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Increasing student participation and motivation in a whole new way

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**Increasing
Student Participation
And Motivation
In a Whole New Way**

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CAPSTONE

Dr. Scott Waltz

Fall 2009

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BACKSTORY:

How can we increase student participation in the classroom? This is something I have thought about throughout my entire school career, from my own experience as a student, to working in classrooms for Service Learning, and also at the school in which I work. What do most people see? The teacher asks a question, but only a few students raise their hand and almost always it is the same students who try to answer the question. When the teacher tries to ask a student that has not raised his or her hand, the student will get shy and shake their head no, showing the teacher he or she does not really want to answer the question. The student might also turn red in the face, and try to avoid eye contact with the teacher.

If educators could find new ways for students to participate, students might be more willing to raise his or her hand to ask a question, or answer a question given to them by the teacher. I started thinking about how educators could increase student participation in the classroom without embarrassment of the student. I had a great experience last semester, in which the professor had a way to increase classroom participation. He used a new piece of technology called a 'clicker'. Each student purchased a 'clicker' on which we, the students, would answer our questions. He had technology on his computer that would register all the answers of the students. To begin the process he would give a multiple-choice question. Followed by a set of four or five answers given as choices, we, the students, in return would select our choice on the clicker. He would share with the class the results in a bar graph format, so the class could see the percentages of how everyone answered. He would follow up by asking questions if needed, but if the majority of the class was correct, he would continue on with his lesson. If he had to ask questions he knew that students might be confused and need a better understanding of that particular concept, but

without questioning, he understood that the students did not need to review and could continue.

I felt this was a great way to increase participation, but also in a way that would not embarrass the student if they got the wrong answer. I started thinking about how we could increase participation. I knew that all schools cannot invest in the clicker, but there had to be a way teachers could try and increase the students' participation. I thought about how students ask or answer questions in the classroom. I knew that I wanted the new way to be fun and exciting. I started thinking and the idea I developed is described in the Project Description section.

NATURE OF THE PROBLEM:

Students who are shy have a harder time participating in the classroom because they do not want to ask a question in front of the entire class. They would rather talk with the teacher privately to ask their question, but some do not even ask the teacher privately. This causes the student to fall behind in their studies. The teacher does not know they are confused or does not understand a concept until test time arrives.

Sometimes students are shy and do not feel a connection with the teacher, but the student and teacher should have some sort of connection so the student will be able to do well in the class. In Christi and David Bergin's (2009) article they discuss how students need to have some sort of attachment not only to the students' parents, but to the teacher as well. They have the belief that if students have an attachment to the teacher the students will do better in the classroom, but also feel that they can express themselves more in class. The students who do not have an attachment to either the teacher or parents seem to not do as well in the classroom. This causes the student to fall behind and not have much interest in their studies.

Teachers and students must also have a good teacher/student relationship with one another. If the student and teacher cannot work well together, it can cause the student to have a harder time at succeeding. This is what Kathleen Rudasill and Sara Rimm-Kaufmann (2009) discuss in their article. They talk about how that if students feel comfortable in the classroom they are more likely to talk and ask questions, but if students are shy the student will be less likely to talk in class. The authors discuss in more detail of how if students are shy they will not want to talk with the teacher or ask questions in front of the class. If the student has a relationship with the teacher they are more likely to talk with the teacher and ask questions.

Educators have thought of several ways that can help students increase participation and retention of information. Author, Avinash Mainkar's (2008) discusses one way in her article. She discusses several ways that she believes will help students become more active in the classroom. When students are able to discuss information the students are more likely to remember what it is they have learned, whereas the students who do not participate in discussions will not remember as well. Students cannot be graded completely on participation because there is a wide range of the participation levels in the classroom. There are several reasons why students may not talk in the classroom. The students could be shy, but also it could be their cultural upbringing that encourages the children not to speak, unless the child has been spoken to.

In Ellen Skinner and Michael Belmont's (1993) article they wanted to get students motivated in their classroom. Skinner and Belmont discuss how educators can spot the students who are and who are not motivated. One thing that Skinner and Belmont noticed that as students got older their motivation in the classroom decreases.

Overall, most of the problems students face is that they do not have the attachment or feel comfortable with their teacher causing the students to be shy and not want to speak with the teacher or aloud in front of the class. We, as future educators, should try and start our school years off with trying to make our students feel comfortable so that the students will be more willing to speak aloud in class, as well as speak with the teacher privately. When having that student-teacher relationship we will know that our students will feel more comfortable asking, rather than just being another quiet student.

OTHER INTERVENTIONS:

There are several ways that show how educators can increase student participation and motivation. One of the ways is Judith Arter's (2000) method of using different scoring methods. By using the different scoring methods, scoring guides shows a number of ways to see the results of what students have done and how they have improved or not improved. An example of a scoring method Judith Arter uses is that of rubrics. She has the belief that rubrics help teachers decide how well a student has learned a new concept. Teachers are able to see how well students are learning something just by using this type of score guide. It can help increase awareness. If the student does not understand it the first time, the teacher will then know what is needed to help increase the students motivational needs for the next time.

Another way I found that can increase students' participation is to get them actively involved in their learning. This is what Alaska University of Anchorage (1989) has done by getting students involved in a program titled *Instructional Television ITV*). The Instructional Television program helps the student by watching a program on TV. The program then allows the students to think and learn in a new and different way. The teacher follows up with questions or activities that will get the student actively involved in a classroom discussion. By having active discussions it is showing that the student is increasing their participation.

Lastly, a program that helps students outside the classroom is that of the Out-of-School Time program discussed by Beckett et al. (2009). The author focuses a chapter on how if a student does not learn the information during class time, the student can come to the Out-of-School program and there will be individuals to help them learn the concepts about which they might still be confused. When students do

not learn the concept in class, and are still afraid to ask the teacher, they need to take advantage of the after-school programs like the Out-of-School program. These programs can help students get the extra help they need, and in a setting where it is more of a one-on-one experience for the student. By having the one-on-one experiences it will help students who are trying to learn and feel more comfortable asking questions. Hopefully, by helping these students feel comfortable asking questions in the smaller setting it will eventually allow them to feel comfortable asking questions in their classroom in front of others.

There are several different ways to increase participation, such as Judith Arter's (2000) different grading methods. By having the different grading methods, teachers can see where students are confused on concepts and how the teacher can help them become better students. When trying to increase student discussions within the classroom one great way is that of the "Instructional Television" programs. The program will help the students get involved by discussing what they saw on the TV. If students are still shy, and want that one-on-one time with a tutor they can always take part in an after school program, like the one talked about in Beckett et al. (2009) article. Three completely different programs, but all programs that are trying to help increase students participation and motivation inside the classroom.

COMMUNITY PARTNER:

For my community partner, I chose to work in the fourth grade classroom of Georgia Ferreira at San Carlos School in Monterey, California.

After observing the students' participation, I decided to develop a way that could help increase the student participation in the classroom. By increasing the student participation it not only would help improve the confidence in students, but would also allow students to work hard and understand what teachers are teaching.

Students seem to show an interest in learning, but not always by having to ask questions aloud in class. Several students would prefer to ask privately or not ask at all. By increasing participation, students will better understand what it is the teacher wants them to learn and will also help boost their confidence by asking questions in front of the class.

I began with a discussion about my project proposal with the principal, Teresa Bennett, at San Carlos School in Monterey, California, who recommended that I work in the fourth grade classroom. I set up an appointment with Georgia Ferreira, the fourth grade teacher, to discuss my project about student participation in the classroom. She told me that when she teaches during the day, she does not always get complete student participation. She would teach the lesson and ask if the students had any questions; some do, and some do not. Then she would continue on with teaching. When test day arrived she would test the students, and as she began to grade the students tests, she noticed that several had questions wrong that she had discussed earlier within the class, but no one asked any questions. She then had to discuss these problems with some of the parents.

I told her about by my idea of how I would like to try and help increase student participation by using the STOP / OKAY sign method. She thought this would

surely help encourage students to participate in class, as well as increase students desire to ask questions if they were confused on something. Then I began the implementation of my project to see how and if it does increase participation in the classroom.

SIGNIFICANCE:

Classrooms of students are taught new lessons each and every day. Students do not always understand what the teacher has taught them. Some students will be brave enough to ask questions, but the majority of students will sit back and not ask any questions at all.

Students who are trying to increase their student participation should realize that when they ask a question it not only helps them understand what they are learning, but it also could help someone else who may have the same question. By asking questions, it also lets teachers know that students are interested in what the teacher is teaching, but it also lets the teacher know that the student might not understand a concept.

By increasing students' academic achievements, we, the educators, can share what accomplishments students might have with the students' parents. This will allow the parents to feel grateful and happy that their student is doing well in the classroom. If a student has their parent's approval the student will feel as though that they have made their parents proud. Most students want to make their parents proud.

Finally, by acknowledging a students participation in the classroom, it will improve that student's self-esteem and make the student feel important and boost their confidence. In return, by improving a student's confidence the student will be more likely to respond and ask questions in the classroom.

ASSESSMENT:

I will begin with an introductory interview with the teacher, followed by a survey for the students that will include the following questions:

- 1) **Do you raise your hand when you have a question, or are confused on something you are working on?**
- 2) **IF YES, and you could ask your question a different way, would you feel less nervous?**
- 3) **When someone asks a question, do you have the same question, but did not raise your hand to ask it?**
- 4) **What is your favorite subject?**
- 5) **What is your least favorite subject?**
- 6) **When you do not understand something, what do you do?**

This survey will allow me to start to get an understanding of how the students participate when the teacher asks a question, or if the students have a question.

Before I implement the STOP / OK signs into the classroom, I will first observe and see how many students raise their hands, ask questions, or answer questions the teacher may ask. I will continue with the observation of the body language students may have, whether it is the student asking the question or if the teacher asked the student the question. I will study the voice level of the students speaking. I will count and see how many students raise their hands and how many will wait for one-on-one question time to ask the teacher.

After the start of the STOP / OK signs in the classroom, I will observe if the number of students who raise their hands increases or decreases. I will also observe the students' voice levels when speaking. I will view how many use the STOP / OK

signs, and if they are used more or less on a one-on-one basis between the students and teacher.

I will conclude my assessment with an overall interview with the teacher to see what feedback she can give me. I will ask her if the STOP / OK signs increased student classroom participation. I will also interview a select few of the students to see how they felt about their own participation level and what the student enjoyed or did not enjoy about the project. Finally, I will give an overall post-survey to the students with the questions that follow:

- 1.) **Did you feel more comfortable using the STOP / OK sign to ask your question?**
- 2.) **Would you prefer to use the STOP / OK sign as a way to show the teacher you have a question?**
- 3.) **Would you prefer to keep it as something to use on your desk only?**
- 4.) **If you could use these STOP / OK signs for the rest of the school year would you like to do so?**
- 5.) **Are you feeling more comfortable asking your questions to your teacher now or before using the STOP / OK signs?**

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

I will be implementing a STOP / OK sign project in which each student will be given a sign to see if this will help increase student participation in the classroom.

How each of the STOP / OK signs work is as follows: The teacher will introduce and teach his or her lesson. She or he will then ask questions, and if the student has a question they will raise their hand. Once the teacher begins to walk around the room is when the STOP / OK signs will be used. If the student has a question they will place the STOP side of their stop sign on their desk, and this allows the teacher to see it and know that the student has a question. If the student has no questions they will keep the OK side up on their sign. By observing the students use of the signs or by raising their hands I will get an understanding of the participation levels in the classroom. This will help me determine whether the use of the signs in the classroom has helped increase the student participation of the students in the classroom.

RESULTS:

Before I began my project in the classroom I wanted to get an understanding of how many students have felt uncomfortable participating when a teacher asks a question. I decided not only to observe, but also to ask the students about their participation. I began with a survey asking the students if they raise their hand when they have a question. Overwhelmingly, twenty-three students out of a class of thirty-five said they seldom raise their hand. I asked them if they could ask a different way would they feel more comfortable. This answer was almost split down the middle with fifteen responding that they would want to ask a different way, fourteen felt they would not feel comfortable asking in a different way, and four said sometimes they might.

It was time for me to begin my observation of the students. The first day I observed they were working on Social Studies. The teacher began by telling her students that if they had a question to raise their hand. They were learning about the geography of California. Two spoke up right away, not raising their hands. The teacher reminded her students to raise their hands. One student raised her hand to ask, but before the teacher saw the student's hand she lowered it. For their lesson they were each reading a paragraph, and each student who was to read was called upon. This allowed me to observe the voice levels of the students when they were called upon. I observed a total of ten students read. Five students read aloud with confidence. One read loudly, but also read quickly. One read loudly, but his voice was muffled as he had his hand over his mouth. One was lost at the beginning, and had to have a classmate show him where they were at in the reading. After he completed his paragraph, he buried his head in his book. Embarrassed, he did not know where they were at in the beginning. Two students were very soft spoken as

they read their paragraphs. After the reading was complete the teacher allowed students to ask questions about what they had read, and a total of seven kids asked questions. I decided to create a project that would attempt to increase the participation levels of the students.

I made STOP / OK signs before I observed the students again. It was the first day the students would use the signs. I, as well as the teacher, explained what the use of the signs would be measuring. At first the students played with them, using them as a fan, but after another discussion about when to exactly use the sign, the students appeared to understand and placed them on their desk. At first when any of the students had a question they would raise the STOP side up to show the teacher they had a question. After the first day of using the signs, I asked a few students if they liked using the signs. I got an overwhelmingly answer of yes.

I went in for my third day of observation, but it was the second day of the students using the signs. They were about to begin a new lesson in math. The teacher started telling her students to take out their STOP / OK signs from their desks, but not everyone was paying attention. She told the students if they had questions to place their STOP sign up to show they had a question. A few students still raised their hand, rather than use their STOP sign, but fifteen students in total used their STOP sign to ask a question.

I ended my classroom observation with another survey to see if using the STOP / OK signs helped increase the students participation. I asked a similar question as in the first survey, asking the students if they felt more comfortable asking a question when they had their STOP / OK sign. The students had a significant difference in their answers from the first time. This response was thirty-two saying yes they felt more comfortable asking with the sign, and only three saying no they

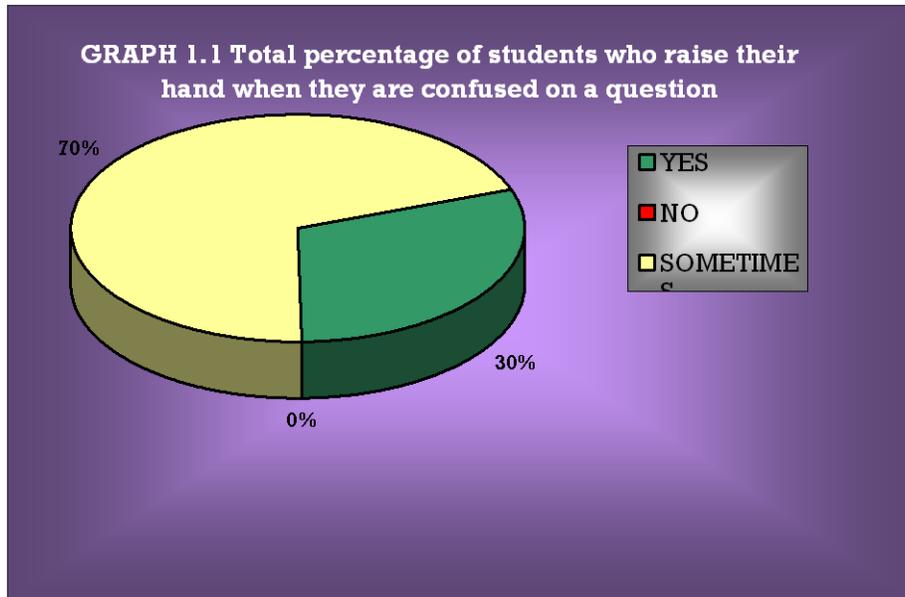
did not feel comfortable. I also asked if they would prefer using the STOP / OK signs to ask their teacher a question, and twenty-eight answered yes they would like to use the signs, and seven replied no they would not like to use the sign. I asked their preference of using the STOP / OK signs either to raise in the air or place on their desk. Sixteen said they would prefer to keep it on their desk, but nineteen did not want to keep it as a desk option only.

I interviewed the teacher and a few of the students about their thoughts on the use of the STOP / OK signs. The teacher felt that the students played with them at first, but after a few days and a few reminders they started to use them correctly. She also felt that it increased the participation of the students who asked questions at their own desks. She felt that instead of having sticks on the signs it would be better without them, because it might be less of a distraction for the students.

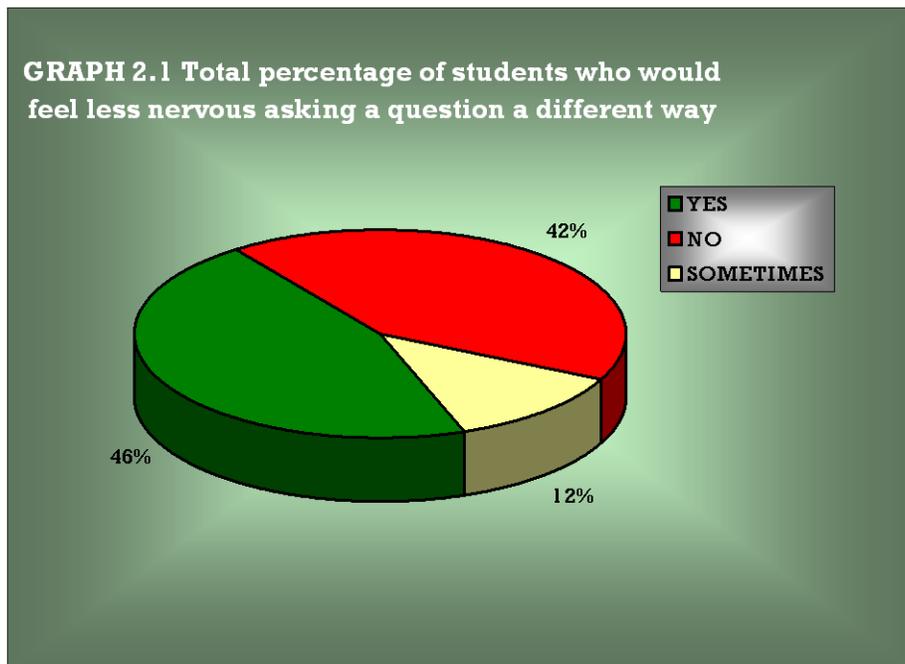
Finally, I interviewed six students to get their reactions about using the STOP / OK signs. One student I asked said, "I felt comfortable placing the signs on my desk when I had a question." I asked another student what I could change. She replied, "Change the Popsicle stick color and place our name on it along with the word question." I thought that the most comical answer I received from one of them was, "Change the color of the signs, change the okay to blue and the stop side of the sign to green, and also put Christmas stuff on the signs."

Overall, I believe that by using these STOP / OK signs it did help increase classroom participation because the students had a new way to ask the teacher a question without feeling embarrassed.

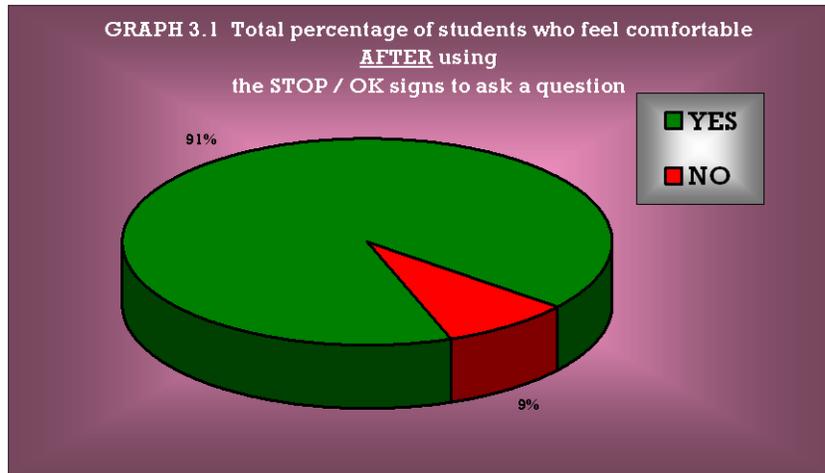
Graph 1.1 results based on question # 1 of pre-survey: *Do you raise your hand when you have a question, or are confused on something you are working on?*



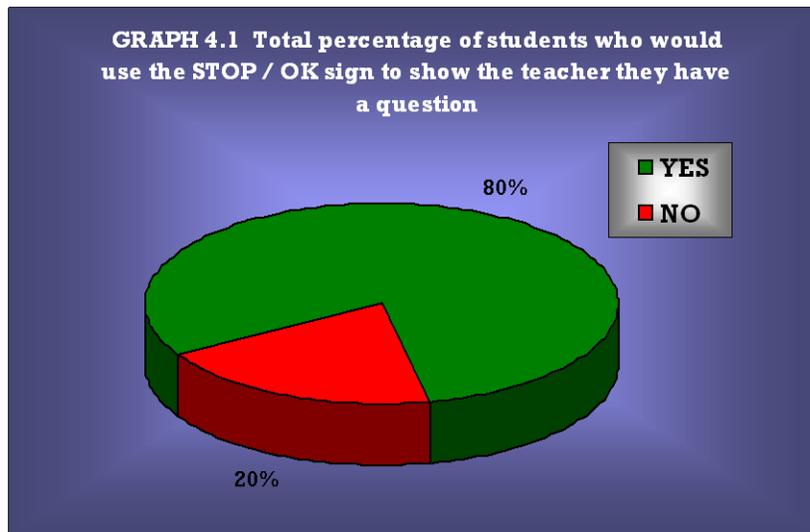
Graph 2.1 results based on question # 2 of pre-survey: *“If YES, and you could ask your question a different way would you feel less nervous?”*



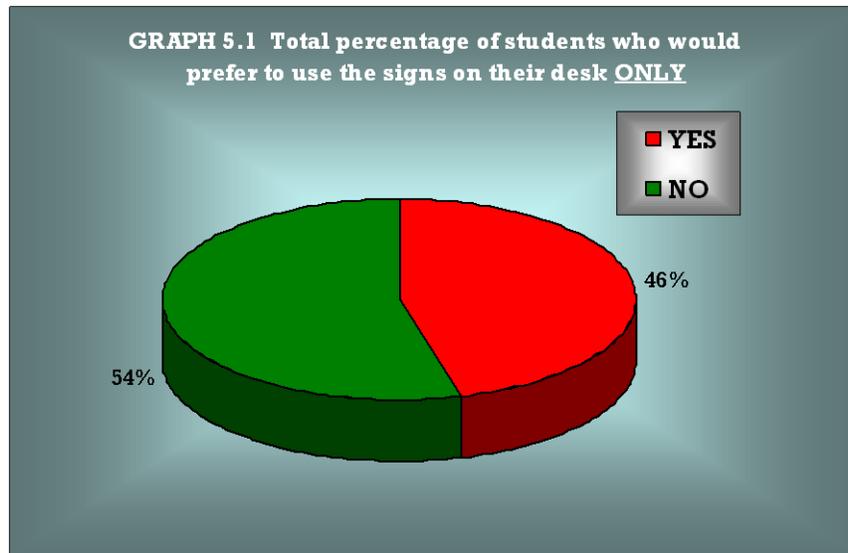
Graph 3.1 results based on question # 1 post-survey: *“Did you feel more comfortable using the STOP / OK sign to ask your questions?”*



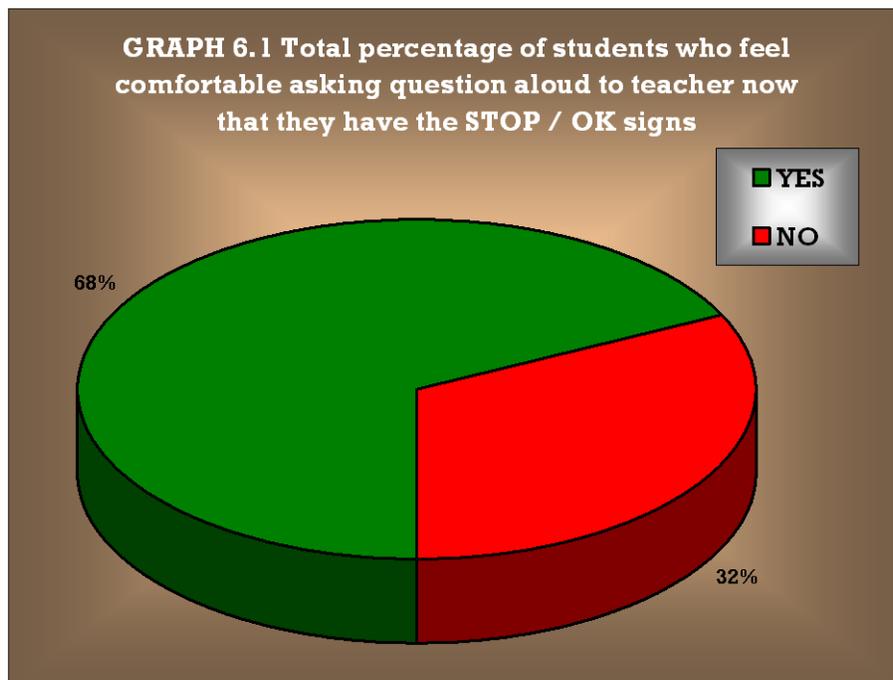
Graph 4.1 Based on question # 2 of post-survey: *Would you prefer to use the STOP / OK sign as a way to show the teacher you have a question?*



GRAPH 5.1 Based on question # 3 of post-survey: *Would you prefer to keep it as something to use on your desk only?*



GRAPH 6.1 Based on question # 5 of post-survey: *Are you feeling more comfortable asking your questions to your teacher now or before using the STOP / OK signs?*



MY ASSESSMENT:

I found my time working on this project in the classroom to be a positive and productive experience. Working with the fourth graders at San Carlos School in Monterey, California, was a time that I truly will never forget. When I discussed my project with the principal, Teresa Bennett, she felt that the fourth graders and their teacher, Georgia Ferreira, would be the best classroom in which to do my project. My first day in the classroom I felt very comfortable because most of the students I have worked with previously for a semester of Service Learning. At that time, the students were in first grade and now they are fourth graders. Georgia Ferreira welcomed me to her class and explained to her students that I would be working on a project with them, and they all were very excited and could not wait to get started.

I started my first day with an introduction of myself, why I was in their classroom, and how they were going to help me with my Capstone. On the first day I was only there to observe their participation levels and interactions with the teacher. I observed several students raising their hands, but also students did not raise their hands.

When it was time for the students to begin using the STOP / OK signs, I noticed that at first they wanted to play with them. I realized I probably should not place them on popsicle sticks, as it would then be less of a distraction. I did, however, start to see the students start to raise their signs to ask questions. I believed that by using them the students would feel more confidence when asking a question.

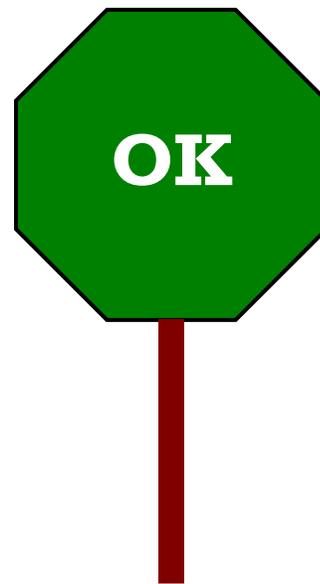
On my third day in the classroom, the teacher decided that when students had questions they would only use the STOP / OK signs on their desk to ask questions. If the students had differences in their participation, I thought, this would be the way to view the differences in the students participation levels. Students felt more

comfortable using their STOP sign on their desk only. Seven out of thirty-five students used their signs in a thirty-minute period. I observed that the students felt more at ease when they asked their questions on a one-on-one basis with the teacher. Also, by having the signs on their desk, students did not have to sit in their desk raising their hand waiting for the teacher to come answer their question. By using the sign the student was able to place the STOP side up and continue on working until the teacher arrived at their desk, asking the student what was their question.

I believe that if the teacher continues to use the signs throughout the rest of the school year her students' participation levels will increase more and the students will feel more confident when they need to ask a question. If students' participation levels increase then I believe students will continue to do better in school and increase their confidence levels, both inside and outside the classroom.

DELIVERABLES:

For my Capstone project I wanted to increase the student participation in the classroom. I was hoping to achieve this by implementing a STOP / OK sign project. The STOP / OK sign would be an octagonal shape, with one side red, the other side green. The red side would say STOP, the green side OK. The student would use these signs at their desk. Once the teacher had explained the lesson if a student had a question they would place their STOP side of the sign on their desk. If the student had no questions they would place the OK side up. The teacher would stop at the desk of the students who have STOP side up on their sign, and continue past the students with OK on their sign. These signs would help show a new and different way that students can try to increase their student participation in the classroom.



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