td>Wed, Feb 3, 2010 10:24 PM</td>
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<td>7. Clear expectations -1 or 2 steps as opposed to complex, multi-step directions -modeling -a visual that demonstrates what I’m expecting (very effective)</td>
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Read the Directions!

ADD IT
How are these words alike? Add more.

because, began, below, beat, bread, beef

become

become

beat

belt

bench
Appendix L
Sample of Student Work Where Directions Were Followed

Words that end with st

must  dust  list
just  test  quest
first  rest  pest
least  nest  dust
chest  yest  rest
Appendix L
Sample of Student Work Where Directions Weren’t Followed
L: Alright so my inquiries about inquiry skills mostly with a little bit of organizational skills. So I was wondering if you work with kids on this

J: Yes, yes, all the time at this level

L: Primary?

J: Yes

J: Well we teach them what we call active listening

L: Does a teacher recommend that they come to you?

J: Typically, most of my referrals come from teachers. If a parents recommends it it’s usually due to a divorce or a death in the family.

L: So if a student was to come to you to work on listening, what types of things would you do?

J: A couple things, a book on good listening, so I go to the library and get a couple books and use it for bibliotherapy. I do role modeling and I act really goofy, like “Here’s the teacher and what am I doing wrong?” Then I teach them what we do with our eyes, our mouths, are hands, are feet, so it’s whole body. The whole body is involved with active listening. They practice here. Then they go in the classroom. Then they have to show me. It is very structured when I come in there, they must do exactly what I said when I come in there.

L: How long does it usually take?

J: When I put a kid in my schedule I put them down for 8-10 sessions. The thing is that when you’re learning a new behavior it takes a minimum of 20 days.

L: When you come in to observe, do you find out you they are more?

J: Oh absolutely, they know exactly why I’m there and what they should be doing, so when I leave I tell them that the teacher is going to watch them and report back to me on how they did. And as much as I think they enjoy coming to me, because we always play games. So we work but we do a fun thing, they need to be comfortable to come here, that I do this with love in my heart, and that we have work to do and play to do. When I go in there, although they know I mean business they know it’s still ok because I can’t loose that rapport that I have to build.

L: I guess, listening is an issue in our classroom and then it turns into not following directions. Does that usually go hand in hand?
J: Yes absolutely because if they aren’t listening then they aren’t hearing what to do, um, and they get it wrong, they do everything wrong, they have to do everything over and no one wants to be doing that. For them to police each other, it’s so much stronger, it means more than when it comes from us.

L: I feel by this point of second grade should I have to do that?
J: You have to do what you have to do. Do you feel like you should have to do that? No. But we can start teaching them that here is your one page, and the next week do two pages.

J: If they’re getting their bodies, and getting ready for listening then their minds are going to come along with that.

L: A little bit of my first initial wondering was their desks, their finish work was over flowing and we find that they are just shoving papers in their desks and they are just getting lost. Do you ever work with that?

J: Yes, I work with a student at Boalsburg that every Monday she cleans out their desk. I would take 5 minutes from recess, because they really don’t know. Have them clean their desks once a week.

J: I think it’s important that they know and that you practice practice practice, and that you get a signal so you don’t have to go through the whole thing.

L: I feel like 1, 2, 3 eyes on me is getting kind of redundant. I’m also thinking about making a 3 step poster to hang in above the turn in

J: Yea you’re teaching them, to me that’s what’s elementary is all about. We’re teaching children how to become students we’re trying to get them curriculum information, but we’re also teaching them to become students. A lot of that goes on in Kindergarten but everyone has their own styles so they come to you from different places.
Inquiry Brief
Elizabeth Stoddard (Grade 2 Park Forest Elementary)

Context

As an intern in Penn State’s Professional Development School, I spent the 2009-2010 school year in a self-contained, 2nd grade classroom at Park Forest Elementary School, which is a part of the State College Area School District. This school, although large, also focuses on having a strong community throughout the school.

There are nineteen students in my classroom, seven male and eleven female. The majority of these students come from middle to upper-class households, however, there are three who receive free or reduced lunches. The majority of my students are meeting expectations for 2nd grade. However, there are five students who perform above grade level in reading and math, and two students who perform at a level significantly below grade level. There is one English Language Learner who is from China. There are no, students with IEPs, students with physical disabilities, or who are in an enrichment program. There are two students who are in Title 1 and have been recommended for Instructional Support Team. These students can often require individual attention when it comes to following written directions.

This classroom has looped from the year before, which means that twelve out of the eighteen students have stayed with the same teacher since first grade. There is a variety of social and behavior needs within this classroom. Three or four of the students consistently misbehave and need constant reminders of how they should be acting in school. The class as a whole has been having problems with following directions and being active listeners.
**Main Question**

How can I help my students to become better listeners and follow the directions the first time they are given?

**Sub-Questions**

• How can I be more clear with my direction giving?

• How can I help my students be more responsible for routine tasks?

• How do my relationships with students affect their motivation to follow directions?

**Rationale**

As I started to take over more responsibilities in the classroom, I started to notice issues my students were having with following directions; specifically putting their names on papers and following the directions that were given to complete activities. The majority of students were turning in work in which they either hadn’t followed the directions given, or turned in work that was supposed to have corrections made to it without making those corrections. It is extremely frustrating to me when students turn in activities, that I have taken the time to point out what needs to be fixed, without changing a thing. It leaves me wondering if they just don’t care about following the directions I’ve given them, or if I am being unclear. I want to try and figure out the reason behind why following directions seems to be such a struggle for my students. I also want to find ways to help them improve upon this important skill. My students will be expected to be active listeners and follow directions for the rest of their lives. My hope is that I can help them to realize the importance of this and not only get better at doing it, but to want to improve as well.
Data Collection and Timeline

Week of February 1 and February 8:
• Primary Teachers Survey
  • Ten questions about strategies they use in their classrooms to help students follow the directions and stay organized. These questions were a mix of a rating scale and comment boxes.
  • I’m keeping a checklist to record how much student work is turned in with no names and number of students who turn in work without following the directions. I will use this data to refer back to at the end of my data collection.
• Names on Papers Check-In
  • Each time we do an activity, I have been stressing to the students the need to put their names on their papers. I will tell them to do this two or three times per activity. We will do this two or three times per activity and then gradually lessen the number of reminders to observe impact/self-improvement in this area.

Week of February 15:
• Teacher interviews
  • I will be conducting interviews with two of the teachers who completed my survey, as well as the school’s guidance counselor.
• Parent Survey
  • Five-ten questions
    • Does your child have responsibilities at home?
    • What happens if your child does not complete a task?
    • Does your child ask for help when completing homework?
    • How often do you have to remind your child to do his/her chores?
    • Does your child ask you to clarify directions to homework assignments?
• Examples of student work
  • Assignments where students didn’t follow directions vs. Assignments where they did follow directions.
    • Document how directions were given via video and/or notes taken by mentor/PDA
• Introduce one spelling activity per day vs. The whole packet at once
  • I want to see if part of my students’ direction following problem has to do with the amount of directions they are given at a time. Instead of giving them the unit spelling packet on one day and explaining all of the activities, I am going to introduce one activity per day and have that complete it. At the end of the day I will collect their packets so that they can’t work ahead, and also to help them keep less papers in their desks.

• Names on Paper Check-In
•Continue with stressing importance of putting their names on their papers

Week of February 22
•Student Survey on Directions
  •Five to Ten questions
  •Smiley face rating scale
  •I understand the directions when Mrs. Hopkins or Ms. Stoddard explain them to me before an activity.
  •I ask three friends for help with directions after they are given before asking a teacher.
  •I get worried or nervous when I find out we are having a test/quiz.
  •After I complete an activity, I get nervous about how I did on it.
  •I always try to be an active listener.
  •I think that directions are important because . . .
  •I understand directions best when they are (said, spoken, written). . .
•Following Directions Activity from Follow Directions Grades 1-2
  I will use one of the activities from this book that focuses on oral directions. I will also do an activity that requires them to follow written directions. I will compare how well my students followed the directions on each activity to assess whether they do better with written or oral directions.
•How do I give directions?
  •Document how directions were given via video and/or notes taken by mentor/PDA

•Checklist Poster
  •Checklist poster by hand-in basket
  •Is my name on my paper?
  •Did I follow all directions?
  •Is my work complete?

Week of March 1:
•Checklist (Revisited)
  •Use the checklist from weeks one and two to collect data about how many students are not putting their names on their papers and not following directions before turning in their work
    •This will allow me to use it as a mid-point reference
•Student Work
  •Examples of student work in which they didn’t follow directions vs. when they did (to compare what worked/what did not in terms of giving directions).
• How do I give directions?
  • Document how directions were given via video and/or notes taken by mentor/PDA and decide on what changes to implement

• Student Interviews
  • Student interview
    • This interview will be used to help build better relationships with my students to see how that affects their motivation
    • It will consist of general questions about their lives
    • 4 students/day
      • How many siblings?
      • Are you the oldest? Youngest?
      • When is your birthday?
      • What is your favorite . . .?
    • Start to take notes on how the students’ motivation to follow directions seemed to have, or haven’t, changed

• Reward System
  • For everyday I receive work from all students that have a name on it AND have followed all directions, I will ADD 5 marbles to the jar.

Week of March 8:

Spring Break

Week of March 15:
  • Record on my checklist how many students turn in work with no name/didn’t follow directions
  • Start to take notes on how the students’ motivation to follow directions seemed to have, or haven’t, changed
  • Student Work
    • Examples of student work in which they didn’t follow directions
  • How do I give directions?
    • Document how directions were given via video and/or notes taken by mentor/PDA

• Student Interviews
  • Student interview
    • This interview will be used to help build better relationships with my students to see how that affects their motivation
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• Are you the oldest? Youngest?
• When is your birthday?
• What is your favorite . . .?
• Start to take notes on how the students’ motivation to follow directions seemed to have, or haven’t, changed

**Interventions**
• Continue with interventions checklist poster and the reward system
• Last chance for any small interventions to try for the week based on data collected so far

**Week of March 22 and March 29:**
• Analyze Data
  • Data will be analyzed as each intervention/survey/interview has been completed. During these two weeks, however, I will analyze this data at a deeper level than I will have before.
    • How has the number of students turning in work with no names and who didn’t follow directions changed from the first week and mid-point?
    • What interventions were more successful than others?
  • Analyze student and parent surveys
  • Begin making claims based on data analysis

**Month of April:**
• Begin the writing of research paper
• Begin presentation ideas
• Revise paper
• Create abstract
• Do any additional data analysis
• Finalize paper and presentation
Annotated Bibliography


The Daily 5 is a classroom system created by Gail Bourshey and Joan Mosher that helps to foster independent literacy. Reading to self, reading with someone, writing, word work, and listening to reading are the five practices that this book recommends implementing in your classroom. By teaching and modeling these practices in your classroom, students should develop habits that make them more independent. The Daily 5 is geared toward language arts, but I feel that this source can give me ideas on ways to make my students more independent in all areas, resulting in me not having to repeat directions so often.


This source provides a wide range of information about ways to shape your classroom during the crucial first six weeks of school. It provides insight as to what you should be doing with your students on a week by week basis, giving ideas for activities, morning meetings, and expectation setting. Denton and Kriete provide detailed examples of ways to create rules with your class, practice those rules, and set expectations. Although doing these things is critical during those first few weeks, I feel that I can benefit from these ideas for my inquiry project. By using this source I will be able to modify information about setting expectations to meet where my students are at this point in the year.


This source is an activity book that can help students to improve their direction following skills. It provides activities with written directions, step-by-step directions, and oral directions. By using some of the activities from this source, I hope to deepen my students’ understanding of how important it is to follow directions.

Joanne Morrison, personal communication, February 19, 2010

Joanne works with students on a one-to-one basis who have a wide range of needs. I think that she is a valuable resource because she is trained to help elementary age students with behavior and social skills. She was able to give me information on strategies to try for direction following and insight into how long it takes for a new behavior to be learned.
I will be using a past inquiry done by two Professional Development Interns as one of my sources. Their inquiry focused on effective direction giving and how to get their students to follow the directions. My inquiry question is very similar to this, if not almost exactly the same, so I think that looking to this inquiry for ideas will be very beneficial.

Kimberly Wilson, personal communication, February 15, 2010

Kimberly Wilson is a 1st/2nd multiage teacher at Park Forest Elementary. She keeps her room and student’s very organized and I think that I would benefit from her advice on how to help my students become more organized. As a fellow primary teacher, listening to the strategies she uses in her classroom to help her students follow directions was beneficial.


This picture book is about a bunny who has very large ears but doesn’t listen. As a result of his poor listening skills he ends up in danger when he ends up at the cave of the Scruffy Varmint. Once he learns that he may be turned into stew he starts to listen. This would be a good book to help teach my students the importance of listening. It is a book that we read during the first few weeks of school when we were setting our expectations. Revisiting the book at this point of the year will be a good idea and a follow-up discussion afterwards will hopefully result in my students realizing how listening is important.


This source provides a wealth of knowledge about classroom management. It covers a wide range of issues that teachers face with trying to manage their students from understanding why children misbehave to interventions to try with students depending on their degree of behavior issues (common to chronic). I think that for my inquiry project, I will find the sections about *Understanding Why Children Misbehave*, *The School Environment*, *Prevention*, and the sections on different interventions will be most useful.
Vanessa Tomasko, personal communication, February 13, 2010

Vanessa is a first year teacher who was a Professional Development Intern during the 2008-2009 school year. I was able to obtain some great ideas about ways to help students follow directions. It was particularly valuable to have the insight of a first year teacher compared to a veteran teacher.


In order to help my students become better listeners, I have to make sure that I understand where they are at developmentally. *Yardsticks* is a great source to help me determine how to make my interventions age appropriate. This source describes what to expect from children ages six to fourteen in developmental areas such as: growth patterns, curriculum, and in the classroom. I will be using the chapters on seven and eight year olds, specifically.