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Creating A Normalized Montessori Classroom

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Creating A Normalized Montessori Classroom

An Action Research Report
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Creating A Normalized Montessori Classroom

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Abstract

The purpose of this report is to describe the findings of a study on how the

implementation of the Accelerated Reader Program, use of five different management

strategies, as well as the introduction of routines and rituals affects students' ability to

create a normalized 1st through 3rd grade Montessori classroom. The research was

conducted with a lower elementary Montessori classroom within a public school

setting. More than half of the students had never experienced a Montessori

environment. The data collecting methods used were a summative assessment, tally

sheets, field notes, attitude scale inquiries, and semi-structured conversations with the

students. The results of this research indicated only a marginal increase in a positive

direction toward a normalized class. A large part of the difficulty in reaching a

normalized class was due to the lack of ability to concentrate on work because of

noise in the classroom. The implications of this action plan include reducing

extraneous distractions, increasing positive reinforcement, and teaching more time

management and self-monitoring skills.

What do the founders of Google, the founders of Amazon, Julia Childs, George Clooney, Anne Frank, Helen Keller, Beyonce, Taylor Swift, Yo Yo Ma, and Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis all have in common? Besides all being very successful in their fields, they are also Montessori graduates; meaning at some point in their education they experienced the Montessori philosophy. Presumably, they were exposed to, what Montessorians would call, a 'normalized' classroom. This ideal classroom is where students learn joyfully, freely choose their work, concentrate deeply in work that captures their interest, engage in meaningful work independently and function as members of a respectful, harmonious, learning community.

My wish for my fledgling Montessori class is a 'normalized' classroom. The classroom has all the potential of being a Montessori sanctuary for learning. The prepared environment is set. Activities and materials are demonstrated to the children with grace and courtesy, and provide choices within the framework of the curriculum. We discuss how to work quietly and concentrate on the activities; yet the noisy classroom persists. Children often tell me that they cannot concentrate. Many are still not independent workers and do not know how to navigate through their day. The rituals of treating the materials and each other with respect are still difficult for some.

This Montessori classroom is part of a Title 1, K – 6th grade traditional public school with only two Montessori classrooms in this school of 600 children. Montessori has only been part of this school for the last five years. Implementing Montessori into this school has not been an easy transition. The students have had to endure a very bumpy start with a variety of teachers, different class configurations, and various teaching methods that where not always authentically Montessori.

Currently, my Montessori classroom consists of 27 children (12 boys and 13 girls) of which 18 of them have never had a Montessori education before. The students, who have had Montessori, experienced much turbulence in the programs beginning years. In this environment, creating a 'normalized' classroom will take some time. It may even take several cycles of students to create an allegiance to the expectations of a Montessori classroom. Finding the best ways to begin and continue this path is the goal of this researcher. What are the best ways of instilling concentration, grace and courtesy, respect, and love of learning? In other words, what are the best ways to create a 'normalized classroom'?

Montessori discovered that children work differently than adults. They must always be given work to do with their hands since they find it easier to understand concepts when touching the objects, rather than just hearing the explanation (Montessori, 1972, p. 127). Cossentino (2010) described the emphasis on the hands in Montessori as "rituals". Cossentino found students looked forward to, expected, emulated and anticipated these rituals.

The actions of touching others in a particular way, handling objects in a particular way, walking around the room in a particular way, all enable the practitioners to conduct a particular understanding of what it means to participate in Montessori culture ("The window of ritual," para. 19).

The rituals of grace and courtesy presentations demonstrate the expectation of a Montessori student and a respectful person. These rituals show the students how to handle the materials, what they are used for, and where the materials go when they are finished with the work. The materials should be put away so the next person

choosing this activity will have all the same items available. Grace and courtesy helps

children to think of others and creates a peaceful classroom. These rituals, and grace

and courtesy help to normalize the Montessori classroom behaviors. Lloyd (2008)

discussed Montessori's theory of normalization in her dissertation. Lloyd examined

"the emotional state that results from the mental concentration that arises from

actively participating in one's personal interests" (p. 96). There are processes that

must happen in the classroom for normalization to take place. Lloyd suggested that a

normalized classroom is created when children work on level appropriate activities

that sustain their interest. She continued by saying for deep concentration to occur the

work cannot be too hard or too easy. If the work is too difficult, the student becomes

frustrated and will lose interest. Easy work is not the answer both because boredom

will set in, and deep concentration will be lost to distraction.

Rathunde (2010) discussed the origins and benefits of concentration. He

stated, "deep concentration puts one in contact with the essential motivational forces

of human nature that are based in childhood… this pattern often results in lifelong

learning and remarkable achievement" (p. 25). Personette (2001) concurred with

Rathunde and said, "concentration is the key. When children are concentrating, you

can hear a pin drop. Their focus is so intense they are unaware of what is going on

around them" ("Parents are amazed," para. 1).

What does a normalized child look like and do? Shaefer- Zaner (2006) found

that there were three steps and four characteristics that occur every time a child

became normalized. The three steps were:

(1) Preparation for an activity which involved gathering together the

material necessary to do the activity. The movement and the thought

involved in the preparation serve to call the attention of the mind to

begin to focus on the activity

(2) An activity which so engrosses the child that he reaches a deep level

of concentration. This step is what all educator and parents recognize

as important for education.

(3) Rest, which is characterized by a general feeling of satisfaction and

well-being. It is thought that at this point some inner formation or

integration of the person takes place ("When does *normalization* appear?"

para.1)

She continued by describing the four characteristics that children showed when they

became normalized. They had a love of work, could concentrate on the work, had

self-discipline and were social ("Characteristics of *Normalization*," para. 2*)*.

Another element in a normalized Montessori classroom is freedom of choice.

Seldin (2006) discussed the effects on children when given the opportunity to choose

work and how these choices lead to deep concentration. These choices were within

the structure of the classroom and took into consideration the students' individualized

learning for each grade level. Seldin said, "Whenever students voluntarily decide to

learn something, they tend to engage in their work with passion … that few will ever

invest in tasks that have been assigned" ("Providing structure," para. 1). Eissler

(2010) studied concentration in Montessori schools. He would agree with Seldin's

findings that choice is one of the fundamental aspects of concentration.

Choosing what to learn is the first step in taking control of one's

education. Being able to concentrate on it is the next step. The final

step is the child's realization that, at the end of a piece of work, he

has a new ability, a new understanding, or a newfound power. (p.

2).

Visser (2009) discussed a normalized Montessori classroom as meeting the

students' needs. Visser analyzed how Montessori classrooms met the needs of all

children. She saw that when children were allowed to concentrate on their work it

created a self–discipline that was contagious throughout the classroom. The room was

peaceful with children focused on their work. Visser found, "that children, when

focused on such activities, were peaceful and content because they were meeting an

inner need" ("Classroom management," para. 1). The Montessori philosophy follows

the children and allows them to grow and learn at their pace academically and

emotionally. Respecting their freedom to choose their work and friends can lead to a

more normalized classroom because the children will feel more autonomous and

peaceful. Scanlan (2013) studied respectful relationships in the Montessori

environment. He studied two Montessori schools and discovered how Montessori

pedagogy fosters respectful relationships in the classroom. He said,

The combination of the themes' respect, freedom, movement and the

prepared environment, provide a basis for an educational philosophy

that is inclusive of the whole child. In this, Montessori education

represents a philosophy that comes to life through relationships built

on respect. (p. 76).

Other studies discovered the importance of sound levels and available space in the classroom and how these elements can affect concentration. Nelson, Kohnert, Sabur, and Shaw (2005) suggested noise level in the classroom determined the amount of learning and concentration that occurred. Concentration can be broken or unsustainable in a loud environment. Nelson et. al. discovered this was especially true for second language learners. Their research results showed "noise had a greater impact on the [second graders learning English as their second language] L2 group's performance … the decline in performance accuracy for processing words in noise was more than four times greater for the L2 group than for the English Only group (Nelson et al. 2005, "Speech perception," para. 2). Tanner (2009) found concentration in classrooms can be broken if space is limited. He discovered students need adequate space to study, and crowded areas create problems. He based this research on the study of acceptable social distances. Tanner quoted Wohlwill and van Vliet's (1985) work, "…the consequences of high density conditions that involve either too many children or too little space are: excess levels of stimulation; stress and arousal; a drain on resources available; considerable interference…" (p.2). Tanner calculated according to social distance research, a class of 20 elementary students would need a classroom of at least 1029 sq. ft. for adequate learning to occur (p.3).

There have been studies done on different school programs that are said to encourage student's independent learning and promote learning through concentration. The Accelerated Reading (AR) program is one such program and advertised as being good for increasing reading levels and sustaining concentration in children. Stefl-Mabry (2005) researched this program to determined if AR is a

computerized version of Silent Sustained Reading or SSR ("Silent Sustained Reading

Camouflaged", para.1). Stefl-Mabry discovered, "SSR is the crucial variable that

determines the success of AR and … any reading program" ("Implementation

Inconsistency", para. 3). The silent sustained reading requires the children to

concentrate on the book.

Schmidt (2008) studied the effects on the students' reading accomplishments

and their attitude toward reading after being in the AR program. Schmidt wondered

what the students were retaining from the limited reading selection and the multiple-

choice tests. These tests asked basic comprehension and literacy questions. Schmidt

discovered, "AR was not building a lifelong love of reading… [the students] were

learning to consume books quickly and move on to another after answering questions

either successfully or unsuccessfully" ("Thinking back," para. 6). Students are

reading, but only for the program, not for the love of reading. Melton et al. (2005)

studied AR and showed students had no significant increase in reading skills after

using the AR program. Two fifth-grade classrooms of similar size and demographics

were studied. One class participated in the AR program and one did not. They

assessed the results of classrooms' reading scores. Melton et al. discovered that the

class that did not participate in the AR program had a significant increase in reading

achievement compared to the AR group ("Conclusion," para. 1). The results of these

studies were of concern to the AR company according to Stefl-Mabry (2005). She

stated in her article that Topping and Fisher (2001) found the AR program's studies

showed that the program was not administered to the children properly. The studies

revealed that schools were not allowing the appropriate time for the SSR. Stefl-Mabry says,

> Study after study reveals the importance of schools providing students longer periods for SSR. According to AR goal setting changes put into effect in June 2003 propose the following daily reading practice recommendations for independent readings …Elementary school— sixty minutes. ("Implementation Inconsistency," para. 1).

It is apparent that creating a normalized classroom is possible. Concentration and the child's freedom to choose work are essential elements in creating a normalized classroom. Not only does work that promotes deep concentration captivate the student's interest and fosters independent and life-long learners, but it will also decrease the noise level of the classroom. The quiet will in turn help the second language learners who are trying to process information in English. Elements such as room size, will not be fixed in this study. However, the data is an interesting issue to consider when the results of this research are evaluated. Incorporating independent learning programs such as the AR program may create independent learners who can monitor their success in this program. The success of the program will be dependent on the children having the appropriate SSR time. The work choices provided, rituals demonstrated, and the peaceful environment also aids in developing a normalized classroom where "interest is spontaneously engaged" (Rathunde, 2001, p. 28). These are the building blocks for independent, life-long learners and a normalized Montessori classroom. My study is based on those components. I ask, how will the implementations of the Accelerated Reader Program as well as the

introduction of routines and rituals for classroom independent behavior affect my

students' ability to create a normalized 1ˢᵗ through 3ʳᵈ grade Montessori classroom?

Methodology

To gather the data for my action research, I used four different research tools.

I used an attitude scale inquiry, an artifact from a summative assessment for the AR

program, observations with a tally sheet and field notes, and semi-structured

conversations with the students. I used these research methods throughout the

duration of the action research process. The first tools used were the attitude scale

inquiry forms and summative assessment because it was important to get a starting

basis before the action research intervention began. These tools were also the last

ones used to determine progress from the beginning of the research to the end. Next,

the observations with a tally sheet and field notes were implemented on a daily basis.

The semi-structured conversations were done periodically throughout the action

research period. All these tools were used to gather as much information about which

management strategies and rituals work best to attain a normalized Montessori

classroom.

On the first day of the intervention, students were told about my study and

asked to fill out an Attitude Scale Inquiry (see Appendix A). The goal of the inquiry

was to gain insight into how the students felt about their experience in the classroom.

The students were instructed to read each statement and think about their

feelings. Their response choices were either a happy face, unsure face or an unhappy

face. They had to decide if they completely agreed with the statement (happy face),

'kind of' agreed or disagreed with the statement (unsure face), or completely

disagreed with the statement (unhappy face). They were instructed to circle the face

that matched how they felt about the statement. They were assured there was no right

or wrong answer. To explain the concept we did a sample question together. I wrote

"I love my family" on the white board. We discussed the answer choice faces and

what they meant and we circled the appropriate face. The students were given the

form to fill out and return to me.

At the end of the intervention, they were given the attitude scale inquire again

with the same instructions. The qualitative information on the two forms was

compared to determine if their feelings of independence, enjoyment, satisfaction,

concentration and confidence as a learner had increased during the intervention.

One of the summative artifacts used started with the STAR test. These test

results were used to retrieve each student's beginning reading levels. AR reading

levels are initiated by the STAR test's results. Each child's beginning and final

reading levels were recorded on the AR form (see Appendix B). The data was

compared and gave quantitative information about each student's progress in AR.

The students read and took AR tests for 45 to 60 minutes per day after lunch

playground time. Students went to the library and checked out AR designated books

and read silently. Upon completion of the book(s), they took an AR test(s) on an IPad

or desk top computer. The students received instant notification on the percentage of

answers that they got correct on the test. As they improved their reading skills and

comprehension of what they read, their test performance improved. The AR program

data provided reading level changes throughout the year. I received notification of

their progress on these tests from the AR program's database. I used this data to give

a quantitative report on the student's reading achievement and independence level

throughout the intervention. Another STAR test was given at the end of the

intervention to compare their reading level from the beginning to the end of the

intervention.

The next intervention examined the effectiveness of five different

management strategies. The management strategies were modeling how to choose

work independently, helping students with work charts, making positive comments to

students, redirecting students not engaged in an appropriate activity, and

demonstrating appropriate ways of using the materials. I created a tally sheet (see

Appendix C) which was a record of management strategies implemented. The tally

sheet was broken down into five days of the week with each day stressing a different

management strategy (i.e. Monday's was focusing on the work charts). The

management strategy effectiveness was officially monitored for ten minutes, two

times in the three-hour work period every day of the school week for the duration of

this intervention. Each day, one management strategy was demonstrated. The effects

of that strategy were monitored and tallied on the basis of desired behavior from the

students. The desired behavior was a quiet work period, students chose work

independently, they were attentive in groups, and the students modeled appropriate

behavior when they moved freely in the classroom. A video could be taken before,

during and after the intervention.

At the end of the day, I reflected and wrote about my observations and

possible reasons for each day's outcome in the field study notes. Any improvements

or declines in behaviors were documented in the field study notes.

The last tool used (Appendix D) was one on one, semi-structured conversations with students (4 from each grade level equaling 12 total). In the conversations, the students were asked to explain the purpose of the routines and rituals that we used in the classroom. I also showed them pictures of our routines and rituals and asked what was happening and why it was done this way. These rituals and routines were the morning meeting, using and rolling up rugs for their work, jobs, birthday celebrations, waiting for everyone to be seated for lunch before eating, putting their work away before they start a new work, cleaning up work, and cleaning up their snack so the area is ready for the next student. The students were told that there was no right or wrong answer; this was their opinion. They were free to respond to the question truthfully and to use their thoughts. I wrote their responses on the Semi-Structured Conversation Sheet (see Appendix D). If they did not understand the question, I rephrased the question. The purpose of this tool was to find out, from their responses if they understood and recognized the routines and rituals we used in the classroom. I wanted to know if they knew why we had these rituals, how they think routines and rituals helped them, and when did they use these methods. Their answers were analyzed and compared to produce a qualitative report on the trends that were most prevalent in the class.

Data Analysis
At the conclusion of my research, I analyzed the results collected. The first piece of data I analyzed was the responses from the attitude scale inquiry. The goal of this piece of research was to gain insight into how the students felt about their experience in the classroom before and after the intervention; specifically how much independence, enjoyment, satisfaction, concentration and confidence as a learner they

felt while in the classroom. This information on the two forms was compared to determine if their feelings had changed during the intervention.

Figure 1 shows the beginning attitudes the students felt about their experience in the classroom. The chart shows an overall satisfaction (or happiness) of being in the classroom, finding and doing their work, and knowing what to do each day. However, the results show much dissatisfaction about the level of concentration they achieved overall. More than half the class said they could not completely concentrate on their work each day. The lack of being able to concentrate may be due to the noise level in the classroom. Many students want to chat loudly with one another even though they know they are to work quietly.

Figure 2 shows the results after the intervention. Some areas improved such as finding their work and feeling good about their work. However, the amount of students feeling they can concentrate on their work declined from the beginning inquiry. In the end, only five students felt they could concentrate. In addition, the amount of students feeling they could do their work successfully decreased. In the beginning, only two children felt they could not do the work. In figure 2, this result increased to nine children feeling they could not do the work. These findings are of great concern particularly if the child cannot concentrate, they cannot do the work well. These results pose much concern for the children's success and also the normalization of the classroom. The combination of not being able to concentrate and increased feelings of not being able to do their work will make reaching a normalized classroom take much longer. One of the key elements of a normalized classroom is the ability of the children to concentrate on their work.
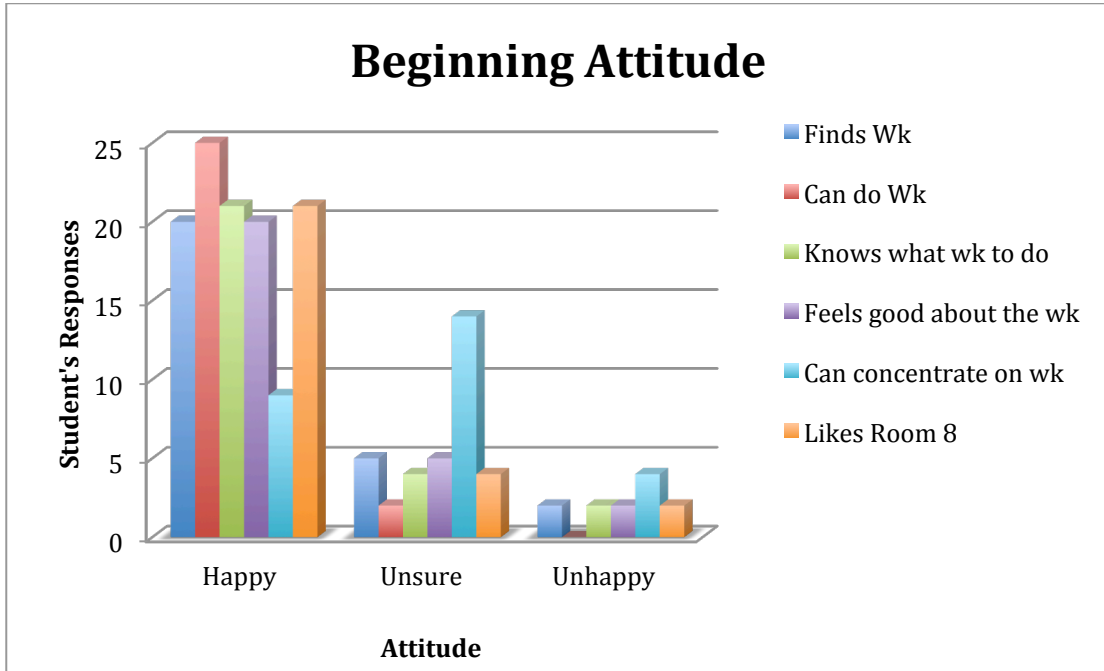
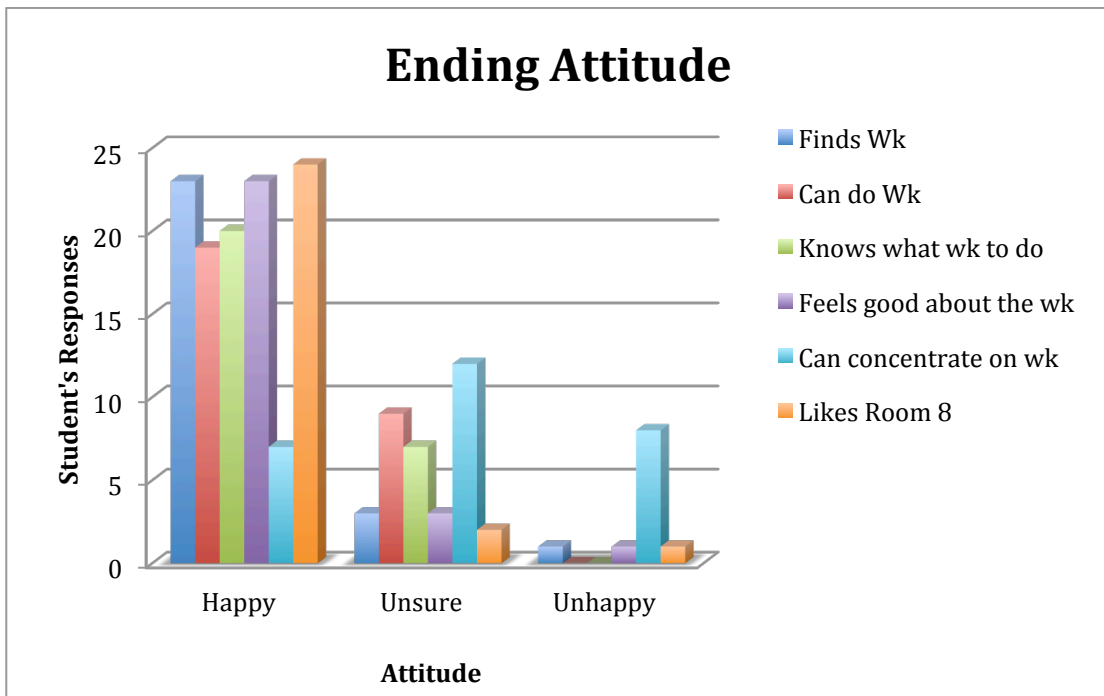*Figure 1*: Beginning Attitude

Figure 2: Ending Attitude

The second data I analyzed were the summative STAR test results. The data

was compared and gave information about each student's progress in reading and

reading comprehension (Table 1). The data shows that most students' reading levels did increase. However, the purpose of including the AR program in this research was to create more concentration in the class and thus create a more normalized classroom. Observation notes showed that during the official AR time, the classroom was silent, and most children were concentrating on their books or tests.

	STAR & AR Test Results		
Student	STAR 9/14	STAR 3/15	Change
DA	5.2	5.8	0.6
AAL	1.2	1.3	0.1
AAN	2.1	2.3	0.2
RA	1.3	1.6	0.3
DB	2.5	2.8	0.3
RBJ	1.3	2.1	0.8
BC	2.3	3.1	0.8
MC	5.7	6.1	0.4
KC	2.9	4.1	1.2
FC	1.1	1.4	0.3
HG	4.1	5.3	1.2
HS	4.1	5.4	1.3
TI	4.7	6.3	1.6
MK	3.2	2.5	-0.7
AK	1.4	2.1	0.7
SM	2.4	3.6	1.2
GM	2.3	3.7	1.4
AM	3.8	4.0	0.2
OP	1.3	1.3	0.0
MQ	1.0	1.4	0.4
SR	1.2	2.5	1.3
IS	2.3	2.4	0.1
KS	1.3	1.2	-0.1
JS	5.2	5.4	0.2
TS	1.2	1.2	0.0
ST	3.0	3.5	0.5
CZ	2.8	3.2	0.4

Table 1: Results of STAR and AR Tests

The research shows that the AR program can create increased reading levels and concentration in the classroom at times. However, at this school, there was an outside element that changed the sanctuary of the quiet reading time during AR. This element was a monthly AR party. If the students met their reading goals, they

attended the AR party. This well-intended incentive program created havoc in the

class. In this situation, the level of concentration and quiet was disturbed, and created

a buzz of noise as the AR party approached. For some, once they had attained their

goals, the reading stopped and the noise began. In this situation, the field notes

documented that the noise level went up and the concentration went down. Thus, the

normalized classroom was then lost to parties and prizes.

   The next data examined was the effectiveness of five different management

strategies. The data in Figures 3 (Positive Reinforcement) and 4 (Modeling Choosing

Work) show more effective management strategies. Teaching the children how to get

their activities and reinforcing their right choices appears to have helped the behavior

in the class overall. These charts have tally marks averaging 18 children per day or 72

children per week showing desired behaviors. For both of these strategies, there were

high tally marks for attentive group behavior. This result may be due to the students

wanting to do well in front of others. Group dynamics often sway behavior in one

way or another. Wanting to be the class clown or the 'good doer' often play out in the

group settings. The positive reinforcement gives attention to those doing well. Other

children quickly follow suit in order to be noticed for good behavior too. In addition,

knowing how to choose their work builds confidence in themselves and they get

positive feedback from others.
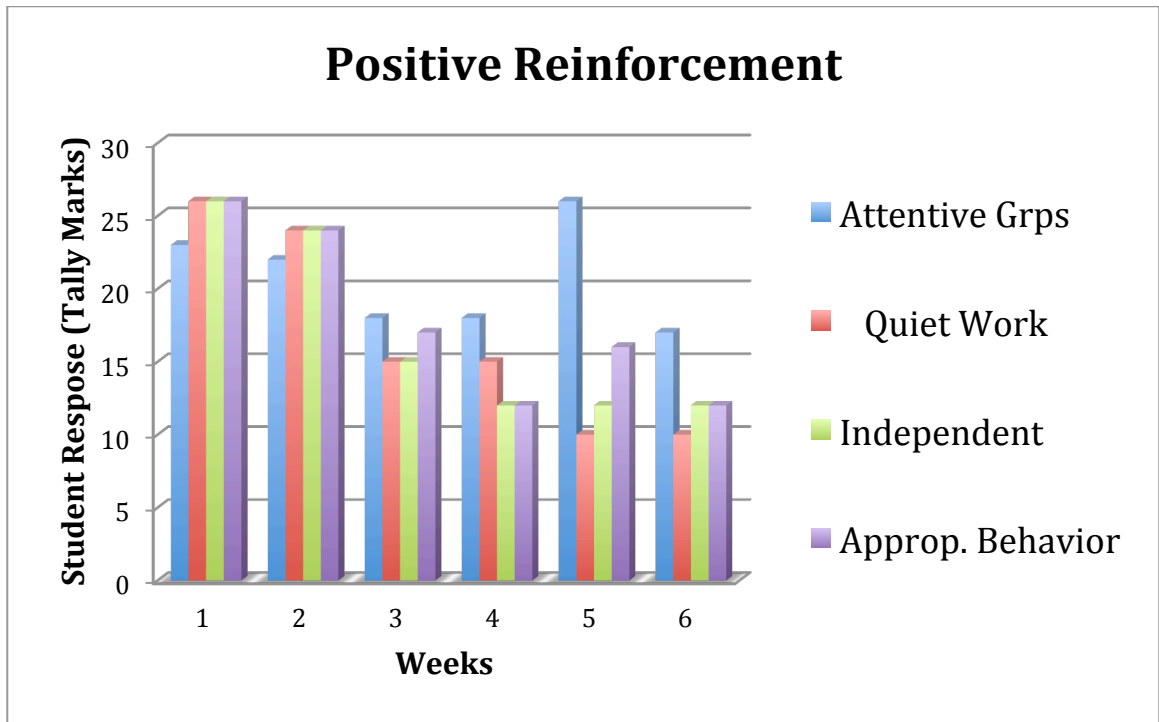
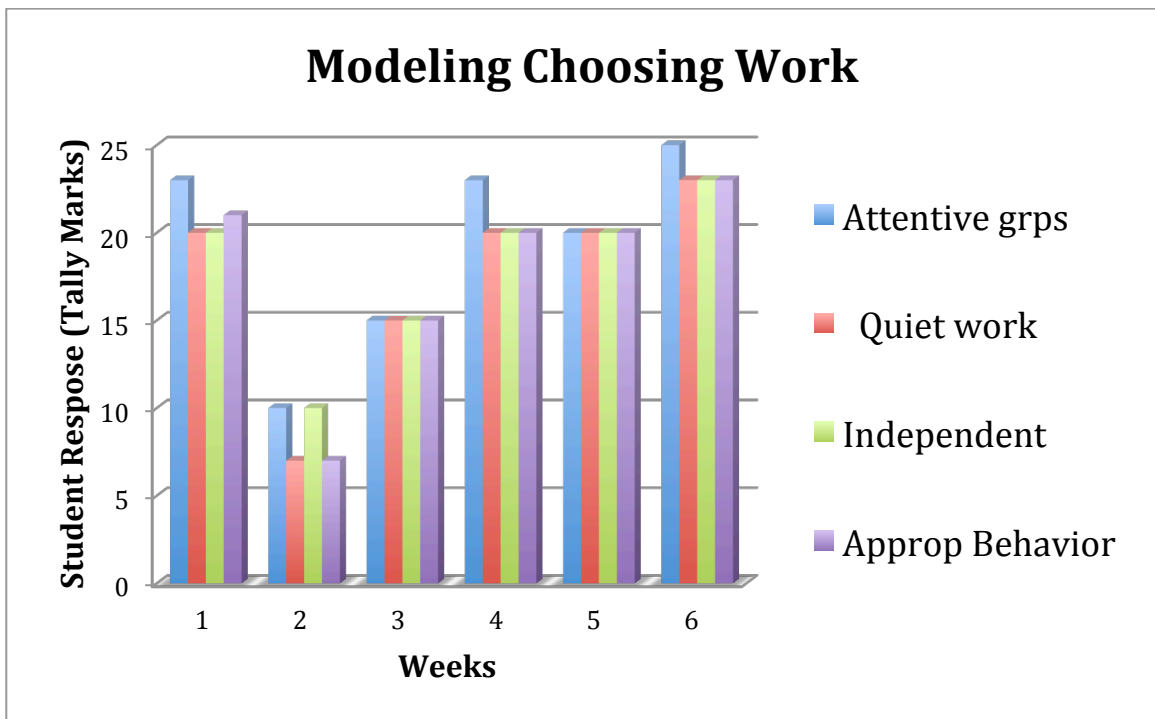*Figure 3*: Positive Reinforcement

Figure 4: Modeling Choosing Work

Redirecting children (Figure 5) and Demonstrating Materials (Figure 6) had a

marginal effect on the student's behavior. Overall, these strategies produced an

average of 16 children per day on task or 65.5 children on task per week. Both of

these methods had consistent distribution of positive behavior tallied. These strategies

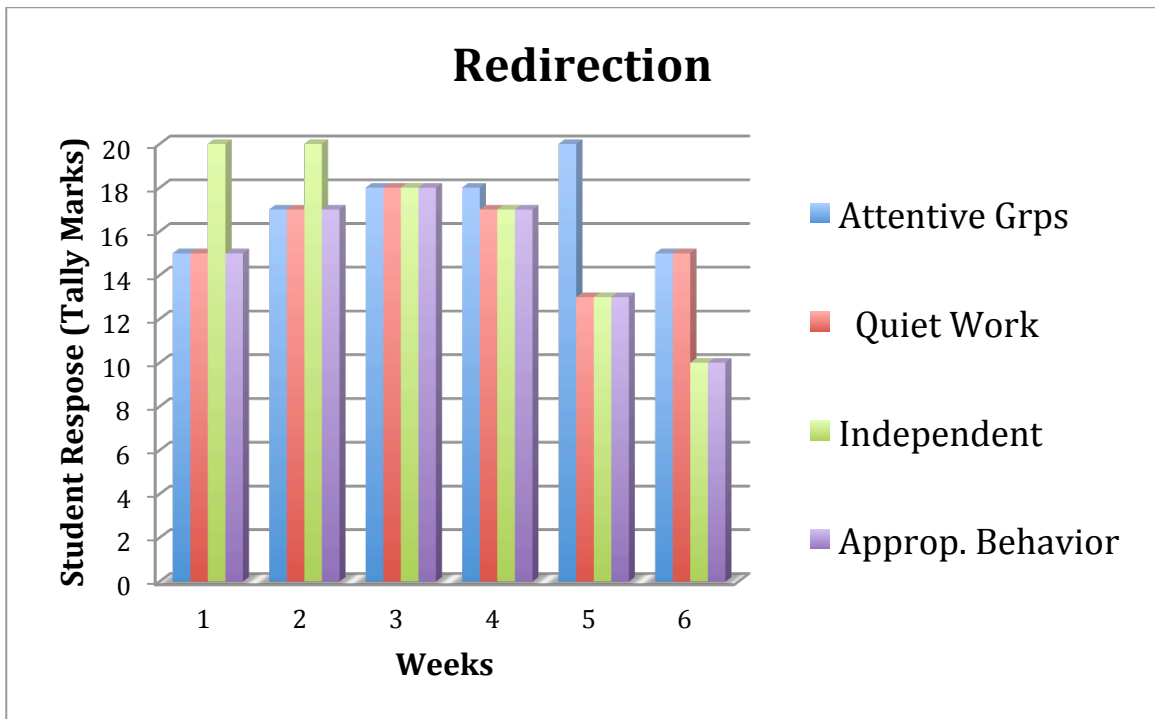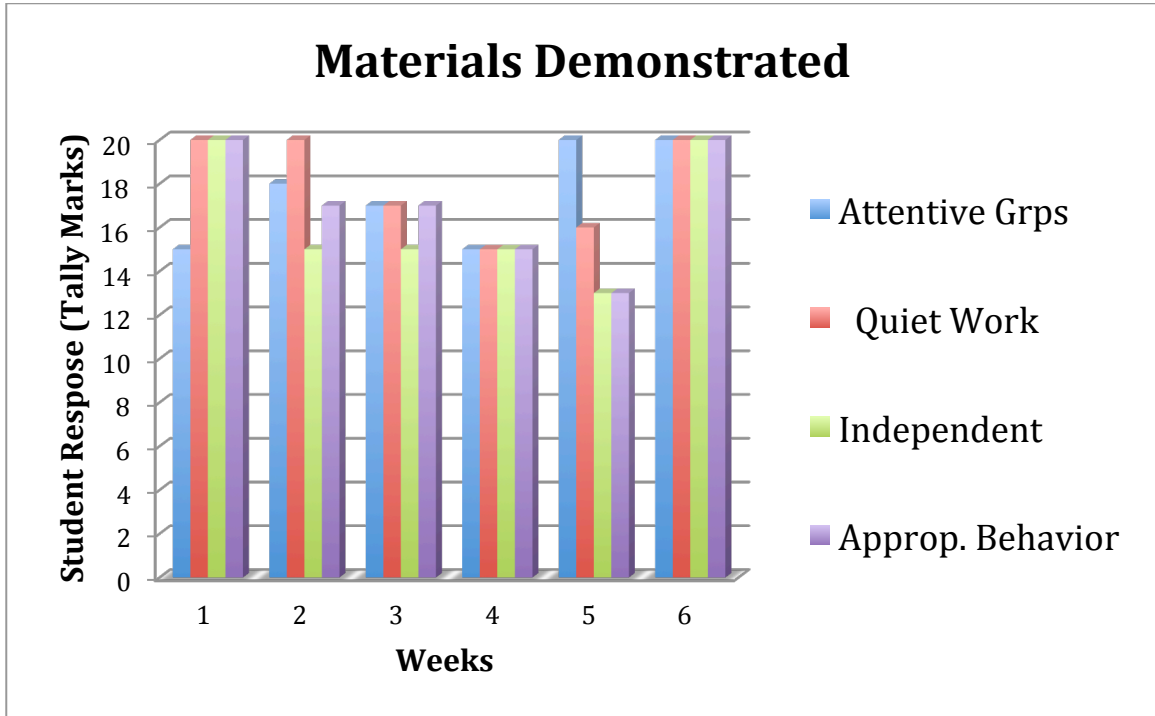could be marginally effect tools in creating a normalized classroom.

Figure 5: Redirecting Children

Figure 6: Materials Demonstrated

According to this data, the least effective management strategy was the helping the children with their work charts (Figure 7). Across all the desired behavior outcomes, helping the children with these charts produced the lowest scores. Only an average of 13 children per day or 52 children per week were on task using this management strategy. It is unclear why this produced such a weak response. The children were used to working with the charts daily. Perhaps the added focus on them was too much, laborious, or uninspiring. The work charts apparently did not produce the normalized classroom behavior that was desired in this research.
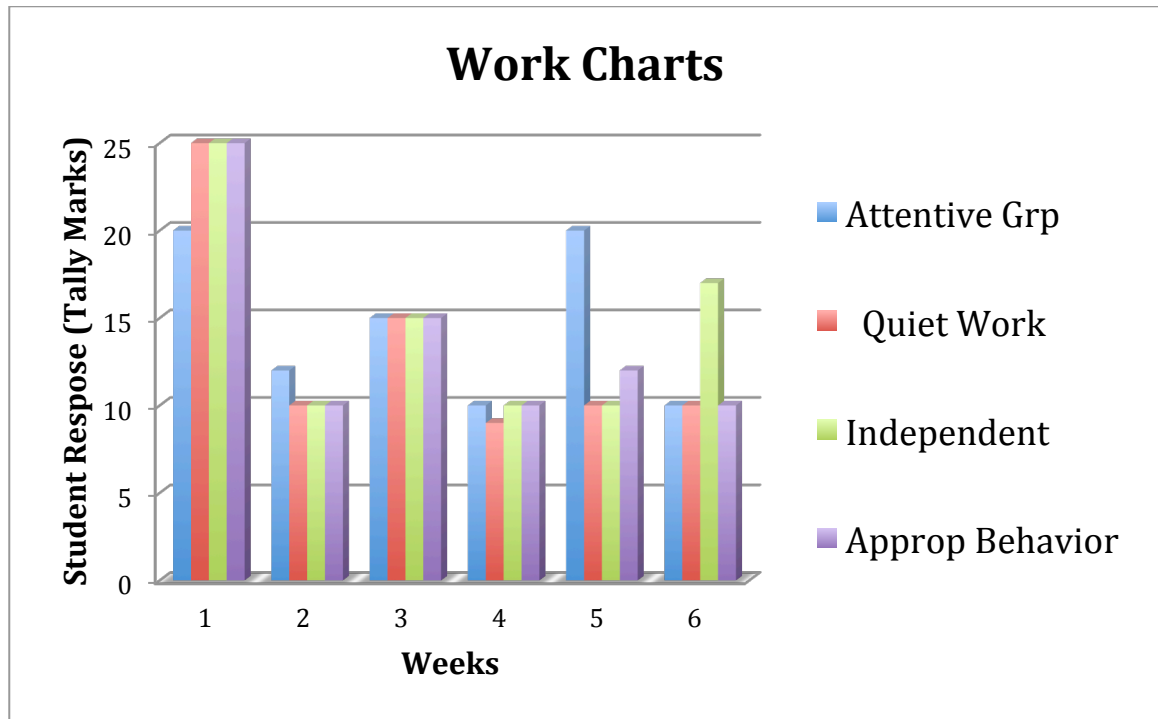
Figure 7: Work Charts

The last data to be examined was the semi-structured conversations with the students. To analyze this data, the students' responses about rituals and routines were coded. Themes noted in their responses were documented, grouped with similar comments, and quantified for the number of times the theme was mentioned.

The students answered the questions about classroom rituals and routines in their opinion. They responded to questions about the morning meeting, use of rugs, their classroom jobs, and birthday celebrations. Many of the student's responses were part of the Montessori philosophy such as waiting for others, taking turns, and working quietly. Many students knew what the materials, routines and the rituals were for and why we used them.

Most students also liked the morning meetings because they felt it was interesting and had informative information about the day ahead of them. The student's responses to the questions asking about the morning meeting are

documented in Figure 8. Very few children did not know why we did the meetings.

Eighty seven percent of the students responded that the meeting was to either

organize the day, present sharing items from home or in the news, or work on group

manners. It is clear from this data and from observation of the behavior at the

morning meeting that the students know how to act appropriately. From the field note

observations of the morning meetings, it was documented that the morning meeting

time was the most normalized part of the day for the class.
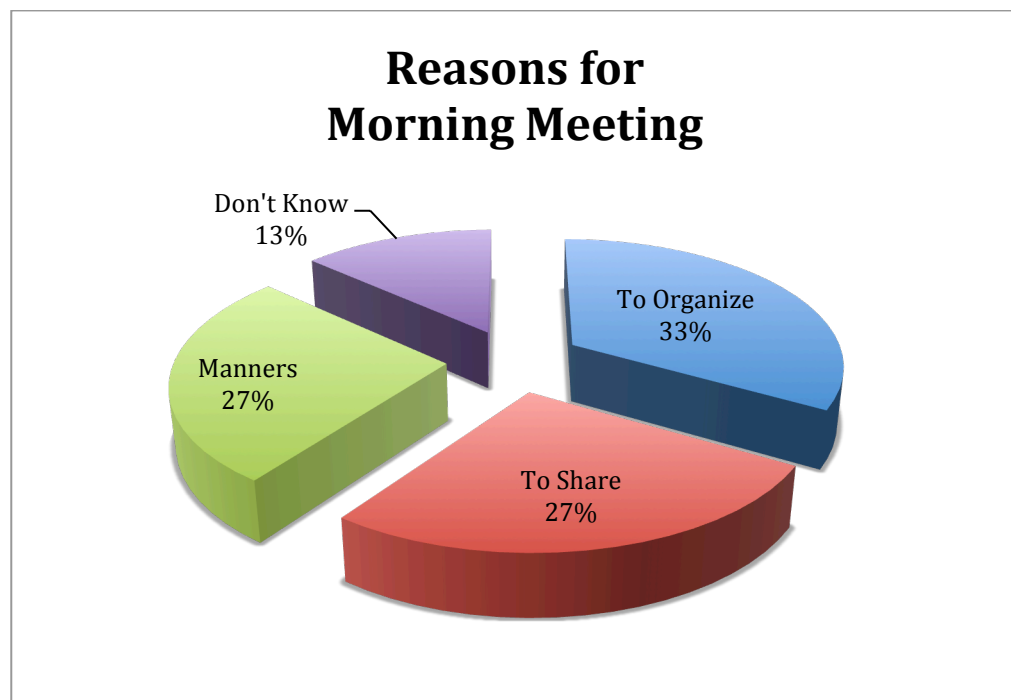
Figure 8: Reasons for Morning Meetings

The use of rugs for materials is a ritual done in Montessori classrooms. Much

of the work the children do is done on these rugs. The children's responses to the

rug's function, shows they thoroughly understood the rug's purpose. Figure 9 shows

their responses either indicated the rugs keep the materials clean and safe, mark the

spot where they are working or keep the work organized. A normalized class knows

the functions of the materials. This class clearly demonstrated they knew what the

rugs were for, and some students also mentioned in the conversation that the rugs were a necessity.
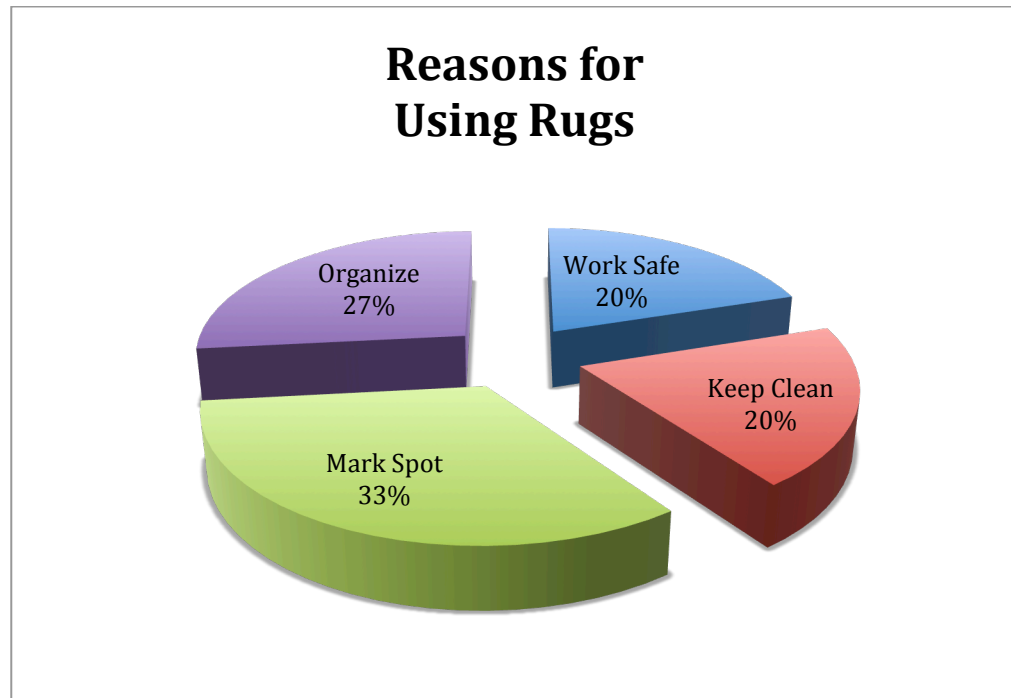
Reasons for Using Rugs

Organize 27%

Work Safe 20%

Keep Clean 20%

Mark Spot 33%

Figure 9: Reasons for Rugs

The last part of the interview asked the children about the birthday celebrations we do in our classroom. It was noted that this subject brought much excitement in their voices. In a Montessori classroom, the birthdays are celebrated in a different way than a typical birthday party. There is a link between history, the passing of time, the events that occur in our universe and gaining one more year in age. In Montessori, this is part of the cosmic education. The celebration is much more of a ceremony. It is filled with traditions and rituals such as the child holding the model of the earth and walking around the sun candle to represent the length of time it took the earth to orbit the sun in this child's year of growth. From the responses, it was clear the students understood the reasons for the sun, the model of the earth, and listening to their classmate's history.

Figure 10 documented 44% of the class felt the best part of these birthday celebrations was learning about their classmate's history. To these children, the history was an important aspect of the celebrations because, as a student said, "They are our friends and we should know where they came from and their history." Others felt the best part was orbiting around the sun. They likened this action to the galactic occurrence that happens every year (which is why it is done in this ceremony). Very few children didn't know why we did a birthday celebration this way. A larger portion of the students saw and appreciated the historical importance and momentous events that happened and were represented in this celebration.
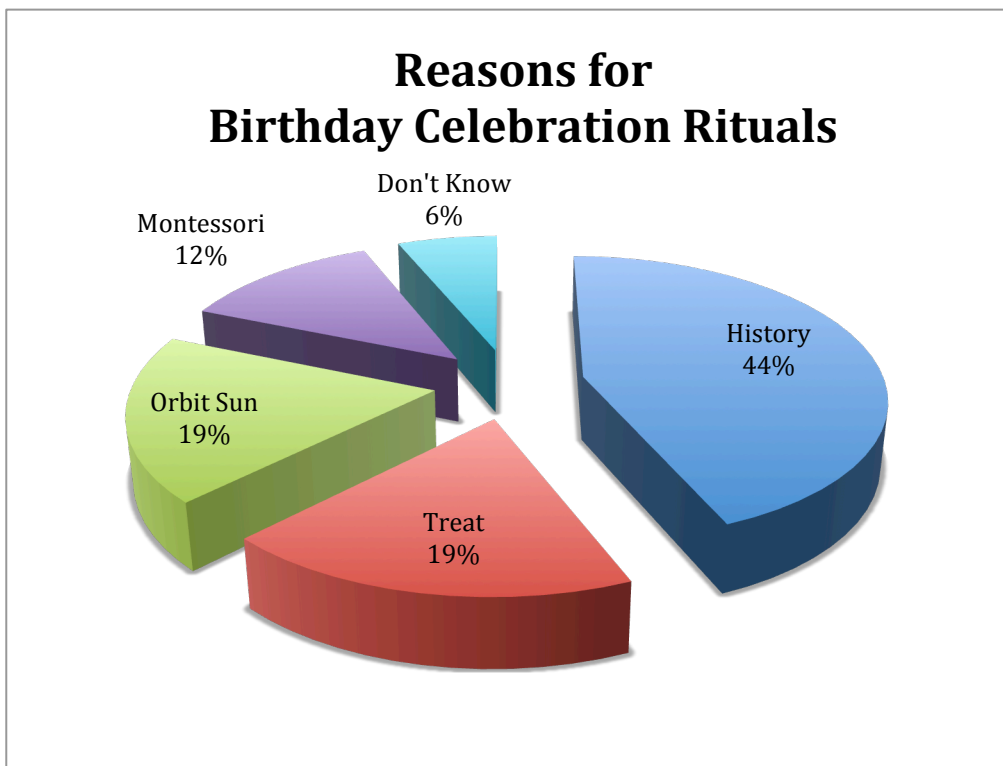
Figure10: Reasons for Birthday Celebration Rituals

Action Plan

My research demonstrated a marginally positive effect on elements that are essential to creating a normalized classroom. Most of the students enjoyed being in the classroom and were capable of finding the activities they needed. Positive reinforcement of their efforts also helped to create a feeling of contentment in the classroom. The AR program contributed to the improvement of their reading scores and created moments of quiet concentration. However, achieving overall deep concentration throughout the day, one of the essential elements of a normalized classroom, remained elusive. The noise level in the room was too loud to allow most students to concentrate. Therefore, after doing the research and analyzing the data, it appears that the interventions have created little change. However, there are three other elements that may have affected the outcomes of this research.

One element is that this intervention started in January, many months after this classroom had begun in September. Some changes had already begun before this intervention started. The results of this study may have been more impressive if the intervention had started in September. When the intervention started, the children had already begun to transform.

Though normalization was not completely achieved over the course of this study, results suggest that the community is on its way toward becoming a normalized classroom. The morning meetings are entirely run by the children and do so with very few adult reminders. The semi-structured conversations with students showed that most children understand the need and reasons for the rituals and routines. They are following these practices, have taken ownership of the classroom, and will continue to want to model the correct behavior.

The second finding was that most of students in this class have not had a normalized classroom environment to model. Many of the students were new to Montessori. Others had endured the growing pains of a new Montessori program in a traditional school environment. For those students with Montessori experience at this school, they have seen many changes to the program. Some of the changes were successful, and some were detrimental to the class. There has also been much instability in the teaching staff for this program and the class configuration. Though these current interventions did not produce excellent results, there has been improvement for this class. There are routines they follow, they do respond to instruction, they know what they need to work on, and they enjoy coming to school. The students know that next year will be the same program, and I have observed more calmness in the class now. Stability and predictability are important for children to feel secure and comfortable. Vitto (2003) says, "Classroom environments where there is a high degree of…inconsistency hurt the development of trust, security and respect…Students need the appropriate consistency" (p. 11). Once the students feel confident about the program, they can begin to relax and dive deep into their work and concentrate. A normalized classroom may happen next year.

The last realization seen from the results of this intervention was how important the school climate is to any program in the school and a classroom. This school considered the AR program a top priority. However, the AR parties cause distractions for the children. This intervention was geared at creating a sanctuary from all the other distractions of the campus, and create opportunities for the children to concentrate and focus. The AR program did help with the student's reading

development, but the incentive of the party when they reached their goals was more

distracting than helpful. Having these extraneous incentives alters the purpose of the

AR program. The parties create competition and too much focus on the party rather

than learning to read for enjoyment. The students cycle through the books so quickly

in order to do the comprehension test and get to the party, that a peaceful reading

sanctuary is almost impossible. Knowing these parties will continue will require some

restructuring of how AR time is spent in the classroom. Perhaps requesting that our

class opt out of the party element of the AR program and suggesting we handle a low-

key celebration in our classroom, or requesting that the party be only for recognition,

rather than prizes as well, might curb the extraneous distractions.

At this school there are multiple incentive programs running at the same time.

These children are used to being cheered along and receiving something for what they

do at school. There is a strong need for outside acknowledgement of their efforts.

Positive reinforcement is an acknowledgement of their effort that does not involve

receiving objects. However, it is still coming for an outside source rather than from

within themselves. Therefore, it seems fitting that the management strategy of

positive reinforcement would prove to be the most effective for this group. The

student's positive response to this reinforcement showed they appreciated the outside

accolades. This strategy will continue to be utilized in the class. In addition, teaching

the children to self-motivate and be happy with their work because they like it will

also be reinforced. For example, if the student asks if I like their work, I can turn the

question to them and ask what they like about their work. Teach them to analyze and

appreciate their efforts, and to be confident in their work.

Some of the management strategies did not produce a significant difference in the students' behaviors. The work charts and redirection from the teacher were strategies that required the students to self-monitor. The students need to learn to monitor their own behavior and choices rather than be told to do so by the teacher. Self-monitoring is an intrinsic skills that this class needs to practice more. So much of their school experience is extrinsic from AR parties, positive encouragement, and other incentive programs. Expecting the students to self-monitor will take time. However, it is an important skill to learn now for these student's futures so they can be successful wherever their lives take them. Though the work charts were found to be the least efficient modes of creating a normalized classroom, they are still crucial for teaching time management and self-monitoring. These charts help the student plan their day and week. When they use them properly the work charts are valuable tools for the students. For that reason, the work charts will still be used in the future. However, there may need to be more discussion with the students on the work charts use, helpfulness, and their importance.

In the future, as this school's Montessori program continues, it would be interesting to see if these interventions would have more positive outcomes with a more established classroom. Next year, as the students become more adept at managing their work, their time, and their environment, they may work and concentrate more deeply. This class of returning students will be the leaders of this class and will help lead the new set of first graders into the fold. The older, veteran children will be able to demonstrate the rituals and routines to the new members, giving the veterans a sense of ownership of the classroom. They will become the

guides. It will be interesting to see this group take the next step toward creating a

normalized classroom where students are working joyfully, choosing work freely, and

concentrating deeply.

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Appendix A

Attitude Scale Inquiry: What are your feelings about school? Circle the face that shows how you feel.

STATEMENTS			
I feel like I know where to get work in room 8.	🙂	😐	🙁
I know how to do the work in Room 8.	🙂	😐	🙁
I know what work I should do each day in Room 8.	🙂	😐	🙁
I feel good about the work I do in Room 8.	🙂	😐	🙁
I like school in Room 8!	🙂	😐	🙁

Appendix B

Name and Grade	Reading Level at start (STAR results)	Reading Level at End	+/- improvement
D. A. - 2nd			
A. Al. - 2nd			
A. An. - 2nd			
R - 1st			
D. B. - 3rd			
B. - 1st			
M. - 2nd			
K. - 2nd			
F. -1st			
H. - 2nd			
S. H. - 2nd			
T. - 2nd			
M. K. - 2nd			
R. B. - 1st			
A. - 1st			
S. - 1st			
G. - 1st			
A. - 3rd			
Opal - 2nd			
M. Q -1st			
S. R. - 2nd			
I. - 1st			
K. - 1st			
J. S. - 3rd			
T. S. - 1st			
S. T. - 2nd			
C. Z. - 3rd			

Appendix C

Observation of effectiveness of management strategies

This will be officially monitored for 10 minutes 2 times in the 3 hour work period everyday of the school week for the duration of this study. Each day one management strategy will be used/demonstrated and the effects of that strategy will be monitored.

Day/ Strategy	Attentive in Groups	Quiet Work Period	Working Independently	Modeling Appropriate Behavior
MONDAY				
Model choosing work				
TUESDAY				
Help w/ work charts				
WEDNESDAY				
Positive remarks				
THURSDAY				
Redirecting				
FRIDAY				
Demonstrate Materials				

Appendix D

Semi Structured Conversation:

Date: _____ Student:_____ Grade: _____

1. In the mornings in our classroom, we do Morning Meeting. Do you like the meetings? ____ yes ____no

      Why or why not?

2. Why do you think we do the meetings?

3. Do you remember me showing you how we use the rugs? ____yes ____no
      Why do we use those rugs?

4. What is your job this week?
      Do you like your job?
      What job do you most like?
      Have you done that job yet?
      Why do we have jobs in our classroom?

5. What do you think of our birthday celebrations?
      What do you like most about them?
      What do you like least about them?
      Why do we do the celebrations this way?

6. What is the purpose of waiting for everyone before we eat?

7. Why do we have to clean up after ourselves?

8. Look at these pictures. (I will need pictures for this part)
What is happening here?
      A. Rolling rugs
      B. Sitting at group: listening and sitting properly
      C. Cleaning up their work area
      When do you do these things?

9. What do you think of these things (the routines and rituals shown in the pictures) we do in Room 8?