California State University, Monterey Bay

12-2021

# Being the Voice for the Voiceless

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LS 400-01_FALL21: Senior Capstone

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December 20, 2021

## Abstract

Many students are eager to step inside a classroom, but this eagerness and excitement can be difficult for shy students. The focus issue addressed in this Capstone Project is enhancing shy students' engagement in the classroom. This is an important issue for students because of the fear that arises when speaking in front of their peers, which can be detrimental to their education. The three stakeholder perspectives examined were a special education high school teacher, a second-grade teacher, and a library media technician. An evidence-based argument is offered that shy students are falling behind in classrooms due to their inability to ask for help. An effective way for shy students to be successful in their classroom is by providing them with extra support after school. After the interviews, three action options emerged from an analysis of the data and were explored as ways to address the issue presented. Creating after-school support is argued to be the most effective way to achieve the goals of enhancing shy students' engagement in the classroom.

*Keywords*: shyness in the classroom, enhancing engagement, educators

School can be a different experience for every student. Each student has different needs, which can result in a variety of learning styles. One example of a learning obstacle that students may face in the classroom is shyness, also known as fear of engagement. There can be multiple ways that students may display shyness. Fear of judgment may cause students to become withdrawn from the classroom which can lead to many obstacles.

Through most of my educational journey from Kindergarten, Elementary, Middle, High School, Junior College, and University, I was always that shy child and student. School was difficult for me because I often struggled with making friends due to my shyness. Oftentimes on the playground during recess, I would sit in the open grass field and find flowers to make flower crowns. This was usually how I would spend my recesses until other children on the playground approached me with curiosity, which ultimately led to friendships. Being shy I would find it the most difficult to make conversation with other children on the playground, so I would often wait for children to approach me first. Although I was fortunate enough to create friendships and make memories, if others would not have approached me first then I would have had a hard time making friends on my own. Being known as the shy "friend" came with many obstacles. For example, friends would make decisions for me or be told that I was weird because I barely spoke. Sometimes teachers would try to encourage me, but as I got older it was something that never went away. Growing up, I was always quiet, so this was not just a classroom concern. Being the youngest sibling, I became accustomed to others speaking for me that I never had a voice of my own. This began to change slowly as I continued through my educational journey and learned the importance of having a voice.

Since I spent most of my time by myself on the open grass field during recess, I felt alone. Being afraid to talk to other children kept me from making friends my own age and making connections with those around me. As I would sit quietly at my desk, I became aware of my surroundings. I would notice the "trouble makers" or the children being praised for knowing all the right answers, usually known as the "nerds". I often wondered where I belonged, I was not a "trouble maker" and I never knew all the right answers. Being shy, I felt judged in and out of the classroom. As I would sit quietly in class, I felt judgment because I rarely spoke or only spoke when spoken to. I would never raise my hand in class, but I was always chosen to answer a question that caused anxiety. The teacher would call on me and oftentimes I didn't know the answer because it took me longer to comprehend the material. When other students would cringe at the thought of group work, I felt that I was the only one filled with excitement because I did not have to choose my own partner. The friends I had were always in another class, so I was often left standing alone waiting patiently for someone to choose me as their partner. More times than not this would occur on the playground during Physical Education. The P.E. teacher would tell the class to choose partners, and I was often the odd one out.

During my years at Community College and at my four-year University I slowly began to discover myself as I had become independent. This dependence ultimately encouraged me to step out of my comfort zone and interact with the community around me. Being shy, one of the hardest things for me was asking for help, so I often felt hesitant and indecisive about many situations. For example, in elementary school, I was afraid that asking for help would cause my fellow classmates to judge me for my learning capabilities. As a student who needed extra help for math especially, I ultimately embraced these challenges and began to excel in school. Being

afraid to ask for help, it was clear that my learning capabilities were not being met. It caused me to fall behind in class because I rarely spoke up when I needed to. When I needed to complete my homework at home, it took me much longer. Thankfully I had the help of an older brother at home, who made sure I completed my work proficiently. As the years continued, I often relied on a tutor to help me. Having this one on one assistance helped me tremendously as a shy student because I felt comfortable having a routine. Once I found the help I needed, I thrived in the classroom because my confidence was finally being shown. By having a tutor, I finally realized that seeking help was nothing to be ashamed of. I had to self-advocate for myself and my educational adventure. Self-advocating was a huge step for me because I had been accustomed to being the shy student hidden in the back of the classroom. I never once raised my hand when I knew the answer to a question. Once I entered college, I was no longer afraid of asking for help. When I had a question, I would ask the professors directly or stay after class for further assistance on assignments. I finally built up the courage and confidence to advocate for myself because I knew that I would become that child falling behind once again. I gained more confidence in college because I knew I was responsible for my own education. My parents were no longer around to advocate for me, so I had to advocate for myself and my education. I finally gained the courage to ask for help. Once I asked for help I was introduced to several resources. I knew that I was responsible for myself so I had to be in control of my education and learn how to guide myself towards success.

## Literature Synthesis & Integration

There are numerous ways educators can help contribute to the lives of many students. Therefore understanding the obstacles that may arise for students as they begin learning in the

classroom is an essential first step. As obstacles arise for students, it is beneficial to their learning process to make a plan that explicitly influences their learning needs—for example, assisting shy students to ensure that they are getting the proper help and resources. Although shyness comes in multiple forms, understanding where shyness comes from within students is crucial when responding to different needs for students. While this can come in various forms, alternating tests to allow for more time, and understanding learning needs, or creating learning plans representing their learning routes can be essential for their schooling.

**What is the Issue?**

Students may face many obstacles in the classroom, and being shy can be one of those obstacles. It can be a problem because this can linger throughout their educational journey. Questions can arise when determining if a child is shy; it means something different for each student. While there is no official medical or psychological definition-- it is not a professional term that psychiatrists or psychologists use. The dictionary defines shyness as holding back in social situations, being reserved, being timid from a lack of social experience; technically, it is different from bashfulness, where you are easily embarrassed in front of others. Some students may show signs of not engaging in the classroom because of fear of judgment (Taibbi, 1995). Shyness has been conceptualized as wariness, fear, and discomfort in social situations. It is expressed in different areas: From the aspect of thought processes, shy individuals are characterized by strong self-awareness and self-attributions of social difficulties; the emotional area is characterized by a sense of stress and discomfort in social situations; the physiological area is expressed in an accelerated heartbeat, muscle tension, and additional reactions that indicate that the body perceives the social situation as stressful, and the behavioral area comes

into expression in restraint and reticence (Korem, 2018). While others may show signs of shyness by performing poorly on exams, regardless of the reasons, it is crucial to determine the root of the problem and find ways to help students overcome the adversity. Since friendships are socially and emotionally supportive, good friendships may influence and even benefit social‑cognitive processes such as perspective‑taking and social skills related to social competence (Burgess, et al., 2006).

It can also become a problem because shy students may need a variety of suggestions that can help support their success. Therefore educators must accommodate their teaching strategies for each student and their different learning approaches. The socially attentive child who may attempt to interact with peers resulting in a lack of success may become increasingly anxious and develop negative thoughts and feelings about the self (Burgess, et al., 2006). For example, students who are visual, hand-on learners, or those who are shy and may take more time adapting to a new learning environment. Taibbi (2005) mentions that shy students may also endure various obstacles within their school setting. He continues to say that shyness is just a person's character and does not have to define who a person is. Those who would like to overcome shyness can work around it by working on things they do well and gaining the support of friends (Taibbi, 1995). Shy students may gravitate towards one specific individual who may also suffer from psychosocial challenges because they may have a better understanding of each other and may feel most comfortable with this person. It may feel that they may try to make themselves invisible in the classroom as they act quietly. They may feel anxious, which ultimately leads them to avoid making any mistakes, and they may look for stability as the dependence on adults may be required for them to flourish in the classroom (Mjelve, et al, 2019). Therefore providing

students with guidance and support may help lead them in the right direction where they feel

confident in their abilities.

**Why is it an Issue?**

There is an issue between shy students within the classroom because there may be several

factors that may contribute to this issue, for example, studies have shown social withdrawal in

childhood and adolescence is associated with negative self‑perceptions of social competence and

relationships, peer rejection, loneliness, and depressive symptoms (Burgess, et al., 2006). In early

childhood, socially withdrawn children are less able to understand the perspectives of those

around them. They are more likely than their more sociable age‑mates to suggest that they would

ask an adult for help or would be entirely unassertive when confronted with hypothetical social

dilemmas involving peers (Burgess, et al., 2006). We can suggest that academic engagement

pertains to the interactions between the students and their educational environment (Hughes &

Coplan, 2010). Therefore, this may become a misunderstanding between the students and

teachers because they may come to the conclusion that their students may not be comprehending

the material when the truth is the student is too shy to voice their responses. For some students, it

may be the first time they are entering an educational environment, so the feeling of

apprehensiveness and uncertainty should be taken into consideration. It may also be expected for

teachers to notice the students who tend to gravitate towards the back of the classroom and sit in

silence throughout the school year. Shyness may be negatively linked to teacher-rated

achievement but not related to standardized test scores. Academic engagement was significantly

and negatively related to shyness and positively related to all measures of achievement (Korem,

2018). There may be an urgency to call on this student because this may be the only way to receive their comments and opinions. Although, this may make the student feel uncomfortable and may lead an educator to doubt if this method is achieving classroom engagement within their students (Redekopp & Bourbonniere, 2009). Another issue is that some students may be more reserved when sharing their thoughts due to the fear of being judged by their fellow peers. Unfortunately, it is impossible to understand or control the views that others may have towards us. Therefore, it is essential to realize that everyone may judge in different ways and in various forms. It is important to discard any fear of judgment and become courageous moving forward to understand that we cannot prevent or avoid judgment for others (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2019).

Childhood shyness and associated psychosocial difficulties can place students at risk of underperforming cognitively. Yet shyness is not regarded as a particular need demanding a response from education professionals (Solberg, Edwards, Mjelve & Nyborg, 2020). The effects of shyness in the classroom may result in the risks of socio-emotional struggles, difficulties developing relationships within peers, and academic problems. For example, shy students may have academic problems because they may feel apprehensive about asking for help. It is beneficial to incorporate whole-school approaches to individual needs, such as intellectual, social or emotional, which may benefit students in the classroom. Therefore, practicing leadership skills in school is important as it may play a great role in establishing systems and practices which are inclusive to all students. As a result, this method may encourage the school staff, as they may be able to witness the achievements of bringing awareness to their students (Solberg, Edwards, Mjelve & Nyborg, 2020).

**What Should be Done?**

Each student has different learning styles, which can help support their academic needs and contribute to their success. Therefore, when assisting a student to achieve the requirements in order to encourage more interaction within the classroom, it is important to understand the different approaches that can help encourage engagement (Brodkin, 2004). By establishing trust within the students, it can be easier to find the right solution. Understanding his or her identity can help improve their interactions in the classroom between the students and educators. Attending school can be a frightening experience for many students. It can take time to adjust to new surroundings and community. Thus, it is crucial to let the parents know that their child's feelings about starting school are completely understandable. When possible, praising or complimenting the students can encourage them to open up and engage more freely when the communication is there. By building trust within communication in the classroom, students may feel comfortable and extend an invitation to their homes. For example, it could include the class as a whole by taking them on a field trip to a student's home who may live on a farm. It would allow the student to act as a tour guide and support his confidence by bringing both his worlds together, his world at home and his world at school (Brodkin, 2004). Providing guidance for these students may help them in their educational journeys and contribute to their growth as they become adults.

When students become withdrawn from the classroom, there is a higher possibility that their shyness can affect their test performance. This influence is more significant on shy students when tested face-to-face rather than in a more anonymous group setting. It is recommended to

divide the classwork into stages, for example: (a) a personal written assignment, (b) sharing the outcome in pairs, and (c) work in small groups, to allow shy pupils to express themselves. Educators can incorporate at school a complete plan that includes cognitive behavior modification. The effective way is to structure hierarchies of fear-arousing situations with shy students and to allow them to experience gradual exposure to various social situations (Korem, 2018). For some students, in order to help their test performance, we can offer a few options when it comes to test-taking. For example, the test can be given individually, face to face, and in a quiet room. These tests can also be given orally, and the students are advised to respond orally. Each testing session would last approximately 40 minutes and the order of tests alternated with each student. As for vocabulary, these tests can be given orally, and the students can respond in writing. While there are differences between each version of the tests offered, it is possible finding support that can best fit students' needs. Shy students may be more comfortable when tested with their peers rather than singled out for individual attention. The idea is that one of the main focuses of attention can become a critical factor in obtaining shyness, contributing to adult shyness. Children who may be less shy may feel more comfortable in an anonymous group setting, even if the results of the tests may imply that the student's performance is determined by the structure of the test administered (Crozier & Hostettler, 2003).

There is also an association between students as they may deal with childhood shyness, academic engagement, and academic achievement. There is a much higher likelihood that teachers may recognize students' absence of participation as a lack of understanding. Support for shy students must be provided in the school setting. When pupils feel educational staff supports

them, they develop positive attitudes toward school and the educational faculty (Korem, 2019). While this may not be the case, there is a much greater need to develop a learning plan that best suits each student. Consequently, there may be a demand to recognize how students are processing the material because it may determine their ability to participate in the classroom. For example, students may feel more confident in their ability to answer questions aloud in class when comfortable with the material presented to them. Therefore, some students may require more time to become familiar with the context. Students may feel more confident in their learning capabilities, contributing to their social skills on the playground. As a result, building confidence may be an advantage as students venture out into the world (Hughes & Coplan, 2010). After all, shyness is just a personality trait and does not have to define who a person is. Those who would like to overcome shyness can work around it by working on things they do well and gaining the support of friends (Taibbi, 1995).

To conclude, I believe that it is important as educators to understand the learning needs of each student, so they can be successful as their educational journeys continue. Therefore, finding the appropriate learning methods for students may help them in and out of the classroom. It is vital that students feel comfortable in their learning capabilities and environment, so encouraging them to engage in learning can become essential. Also, developing a learning plan that supports each student as they learn throughout the year will display their journey and show their improvements and needs. Implementing different learning strategies is valuable to not only students but also parents and educators because it is significant to everyone in multiple ways.

**Method**

Being shy can have a variety of meanings and affect students in different ways. Therefore encouraging participation and creating a safe place for students is crucial because they may fear being judged by their peers. For this Capstone Project, the researcher investigates how teachers view the struggles of shy students in the classroom setting and what they think could be done to improve it. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature, the researcher uses what they have learned to formulate an action that responds to the struggles of shy students in a way that inspires, informs, or involves a particular audience.

**Context**

These schools were chosen because they serve various student populations, such as being socioeconomically disadvantaged and the participants interviewed hold great knowledge due to their relevant experiences.

**Happy Trails[1] Collegiate Charter Academy** is located in Southern California. It is a dependent charter school within the Vacaville Unified School District, founded in 1994 as an independent study charter, and has branched out into a site-based visual media arts school and progressed to become a comprehensive college preparatory high school with Career Technical Education pathways in Engineering and Digital Design. All students at Happy Trails are eligible and encouraged to participate in the Career Technical Education (CTE) Program. The CTE pathways are design-oriented: Digital Media Design and Engineering/Robotics. These distinct pathways allow students to design and customize their educational experience in order to match their post-secondary goals. As a college preparatory high school, Happy Trails offers a rigorous

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[1] The names of people, places, and organizations are pseudonyms to protect anonymity.

curriculum intended to prepare students for university and beyond. Happy Trails attracts students

who are looking for a small school environment that allows them to challenge themselves with a

rigorous and relevant academic curriculum that prepares them for post-secondary success.

According to the 2019-2021 SARC, relevant demographics include; 450 total enrolled students,

46.2% White, 24.3% Hispanic or Latino, 10.9% representing two or more races. Over 19% of the

school population are socioeconomically disadvantaged, 9.7% are students with disabilities and

0.2% are English Language Learners.

      **Sea Breeze School** is a public K-8 school located at 2222 East South Ave on the east

side of Riverview, CA in the Kings Canyon Unified School District.  Sea Breeze School opened

in October of 2009.  The school is named after Mr. Sea Breeze, the first Superintendent of the

Kings Canyon Joint Unified School District. The school serves nearly 670 students in grades K-8

and includes a staff of 31 classroom teachers and 22 support staff. Riverview is located in the

agricultural center of the San Joaquin Valley. The Sea Breeze School campus consists of an

administration building, library media center, technology lab, and multipurpose building. Sea

Breeze School is surrounded by undeveloped land but anticipates the development of its

surrounding community. There is an existing plan for the addition of classrooms when needed.

The mission at Sea Breeze is committed to producing academically proficient students and

positively engaged citizens through a rigorous course of instruction and a comprehensive system

of support within a safe learning environment. According to the 2019-2020, SARC relevant

demographics include 93.4% Hispanic or Latino, 3.4% White. Over 85.4% of the school

population are socioeconomically disadvantaged, 40.2% are English Language Learners, and

3.8% are students with disabilities.

**Sunshine Academy of Music and Media** is a TK-7 school located in a rural setting surrounded by the cities of Tanau and Taylor. Sunshine Academy has evolved over the years, starting as a small K-5 elementary school and now growing into a thematic TK-8 school. The classrooms are now up to date and boast a one-to-one device program using Chromebooks or mini iPads depending on the grade level. The mission at Sunshine Academy includes a diverse community of collaborative individuals including parents/guardians, caregivers, students, teachers, support staff, administrators, and community advocates. Each group comes together as one with the goal of obtaining the highest student achievement both academically and socially to prepare 21st-century. Families have multiple opportunities to collaborate in their student's education at Sunshine. The Sunshine staff believes that the involvement with and the support of students by their families and the community is a key factor in students' success. Family-oriented activities include Book Fairs, Back to School Night, Trunk or Treat, Family Movie Nights, and more. Communication is key to parent involvement. The school communicates regularly with parents and guardians through the monthly newsletter, weekly auto-dialer messages and emails, parent calls, school website, and marquee. According to the 2019-2020, SARC relevant demographics include 48.3% Hispanic or Latino, 16.6% Black or African American, 13.6% two or more races. Over 72.9% of the school population are socioeconomically disadvantaged, 23.2% are English Language Learners, and 11.9% are students with disabilities.

**Participants and Participant Selection**

All participants who have had experience advocating for shy students in the classroom were invited to participate in this study. This group of participants is being invited because of their first-hand experience in the subject and are personally being affected.

**Mrs. See**. Earned a Bachelor's Degree in Child Development with a credential in Special Education. She is a Latino middle-aged woman Special Education teacher who teaches two High School Study Skills classes which are part of the students' specialized academic instruction minutes in their IEP (Individualized Educational Plan). She also co-teaches two math classes with 23 and 29 students.

**Miss. Vee**. A young Latino woman who has been a Library Media Technician for ten years and provides assistance for K-8 grades as they visit the library. She creates reading groups when classrooms of 20-30 students visit her and assists students when choosing books that best interest them.

**Miss. Gee.** A young Latino woman who is a first-year teacher. She teaches 2nd at a Tier one public school with a class size of 20 students. She earned a Bachelor's Degree in Liberal Studies at Cal State Monterey Bay and a Credential/Masters in Education at UC Davis.

**Researcher**

The topic of shy students is meaningful to me because growing up I have always been shy in and out of the classroom. I struggled in the classroom advocating for not only myself but for my education. Since I struggled to self-advocate, I relied heavily on the support of my parents to be my voice. I still believe that I am shy, but I have been able to interact efficiently within my community and find ways to become engaged when I noticed that I was struggling on my own.

Therefore, I hope I can provide guidance for other shy children who may need extra support in and out of the classroom. It can be difficult for students to step out of their comfort zones. Guiding students and showing them that there are multiple ways to ask for help so they do not feel stuck and fall behind in their academics. In regards to my participants, I believe that I am similar because I aspire to be a future educator, which is something they have accomplished. I feel that by becoming an educator we have similar interests, such as serving a community and the willingness to lend a helping hand. As I move forward I will need to be mindful of the information given to me, as it comes from first-hand experiences, for example, the data given to me from the teachers. Ultimately, I hope I can raise awareness of an issue that is being unnoticed which will allow me to help encourage those shy students who enter my future classroom, by finding a method that works and can be beneficial to myself and my students.

**Semi-Structured Interview and Survey Questions**

The following questions were asked to two teachers and a Library Media Technician. The questions are shared below.

**Teacher Interview**

1. Describe your classroom management style.

2. What have been your experiences with shy students in the classroom?

3. What are you concerned about when teaching shy students?

4. What is currently being done to help shy students at your school; -by whom - and do you think this is good, bad, or indifferent? Why?

5.  What do you think should be done about shy students in the classroom?

6.  What do you think are the obstacles/drawbacks/disadvantages to improving the learning experiences of shy students?

7.  Is there anything else you would like to say about the shy students in your class and/or improving the learning experiences of shy students?

**Procedure[2]**

All participants were interviewed. The teacher interviews were done individually. When it was not possible to interview participants in person, they were invited to complete a phone interview or paper and pencil survey of the same questions. Face-to-Face interviews took less than one hour, were audio-recorded (with participant consent), and took place in a comfortable manner and in a relaxing situation, where interruptions and distractions were minimized. A semi-structured interview format was used for phone interviews, to allow for follow-up questions to unclear, interesting, or unexpected responses. All interviews/surveys were scheduled at the convenience of the interviewee and took approximately 40 minutes to complete.

**Data Analysis**

Transcribed interviews were coded and analyzed for emergent themes.

## Results

For this Capstone Project, one high school special education teacher, one second grade teacher, and a library media technician were interviewed to see what they believe should be done

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[2] http://my.ilstu.edu/~jhkahn/

to help enhance shy students' engagement in the classroom. This is important because students'

engagement in the classroom affects their learning capabilities and social skills on and off the

playground. Students may be struggling in certain areas, and without voicing their concerns they

may fall behind in the classroom. Therefore, ensuring that students use their voice when

appropriate is crucial to their success. Creating a safe place for students to feel comfortable is

significant because this encourages them to communicate with their teachers about what their

struggles may be. Having the courage to ask for help can be difficult for some students because

of their shyness so creating a safe place is important for all students, especially those who are

shy. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature, three themes emerged

(see Table 1). Evidence-based decision-making required evaluating each potential Action Option

by the following criteria: availability, cost, and effectiveness. Availability is an essential factor to

consider, as resources and techniques may not be readily available to all participating parties.

Price plays a crucial role because every school district operates on a budget, and student

households function on different income levels. Therefore, either participant may not be able to

afford any unexpected or additional expenses. Finally, effectiveness can determine the potential

success and to what intensity upon implementation. Based on the evaluation of each Action

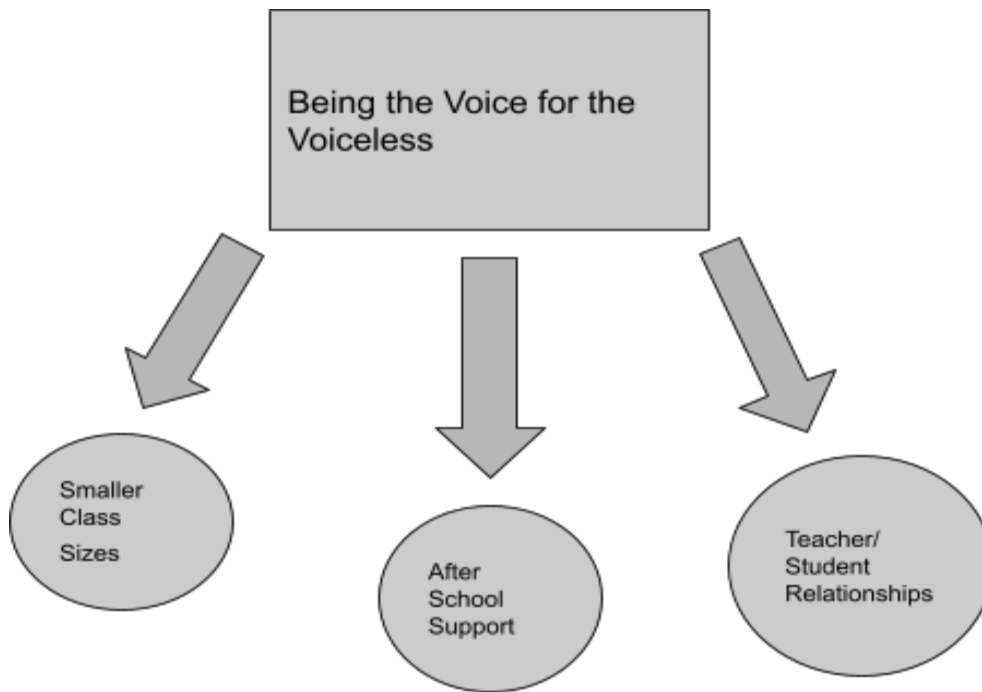Option, an action will be recommended and justified.

Table 1

*Evaluation of Action Options*

|  | Availability | Cost | Effectiveness |
|---|---|---|---|
| Smaller Class Sizes: creating opportunities to have more one-on-one time with students | Low | High | High |
| After School Support: ensuring that students are receiving extra help when needed | Medium | Medium | High |
| Building Teacher-Student Relationships: teachers create ways | Medium | Low | High |

| to connect with students to build trust | | | |
|---|---|---|---|

**Smaller Class Sizes**

Some students may feel overwhelmed when entering a classroom for the first time. On the first day of school, they are greeted by as many as thirty unfamiliar faces. Although they may be familiar with a few faces from previous years, if this is not the first time they are entering the school year. At Sea Breeze, a Kindergarten through eighth-grade school, shy students struggle to receive the support they need because of the large class sizes. As Library Media Technician interviewee Miss. Vee stated, "Having larger classrooms, we are not able to focus on just the shy students; instead we are focused on teaching a lesson and dealing with the talkative students and the behavioral problems in the classroom, and unfortunately the shy students are getting overlooked" (M. Vee, personal communication, October 18, 2021). Miss. Vee creates reading groups when classrooms of thirty students visit her at the library every day. In a short amount of time, she must collaborate quickly with the teacher and create a method that works efficiently with all the students. Therefore, limiting the number of students in each classroom at Sea Breeze school and other schools alike would benefit from smaller class sizes because teachers would be able to have that one-on-one time in the classroom. This theme appeared throughout the teacher interviews, although it did not appear to be an expected response in the literature. Although, in the literature, it is revealed that students feel more comfortable when there is more support for shy students, which must be provided in the school setting. When students feel academic staff supports them, they develop positive attitudes toward school and the academic faculty (Korem,

2019). There is a much higher likelihood that teachers may recognize students' absence of

participation as a lack of understanding when spending more time with them. Also, second-grade

teacher interviewee Miss. Gee stated, "The administration is dealing with behavioral problems

and subbing in the classrooms" (V. Gee, personal communication, November 5, 2021). She also

mentions that she reaches out for teacher support to schedule an observation for a student and

states that, "a lot of times there is no time because the administration is subbing for a classroom,

so there is no one there to help out" ( personal communication, November 5, 2021). While the

affordability of having smaller class sizes is high because there will be a higher demand for

teachers, which can also rate the availability low because this action option requires support from

both students and parents.  The effectiveness of having smaller class sizes is high because

teachers and faculty will have the opportunity to understand their students better. They will be

able to quickly pinpoint any struggles that may arise in the classroom and act accordingly to

concerns that arise. While this action option ensures students who require more support from

their teacher will have a greater chance at success given the smaller class sizes, and teachers will

be able to better accommodate students' needs by creating a more suitable classroom

environment.

**After School Support**

Ensuring that all students receive a clear understanding of concepts and lessons taught in

the classroom is crucial, but shy students may require extra time and support. This was a

common theme seen throughout both teacher interviews and scholarly literature. For example, at

Happy Trials Collegiate Charter Academy, a college preparatory high school has created an

after-school program known as K.E.E.P (Knight Educational Enhancement Period). In teacher

interviewee Mrs. See stated that, "the students can sign up for subjects where they wish to be

placed, it is ultimately their choice. For example, suppose they need help in a certain subject like

S.T.E.M. (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math). In that case, they can sign up for that

specific period of K.E.E.P ( J. See, personal communication, November 5, 2021). Having this

after-school support creates a safe place for students to work on their homework while having a

teacher present when questions may arise. Although for second-grade teacher Miss. Gee, she

finds the online platform Seesaw useful when helping students communicate with their peers as

they submit assignments online, making it easier for her to navigate with her students. Miss. Gee

stated that "she can not have a lot of worksheets because some of the students are not able to

write, therefore she assigns a lot of Seesaw activities because they can use a microphone to type

their words as a voice note. It has helped her shy students regularly speak in class because they

will stay after school to do their assignments or ask their fellow classmates for help when

uploading a photo to Seesaw" (V. Gee, personal communication, November 5, 2021). Seesaw is

an online classroom application for student engagement. Students use creative tools to take

pictures, draw, record videos, and more to capture learning in an online portfolio. Educators find

or create activities to share with students. Families only see their child's work and leave

comments and encouragement. Each student has different learning styles, which can help support

their academic needs and contribute to their success. Therefore, when assisting a shy student to

achieve the requirements needed to encourage more interaction within the classroom, it is

important to understand the different approaches that can help promote engagement (Brodkin,

2004). There is also an association between students as they may deal with childhood shyness,

academic engagement, and academic achievement. There is a much higher likelihood that teachers may recognize students' absence of participation as a lack of understanding. Support for shy students must be provided in the school setting. When pupils feel academic staff supports them, they develop positive attitudes toward school and the academic faculty (Korem, 2019). During this extra assistance after school, students can receive extra help in subjects they do not feel confident in, and they can also establish a greater bond with their teacher as they are in a smaller setting and have a higher chance of one-on-one opportunities. Students may feel more comfortable asking for help in a smaller setting, rather than their full class. While shy students may be afraid to ask for help, given this opportunity can help them voice their concerns. The effectiveness, however, is high because the literature research and interview data help to support the impact of after-school support for shy students as they succeed in classroom engagement. Creating after-school support gives students a safe environment to complete homework, which helps improve academics. Shy students create friendships which may help build their confidence. The availability is medium because this requires support from parents and they may feel that their child does not need the extra support during after-school hours. While this action ensures that students receive the extra assistance needed to support them in the after-hours of school, the cost is medium because teachers may have a higher demand for school supplies. Although there are free opportunities available for students through programs such as Big Brothers Big Sisters and the Y.E.S (Youth Experiencing Success) Program which offer after- school support.

**Building Teacher-Student Relationships**

The beginning of a school year can be the most difficult for students as they adjust to a new environment and unfamiliar faces. For this reason, building and finding connections with

students becomes vital because it helps build their confidence as they feel comfortable with their

teacher. This resulted in a third theme that became much more apparent in both the research and

interview process. Miss Gee., who was also a shy student, mentioned that "some students are not

comfortable being in the classroom and having attention on them. Being a shy student, I was not

confident in myself, and most of the time, my teachers built my confidence. It is important to let

students know that as a teacher, you are excited to have them in your classroom" (V. Gee,

personal communication, November 5, 2021). The special education teacher Mrs. See also

supported this, as she discovered that finding a similar interest with her students improved their

social skills because they were excited to share in class. She stated that "one student was very

shy, but he knew a lot of information about basketball and was fascinated with Lebron James. By

sharing his love for basketball and Lebron James, he had the confidence to come out of his shell

because he was talking about something that interests him. She also mentions that it is important

to identify students' preferences, interests, and strengths because it helps find connections

through their likes. Some students may require the feeling of safety to open up" ( J. See, personal

communication, November 5, 2021). This data coincides with the literature stating that

establishing trust with students can be easier to find the right solution. Understanding their

identity can help improve their interactions in the classroom between the students and educators.

Attending school can be a frightening experience for many students. It can take time to adjust to

new surroundings and community. When possible, praising or complimenting the students can

encourage them to open up and engage more freely when the communication is there (Brodkin,

2004). Although, the availability is medium because some students may require more time in

order for teachers to create connections. This time may be needed after school, which requires

support from parents. A great benefit of building connections is that it does not require any

funding from school districts or families, just time and dedication. The effectiveness, however, is

high because the literature research and interview data help to support the importance of

educators building connections with their shy students to encourage them to engage in the

classroom.

**Recommendations**

Given the three action options, I recommend that teachers create extra support for

students to establish after-school study sessions to ensure that shy students receive the necessary

guidance in order to keep them from falling behind. The literature research and interview data

help to support this recommendation and solution, therefore I am convinced that it is the best

option to help engage shy students, in addition to improving the engagement in the classroom by

ensuring that students have extra support when needed through after school study sessions. The

following section will discuss the concessions, limitations, and possible negative outcomes

associated with this action option.

**Concessions**

My recommendations of after-school support as the essential action option should not

disconsider the meaningful strengths of the other two alternatives. For example, the action option

that recommends smaller class sizes attempts to focus on shy students as they may become easily

noticed in a smaller class setting. Unlike the other action options, this is the only option that

helps educators pinpoint the shy students at a quicker rate which can offer them solutions

immediately. The literature signifies the importance of smaller class sizes because it can become

a problem for shy students when they are in a bigger setting. Students may need a variety of

suggestions that can help support their success. Therefore educators must accommodate their

teaching strategies for each student and their different learning approaches. For example, a

socially attentive child who may attempt to interact with peers resulting in a lack of success may

become increasingly anxious and develop negative thoughts and feelings about themself

(Burgess, et al., 2006). As for educators, building connections with their students can become

imperative for their learning environment because they can build trust, which can ultimately lead

to a greater connection. We can suggest that academic engagement pertains to the interactions

between the students and their educational environment (Hughes & Coplan, 2010). For example,

when students feel confident in their learning capabilities, they engage and participate more often

in the class because they no longer lack uncertainty and fear of judgment from peers when

answering out loud. Additionally, this action option allows educators to focus on the individual

needs of each student. It is clear that both of these action options provide students with the

guidance they need to address the obstacles that may interfere with their academic success.

**Limitations**

While choosing after-school study sessions as my recommended action option as the best

option, there may be limitations to consider. For example, after-school support can come in an

array of interpretations. Not every student may need this extra support, therefore some parents

may not feel it is necessary for their child. Another limitation arises regarding the availability of

the students. Some students may have extra-curricular activities or may need to tend to younger

siblings at home which will demand their attention elsewhere. The final limitation concerns the

total efforts that are needed for this action option to become successful. For example, students,

parents, and educators will need to give time, dedication, and resources into providing the best

necessary support for their academics and engagement in the classroom and without adequate

levels of each, the action option would be deemed useless.

**Potential negative outcomes**

For this action option, there can be possible negative outcomes that may arise. For

example, after-school study sessions with students may not be accepted well by students and

parents. Methods may involve students becoming much more dedicated to their studies during

after hours, once school has finished. This may be difficult for some students to continue to stay

on task because they may act out during these study sessions because they may feel that school

has already come to a close. Also, when students are surrounded by friends during after-school

hours they may see this as an opportunity to horse around. For parents, they may feel the extra

support is unnecessary and would rather have their child be supported in the comfort of their own

home by an older sibling. Additionally, it can create less support from parents and result in

students falling behind in their academics because they are not receiving the support needed.

**Conclusion**

Despite the limitations, concessions, and potential negative outcomes, I still recommend

after-school study sessions as the best action option to help enhance shy students' engagement in

the classroom because it will help boost their confidence. This action has a high possibility of

effectiveness, high levels of availability, and low cost, which can be debated upon the needs of

each student at the recommendations of the teachers and parents. The literature research and

interview data help establish the importance of student engagement because teachers may be

unaware of those falling behind. This is the only action option that may guarantee growth in

student engagement among shy students. Therefore by establishing study groups, teachers spend

more time with their students. With extra teacher support, however, creating additional classroom

support after school will increase the confidence in students because they may be struggling in

class, and forming study groups with fellow peers will ensure they understand the lessons taught

in the classroom. Therefore for these demonstrating reasons, this action option rises above the

others as the best solution moving forward.

### Action Documentation and Critical Reflection

The main focus chosen for this Capstone project is understanding how teachers can

support the needs of their shy students and how they can keep these students engaged in the

classroom. As a shy student myself, I can understand firsthand the struggles that can arise from a

lack of classroom engagement. After interviewing two educators and a Library Media Technician

who have experience on the subject, I was able to identify three different options to help improve

student engagement. The three action options that emerged from my interviews include smaller

class sizes, building student-teacher relationships, and after-school support. The action option

that I chose to implement was after-school support due to the affordability, effectiveness, and

availability. As I moved forward with my action option I was able to find options that would be

most effective to students. Therefore I chose to create an email with web pages attached that

teachers can send to parents and guardians listing available options in their area that can help

encourage shy students to become engaged in the classroom.

*Image 1*. Screenshot of the email provided for teachers to inform parents/guardians about the

after-support that is available to them.

Dear parents/guardians,

I am sending this email in hopes that you will take advantage of the after-school support that is available to your scholar. I have been observing your student during class, and he/she may need extra support building confidence, as he/she seems to be afraid to ask for help when needed. Therefore I have listed available options that I believe will be beneficial. Please feel free to email me with any questions.

**Big Brothers Big Sisters:** FREE
By partnering with parents/guardians, volunteers, and others in the community we are accountable for each child in our program achieving: Higher aspirations, greater confidence, and better relationships, avoidance of risky behaviors, Educational success.
**https://www.bbbs.org/**

**Y.E.S Program:** FREE
YES stands for Youth Experiencing Success. The YES team works diligently to provide engaging project-based activities which encourage students to strive for success, both in and out of school.
**https://www.portervilleschools.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=240255&type=d&pREC_ID=554766**

**YMCA:** Membership Required
At the Y, we create opportunities for people to improve their lives and their communities. Through empowering young people, improving individual and community well-being, and inspiring action, we aim to create meaningful change across the country.
**https://www.ymca.org/**

Included in this email is a list of three potential options that parents/guardians can take advantage

of for their scholars:


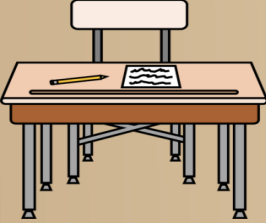**https://www.ymca.org/**   (YMCA)


**https://www.bbbs.org/**   (Big Brothers Big Sisters)


**https://www.portervilleschools.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=240255&type=d&pREC_ID=554766**


(YES Program)

*Image 2.* Screenshot of the poster that can be posted in the main office at schools for

parents/guardians to notice.

**RE: Parents/Guardians**

*Are you interested in extra support for your student who may be struggling with shyness?*

Help is out there! There are resources available after school to help your child build confidence, make friends, and receive academic support.

Check out the resources below and notify the secretary at the front desk of the services that interest you and they will provide you with more information.

**Big Brothers Big Sisters:** FREE
By partnering with parents/guardians, volunteers, and others in the community. We are accountable for each child in our program achieving: Higher aspirations, greater confidence, and better relationships, avoidance of risky behaviors, Educational success.

**Y.E.S Program:** FREE
YES stands for Youth Experiencing Success. The YES team works diligently to provide engaging project-based activities which encourage students to strive for success, both in and out of school.

**YMCA:** Membership Required
At the Y, we create opportunities for people to improve their lives and their communities. Through empowering young people, improving individual and community well-being, and inspiring action, we aim to create meaningful change across the country.

**Action Research Project Documentation and Reflection**

I chose to send the email I created to the high school special education teacher and the second grade teacher because they are the individuals who have the power to create change in their classrooms. Educators are susceptible to suggestions for their students because there is more than one learning style and finding different ways to encourage individualism will be beneficial to the classroom. I also created a poster with the same information included in the email which can have the power to gain a bigger audience by sharing it in several different areas.

Sharing this poster in the office where parents/guardians visit can hopefully catch their attention

as they are waiting for their students. Social media also has the capability to draw crowds

worldwide, so I plan to share via Facebook. It's fascinating to see my research come into full

circle because Facebook is where I found my participants. While I have yet to hear back from

two of my stakeholders, I did receive this response from one teacher:

> **After School Support Opportunities**
>
> Hello Marina,
>
> This is great information for my shy students.
> Thank you for creating this list of resources for
> me. These are fantastic opportunities, and will
> hopefully help encourage engagement as
> students can build confidence within themselves.
>
> Thank you,
>
> Mrs.

It was wonderful to learn that my recommendations were being praised by the teacher

and how she felt they would be beneficial to her students. I was surprised to learn that there were

so many after-school opportunities offered in my area and many of them were free. Cost can be a

huge issue for families so it was great to learn that there are resources available free of cost.

Looking back at the action, I wish I had the opportunity to receive more evidence from more

teachers. Data is an important factor and I believe with more knowledge and advice it would

have helped me create innovative recommendations for a wide variety of teachers and parents. In

regards to my poster, I have yet to receive feedback because it has not been posted. Although

when sharing the poster with one teacher, she praised my work and encouraged me to share it with others. During this Capstone Project, I was able to learn more about who I am as a person and what I can do to create change in the classroom. Being a shy student, I am always hidden in the background, often forgotten. This project allowed me to step out of my comfort zone and challenge myself as I had to create change for future generations by going out into the public seeking support and advice from those around me. As I interviewed my stakeholders I learned that there are teachers who also wish to create change in their classrooms. It was great to work with teachers who supported my project and kept it flourishing.

**Synthesis and Integration**

While my time at California State University Monterey Bay has been full of great memories, there have also been challenges along my three-year journey. Despite these challenges, I have also come across great opportunities which will become beneficial to my career as an educator. Some of these opportunities include the five Liberal Studies Major Learning Outcomes, the required coursework, and the Action Research Project. The Liberal Studies MLO's which have greatly impacted my professional development in a positive way include MLO 1, MLO 2, MLO 3, and MLO 4.

As mentioned in MLO 1, the research that was completed has required me to think, write, and speak critically about the most current responsibilities of California public school educators. The research that was completed allowed me to investigate these responsibilities and learn exactly how students are engaging in the classroom. Learning about the current

responsibilities has given me the opportunity to understand how public school systems are built and how I can create the appropriate changes. As educators, it is important to notice issues and take quick action to ensure that students are receiving the best education.

As stated in MLO 2, this project also showed the importance of examining the values of diversity within students and how it plays a huge role in their education. Given the differences between students, it is important for educators to understand that students have an abundance of learning styles that best suit their needs. It is important to consider and support each student as they represent several different social identities, cultures, and economic statuses. Ensuring that students are safe and supported in their learning environment is crucial to their success.

As declared in MLO 3, Innovative Technology Practitioner, I was able to meet this requirement by using the necessary technology to investigate and then present my findings in an expressive way. I also collaborated effectively with my stakeholders via Zoom through an interview process and organized my data on three action themes that could provide the best effective results. The technology aspect really pushed me out of my comfort zone because I have never done such a heavy-based research project. Concluding the project with a video that represents my findings was a fun way to incorporate and reflect on the overall process.

Lastly,  MLO 4, Social Justice Collaborator, I feel that this learning outcome was implemented through the end result of my project. The title of a Social Justice Collaborator is someone who makes a stand for change and ensures that students are receiving the education they deserve. As a future educator, I am the voice for my students, therefore it is my responsibility to advocate for them and their educational needs. Given the community

experience, I gained with this project, I was able to successfully advocate for access, equity, and justice in public education by collaborating with stakeholders from diverse backgrounds. By speaking to educators I was able to listen to their perspectives in relation to how they keep their shy students engaged in the classroom. Once I listened to their concerns, I was able to create a proposed action plan that would benefit their shy students in the classroom.

The next steps that I see myself needing to take in order to become the successful professional that I aspire to be is graduating from CSUMB and locating a job as a daycare assistant or a preschool teacher. Although I am nervous about this new change, I can say that I have enjoyed my college experience and am sad to see it come to a close. It does bring me great enthusiasm and excitement to be able to teach and share the many tools that I have learned along the way. I understand that I have a huge responsibility as I will help shape tiny brains. Therefore, I will ensure that I take the responsibility seriously and provide a safe learning environment for every student that enters my classroom. This project would not have been possible without several individuals, and I greatly appreciate everyone who helped me each step of the way and provided their support in helping me achieve my goals.

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