Use of Social Stories with Students in an Inclusive Kindergarten Classroom:  
An Action Research Study

by

Maria Rota

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Supervised by
Martha Mock, Ph.D.
Kevin Meuwissen, Ph.D.
Julia White, Ph.D.

Margaret Warner Graduate School of Education and Human Development

University of Rochester
Rochester, New York

2011
Table of Contents

Acknowledgement vi

Abstract vii

Chapter 1: Introduction 1
  Overview 1
  Background 2
    Autism 2
    Social Stories 7
    Altered social stories 7
  Theoretical Frameworks 8
  Educational Problem and Goal of the Study 10
  Research Questions and Methodology 12
  Action Research Methodology 13
  Overview of the Study Design and Participants 13
  Preview of the Study Findings 14
  Contributions to the Research Field 15
  Organization of this Dissertation 15

Chapter 2: Literature Review 18
  Introduction 18
  Educational Problem 20
  Theoretical Frameworks 23
    Disability studies influence 23
      Normalizing 24
      Labeling 24
      Addressing the needs of our students 25
      Influences on my research 26
    Sociocultural theory 28
      Zone of proximal development 29
      Sociocultural theory and the use of social stories 29
    Behaviorist theory 31
  Addressing the Problem 33
    Use for social stories 35
    Context of social stories 36
    Evolution of social stories 36
    Social story sentences and examples 37
  Conclusion 38

Chapter 3: Methodology 41
  Introduction 41
  Action Research Methodology 42
    Challenges with IRB 42
Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

Introduction
Findings of Sub-Question One
  Character and learning style
    Peter
    Michael
  Social Needs and observations of students’ behavior
    Peter
    Michael
  Observation of social story reading
    Peter
    Michael
Findings of Sub-Question Two
  Factors considered when writing or changing social stories
    Guidelines
    Needs and interests
    Suggestions from colleagues
    Effective and ineffective decisions
      Effectiveness of pictures
      Ineffective decisions to begin too soon
      Unstructured time activities
Rapport with colleagues 134
Parent communication 134
Conduct interviews with all parents 135

References: 137

Appendices:
Appendix A: Action Research Cycle 142
Appendix B: Parent Interview 143
Appendix C: Parent Survey 144
Acknowledgements

I would like to recognize the many people who have assisted me through the completion of this dissertation. My first recognition is to my advisor Dr. Martha Mock for her assistance and support through the entire doctoral process. There were many stressful points where she reassured me that I would succeed. Additionally, I would like to thank my committee members Dr. Julia White and Dr. Kevin Meuwissen for spending a great deal of time editing my work and offering their suggestions for a stronger dissertation.

Another key group of people were my cohort members Dr. Linda Bryant, Dr. Lilly Stone, and Dr. Rosa Mazurett-Boyle. These women were there for me through the entire process starting with deciding on topics and ending with practicing for our defenses. Of course we always saved a little time to discuss my upcoming wedding and our personal lives.

I would like to recognize my administrator, Rosemary, and assistant principal, Amy, for their support, encouragement and assistance with the entire dissertation process. Without their assistance, I would not have had the support needed to conduct the study and complete the writing process. In addition, I would like to thank my co-workers who participated in the study, Ruth, Lysa and Mya. They spent a significant amount of time reviewing my work as I completed the chapters and worked collaboratively with me as we focused on the study. They have all assisted with encouragement and were much needed listeners as I became stressed throughout the writing process.

Finally, I am exceedingly grateful to my fiancé Michael LaFex and my parents Angelo and Luisa Rota. They stood by me through the difficult times with encouragement and support and were considerate and understanding during the long writing days when I was unavailable. I could not have succeeded without their love and support.
Use of Social Stories with Students in an Inclusive Kindergarten Classroom:  
An Action Research Study  

Maria Rota  

Abstract  

The use of Social Stories is a widely used strategy with students with autism. Created by Carol Gray in 1991, they are used to teach children with autism about their surroundings and social cues. Carol Gray has developed guidelines and criteria for using Social Stories the way she has designed them and has conducted professional development to teach the creation and use of Social Stories. Many researchers have conducted studies to discover the effectiveness of Social Stories and some have altered Social Stories to determine the effectiveness of the changes made. Although many researchers examine the effectiveness, I have yet to see research on the decision making process which is required when using multiple Social Stories.

This study was developed to examine the decision making process which takes place when planning, creating, and using Social Stories. Two children who demonstrated behavioral or social needs participated in the study in addition to two classroom aides and the special education consultant teacher who work with children in my kindergarten classroom. I recorded planning sessions with the two classroom aides and the special education consultant teacher and conducted an interview with the parents of the children involved in the study. I examined the data with the use of dimensional analysis to determine what information I used to make decisions when using Social Stories, factors I consider when writing, changing, or ending Social Stories, and when deciding whether or not to use a Social Story. The Social Stories were not used in isolation as there were many additional strategies to assist with behavioral and social needs.
Chapter 1
Introduction

I originally became interested in the use of Social Stories\(^1\) upon discovering I would have a child with autism in my inclusion classroom four years ago. I had limited knowledge of autism or any strategies to assist my students. Therefore, I attended professional development to learn about autism as well as the use of Social Stories as a strategy. During that year, I utilized Social Stories with a child who was diagnosed with Asperger’s syndrome and found that he responded to the Social Stories in a positive manner. He was able to utilize the strategies from the Social Stories to ease his discomfort with many social situations in which he encountered. I then decided Social Stories were a strategy I wanted to research further with children with autism as well as typically developing children in my kindergarten classroom. I continued to use Social Stories with children in my kindergarten classroom during the next three years. I found Social Stories to be successful with many of my students with autism; however, others were not as successful and required alternative strategies. Similar to any classroom, a strategy that is effective for one child may not be effective for another.

Overview

The purpose of this study is to examine the planning process as I, the general education teacher, implement the use of Social Stories with children in an inclusive kindergarten classroom. This chapter will review background information in regards to Social Stories and the typical use of Social Stories with children diagnosed with autism as well as an explanation of the goal of the study and the educational problem. In addition, I give a general description of the theoretical framework which guides my process, and I introduce the research questions.

\(^1\) The term Social Stories is a trademark of Carol Gray. Gray (2004) indicates that when Social Stories are created and utilized according to the guidelines she has created, the term is capitalized.
Additionally, I give a preview of the research results and discuss contributions to the research field. Finally, I give an outline of how the remaining chapters are organized.

**Background Information**

In this research study I utilized a tool known as Social Stories. Although many teachers working in an inclusive classroom may be familiar with the terms I used, I described them in this section to assist with any confusion. Social Stories were originally created to assist students with autism in academic settings. For this reason, I begin this section by elaborating on the traits of autism. In addition, I give a brief summary of Social Stories as well as how some researchers have altered Social Stories to meet their needs. More information regarding Social Stories will be explained in the literature review.

**Autism.**

Over the past three decades, the number of students with disabilities in the general education setting has increased, specifically the number of children with autism (Leblanc, Richardson & Burns, 2009; Schilling & Schwartz, 2004). Many researchers look at the most common needs of children with autism in order to develop intervention strategies. “It is recognized that students with autism demonstrate a restricted range of social communication skills such as limited speech to initiate comments, request information from others, and interact in simple games” (Thiemann & Goldstein, 2001, p. 425). In addition, friendship development and academic progress might be impacted due to the limited social communication of children with autism (Thiemann & Goldstein, 2001). Communication and social skills are important for peer relationships and learning experiences.

---

2 For the purpose of this study, the term autism will encompass all disorders associated with autism spectrum disorder including Asperger’s syndrome and pervasive development disorder not otherwise specified (PDD NOS) in order to remove the term disorder from this study.
Autism is a label used for children who demonstrate specific social, behavioral and communicative characteristics (Sansosti & Powell-Smith, 2006). Although specific characteristics are used to diagnose autism, two children may demonstrate very different strengths and needs; however, both children may be diagnosed with autism. Many researchers examine the most common needs of children with autism in order to develop intervention strategies, but there are also many positive aspects of autism. I will begin by describing some of the identified needs that researchers use to develop strategies, and then move into the positive aspects of autism.

Chandler-Olcott and Kluth (2009) state that when autism is represented in the media, it is typically characterized as a tragedy. Similar to the way I have removed the negative terminology in this study, many authors use the term autism generally in their research. They recognize that there are many variations of the disorder which include Asperger’s syndrome, Rett syndrome, and pervasive developmental disorder. However, in order to remove some of the negative terminology and the use of the word “disorder,” many authors choose to use the word autism in their research. One child with autism does not have the same needs, show the same difficulties or express the same characteristics as another child with autism.

Some undesired behaviors displayed by children with autism are the result of “impairments in social interaction and communication” (Crozier & Tincani, 2005, p. 150). These behaviors may be mistaken for intentional disruptive behaviors and may be punished rather than interpreted as a need for deliberate social skill instruction. In place of using punishment to discipline such behaviors, the social skills require explicit teaching to assist with undesired behaviors which occur as a result of the misinterpreted social needs (Sansosti & Powell-Smith, 2006). Interventions such as Social Stories are used by many professionals to assist with
reducing the undesired behaviors and increase positive social interactions (Crozier & Tincani, 2005). The reduction of undesired behaviors and increase in positive social interactions is crucial in any classroom to assist with instruction.

Rao, Beidel and Murray (2007) clarify that a social skill is a specific behavior during a social interaction that includes verbal and non-verbal behaviors for the purpose of communication. Positive social interactions have typically resulted in positive developmental outcomes such as acceptance by peers and academic achievement (Soenksen & Alper, 2006). The learning of communication and social skills happens naturally through social interactions for most typically developing children. However, many children with disabilities may not understand the social cues of others, and they may have fewer opportunities to interact with their peers (Banda & Grimmet, 2008; Soenksen & Alper, 2006). Fewer interactions hinder the possibility to gain appropriate socialization experiences with peers.

Social skills are explicitly taught to children with autism in order to assist them with the navigation of their social worlds and to better understand the social cues that take place in everyday life. The Social Story benefits the child by giving him or her the necessary skills to interact with peers and adults without fear or anxiety (Rao et al., 2007).

Chandler-Olcott and Kluth (2009) recognize the challenges children face, but they also acknowledge the positive characteristics children with autism possess:

We do not deny that people on the autism spectrum often experience the world differently than people without disabilities, and that some of those differences can be extremely challenging for individuals, but our personal relationships and our reading of first-person narratives by people with autism have made it clear that autism is not always experienced negatively. (p. 549)
Although differences can alienate people with autism from their peers, their experiences are not always negative. People with autism have positive experiences as well and can share those experiences with others. Many adults with autism have spoken at conferences and given testimonials as to how they were successful and struggles they may have faced (Hurlbutt & Chalmers, 2004; Pigott, 1998). The overcoming of those struggles and success stories of their accomplishments are inspirational to others with autism and for educators who admire the achievements of their students.

In addition, the knowledge base of a person with autism is astonishing. Nash (2002) published an article in Time Magazine to establish an awareness of Asperger’s syndrome and identified the amazing qualities some of these children posses. Although the article was not meant to highlight the amazing minds of these children, it is that quality that stood out to me over all the other information. Nash (2002) explains how many children with autism receive social skill training and at one particular clinic, she noticed children “become chatty, and animated, displaying an astonishing grasp of the most arcane subjects” (p. 50). Many children with autism become experts in an area of interest and are able to teach others about the topic regardless of its complexity.

Nash (2002) also recognizes there are many successful people who possess such an astonishing trait which allows them to “focus intensely and screen out other distractions” (p. 51). This is most beneficial for employment in the fields of computer programming and engineering (Nash, 2002). Temple Grandin (2011), a woman with autism, also discusses the future of people with autism and acknowledges that computer programming is a profession in which people with autism are “well-suited” for because this is “the way our mind works” (p. 279).
Kenway (2009) elaborates on the benefits people with autism bring to the community. He recognizes the view that there have been many significant contributions from people with autism in the area of science and the arts. One widely known person with autism who made a significant contribution to the cattle industry and research community is Temple Grandin. Grandin has written several books to assist people with autism and highlight their successes. In her book entitled *The Way I See It*, Grandin (2011) gives advice on early intervention, teaching and education, sensory issues, behavioral issues, adult issues and so much more. The accomplishment of writing such a detailed and useful book is tremendous. In addition, this is not the only book that Grandin has written. She has written books on autism, her way of thinking in pictures, animal behavior, her area of research on livestock and many more. Although everyone is different, it is easy to see from this information that people with autism are successful and hold great accomplishments.

Despite the assets of children with autism, many interventions have been developed to help children increase desirable behaviors and reduce undesirable behaviors (Graetz, Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2009). Interventions that assist with social behaviors may promote peer relationships with typically developing peers and increase social communication (Thiemann & Goldstein, 2001). Social communication is important to help children with autism maintain friendships and socialize with peers. Graetz and colleagues (2009) state, “The lack of needed social skills and the presence of inappropriate social behaviors critically affect the lives of individuals with autism” (p. 91). For this reason, many social intervention strategies, such as Social Stories, are developed to assist children with interactions and understand social situations (Sansosti & Powell-Smith, 2006).
Social Stories.

Social Stories were developed by Carol Gray in 1991 (Gray, 2004) to provide children with autism an “accurate understanding” of social situations (Gray & Garand, 1993, p. 2). A Social Story is a short written story which may contain illustrations and is written at the reading level and attention span of the child it is created for (Gray, 2004). The sentences in a Social Story describe “a situation, skill, or concept in terms of relevant social cues, perspectives, and common responses in a specifically defined style and format” (Gray, 2004, p. 2). Each sentence details specific information to assist the child with the situation for which the story was designed.

Although Social Stories were developed with guidelines and structure, many researchers have found positive results when altering a Social Story to meet the needs of children (Haggarty, Black & Smith, 2005). Some changes researchers have made to the administration of Social Stories have been the use of computers to create a multimedia Social Story (Hagiwara & Miles, 1999) and apron storytelling (Haggarty, Black & Smith, 2005). Both of the altered Social Stories are described further in the next section.

Altered social stories.

The previously mentioned alterations to Social Stories occurred during their delivery. However, the sentence structure and format were not altered. The multimedia Social Story conducted by Hagiwara and Miles (1999) was created using a computer. The Social Story had audio capability in order for the story to be read to the child through the computer. In addition, the Social Story displayed pictures to go with each sentence. Delivery via the computer eliminated the teacher’s time required to sit with the child to read the Social Story therefore eliminating the dilemma of insufficient time to read the story. The apron story telling study conducted by Haggarty, Black and Smith (2005) combines the use of Social Stories with apron
story telling. After creating the Social Story-book, the teachers created an apron storyboard for the child to utilize while reading the Social Story. The apron story board was created to make the Social Story more fun and interactive. The apron storyboard was a felt board with pictures and people from the Social Story in which the child was able to manipulate physically instead of reading it each day. The child manipulated the characters in the story to act out the replacement behaviors and conduct the desired behavior. According to Haggarty, Black and Smith (2005), the interaction renewed the child’s interest in the Social Story.

For the purpose of this study, I did not alter the Social Stories, but rather remained true to the guidelines Gray and Garand (1993) have established. The only difference from this study and the typical use of Social Stories is that this strategy was used with children who are not diagnosed with autism. One child is labeled with a disability (not autism) and the other child is not. Both children demonstrated a need for assistance to relieve anxiety regarding situations in which Social Stories were used. Additionally, the Social Stories gave the children information about the situation and assisted them with replacement behaviors in order to reduce the undesired behavior. Since Social Stories are typically used with children with autism, this was a minor alteration to the typical use of Social Stories.

**Theoretical Framework**

My views on Social Stories and working with children in my kindergarten classroom are assisted by a disability studies influence and a sociocultural theory perspective. Although Social Stories are not linked to any theory in the literature, they come from a behaviorist theory perspective which I will explain further. Additionally, I explain how I used Social Stories from a sociocultural perspective.
The disability studies influence is appropriate for this study because it aides with my focus on the child rather than the curriculum. Using a disability studies view, I change my practices to meet the needs of all the children rather than teaching to the norm and forcing the child to adapt to his or her surroundings and mold to the norm (Reid & Knight, 2006). With the use of Social Stories and planning with colleagues, we acknowledge difficulties the children were having, explored antecedents to the behaviors and developed a Social Story to assist the child with the social situation. We explored ways to relieve the child’s anxiety around the situation to in turn assist with the behavior which is displayed as a result of the difficulties the child is facing.

In addition to having the child as the focus of the classroom, there is a need to reframe disability rather than accepting the rehabilitation view in which students must be “fixed” and changed in order to participate in an inclusion classroom (Palmeri, 2006). We must give the children the tools necessary to be successful in all environments. Social Stories are one tool in which teachers may utilize to meet the needs of their students.

When studying Social Stories and the work of Carol Gray, I have learned that Social Stories are not used to assist the teacher and make our lives easier in the classroom, but rather a way of assisting the children to better understand their surroundings (Gray, 2004). As a result of assisting the child to recognize the cause of the behavior and understand his or her options, the behavior will improve and benefit both the child and the teacher. This way of thinking about Social Stories comes from a sociocultural perspective which is influenced by the work of Lev Vygotsky and his notion of learning as a social practice (Wang, 2006). Vygotsky’s (1978) work on the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) relates to the use of Social Stories because it brings
the child to the point of struggle, and with the assistance of an adult, they are able to understand the situation and relieve their anxiety regarding the situation.

Although I use Social Stories from a sociocultural perspective, they originate from behaviorist theory. The ultimate goal of a Social Story is to relieve the anxiety of the child and change the behavior displayed. One area of behaviorist theory is the notion of operant conditioning. Skinner (1974) defines operant conditioning as the “process through which a person comes to deal effectively with a new environment” (p. 44). Operant conditioning enhances some behaviors with the use of reinforcers and decreases others with the use of punishers. Social Stories assist students with dealing with the environment of kindergarten by increasing their knowledge of the situation and reminding them of the reinforcers which have previously been established through other strategies.

Behaviorist theory also states that “the conditions under which a person acquires behavior are relatively accessible and can often be manipulated” (Skinner, 1974, p. 49). In this way Social Stories assist the child with acquiring a desired behavior through the manipulation of the antecedent of the behavior. We develop our classrooms to be learning environments in which all students can learn and succeed. Social Stories are only one way in which this occurs.

**Educational Problem and the Goal of the Study**

The educational problem this study focused on is the limited research on the decision-making process teachers use when implementing Social Stories. In many studies, the researchers explain why they created the Social Story, but do not expand on conversations which took place during the creation or how they focused on the specific skill that they recognized for the Social Story. The goal of this study was to examine my planning and decision making processes when implementing Social Stories with children in an inclusive kindergarten classroom. In this study, I
have included the traditional information regarding behaviors we observed which indicated the need for a Social Story, how I targeted the behaviors and the antecedent that caused the behaviors as well as the external and internal factors I considered while writing or changing the Social Stories, decisions to discontinue the use of a Social Story, and decisions regarding when or when not to use a Social Story for a specific behavior. I used qualitative methods and dimensional analysis to examine this process.

The research on the planning process utilized when using Social Stories is important to me because I have dedicated the past four years to learning more about students with autism and strategies such as Social Stories to assist my students with social learning. This particular year, I did not have any students diagnosed with autism, but in kindergarten more than other grades, some students come to school with social needs. Through the literature, I have learned about the benefits of Social Stories to support students in my classroom. Carol Gray (2004) acknowledges that Social Stories relieve anxiety and help children learn the social cues of others by giving the child information regarding the situation. This study has helped me enhance and reflect on my social skills teaching practices while deepening my understanding of my decision making processes.

In addition to the importance this study holds for me, it is also important to the research community. There are few studies on the teaching methods and planning processes used when implementing Social Stories especially while utilizing action research. This study adds to the literature in the area of Social Stories by examining the planning process of incorporating Social Stories to assist with behavior management through action research methodology.
Research Questions and Methodology

This study examines one overarching research question and three sub questions. The overarching research question is how do I, as a general education teacher, implement the use of Social Stories with students in an inclusive kindergarten classroom? The sub questions are as follows:

1) What information do I use to make decisions when using Social Stories?

2) What external and internal factors do I consider when…
   a) writing and changing Social Stories?
   b) discontinuing the use of a Social Story?

3) How do I decide when, or when not, to use Social Stories?

I used three methods of data collection: interviews, researcher’s journal, and planning sessions. I interviewed the parents for background knowledge regarding the child’s strengths, motivators and challenges. The interview contributed to the background knowledge necessary to begin Social Stories at the onset of the school year as well as information for future Social Stories. In addition, a researcher’s journal was used to document my thinking process as well as any anecdotal notes made while planning and teaching. I utilized the journal to reflect on my planning in conjunction with the action research cycles which I will describe later in this chapter as well as in chapter three. The third method of data collection is audio-recorded planning sessions with the special education consultant teacher and two classroom aides assigned to the classroom. I transcribed all data being sure to remove all identifying information. I analyzed the transcripts using dimensional analysis for themes and information regarding my planning and decision making process.
Action research methodology

Action research is “a reflective process … that is deliberately and systematically undertaken and generally requires that some form of evidence be presented to support assertions” (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007, p. 2). The action research process is very involved and requires a significant amount of attention. Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) articulate an action research cycle for researchers to follow when conducting this form of research. See Figure 1 in appendix A. The cycle begins with a planning stage to arrange the events of the study. The second step is acting on the plan while observing the study participants and recording data. The final step in the cycle is reflecting. As the final step is implemented, the researcher begins the planning stage again making any necessary changes.

In addition to the cycle of action research, there are many ways to position myself as the researcher. Herr and Anderson (2005) consider my type of status as an insider in action research. As I will describe further in the study context. I am currently teaching in the district where the research occurred; therefore, I am considered an insider. Additionally, the study takes place in my kindergarten classroom with the students enrolled in my class and the aides and special education consultant teacher who were assigned to my classroom. This positions me to understand all aspects of events in the classroom while remaining involved with all decisions and planning that are required.

Overview of the Study Design and Participants

The study took place in a kindergarten classroom in the Friarville Primary School (pseudonym to protect the identity of the participants). The study participants included two children in kindergarten, the children’s parents, two classroom aides and a consultant teacher who were assigned to the classroom and me as the classroom teacher and facilitator of the study.
The Friarville Primary School enrolls 596 students ranging from pre-kindergarten to first grade. I am currently a kindergarten teacher in the school and have been employed by the district for the past five years. Four of the five years consisted of working in an inclusive classroom with students who are both typically developing and students with disabilities.

The study was conducted during a twelve week time period which consisted of eight total planning sessions. Three planning sessions were held with the special education consultant teacher and five were held with the two classroom aides. Information regarding student behaviors, antecedents of the behaviors and strategies to assist the children were discussed during this time.

**Preview of Study Findings**

This action research study took place in the fall of 2010 and lasted twelve weeks. The participants were two children who were enrolled in this class and three colleagues who worked regularly with the children. The study assisted my understanding of the planning processes which I undergo when utilizing Social Stories. I reflected on the information I use to making decisions when using Social Stories, the factors I consider when writing or changing Social Stories and when discontinuing the use of Social Stories. Additionally, I examined the process of deciding when or when not to use Social Stories.

I found that the use of planning sessions to identify the behaviors and needs of the children was crucial to the creation of the Social Stories and assisted with how we approached strategies and tasks in the classroom. Working with colleagues to discuss behaviors, develop charts to track behaviors and conduct a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) was a tremendous benefit when creating Social Stories because we were able to discover the underlying issues which caused the undesired behaviors. My colleagues were essential to the
planning process as they contributed valuable information about the behaviors and were able to acknowledge antecedents I may not have considered.

Additionally, I found that the parent interview which I created for the purpose of this study, was very useful in discovering antecedents which are difficult to recognize in a short period of time in the classroom and to discover interests and motivators for the children. Discovering that a child is fearful of crowds and may display undesired behaviors to avoid the crowd was very helpful for one of the children in the study.

As a result of this study, I have developed a parent survey which will be implemented in subsequent years to receive valuable information regarding each student rather than only a select few. This survey will provide me with information regarding interests of the children, learning style, social struggles as well as social benefits, stressors of the children and strategies which have worked for the parents at home which may assist me in school.

**Contributions to the Research Field**

This study includes the use of Social Stories with children in an inclusive classroom. Although Social Stories are becoming more prevalent, there are still many people who are not familiar with their use outside the area of students with autism. This study will add to the research on the use of Social Stories with children who are not diagnosed with autism. Additionally, many research studies available on the use of Social Stories discuss the effectiveness of the Story rather than the planning process. This study elaborates on the planning and decision making process involved with the use of Social Stories.

**Organization of this Dissertation**

This dissertation is arranged in six chapters. Chapter one described background information on autism and Social Stories. The chapter also described the educational problem I
addressed while conducting the research and the theoretical framework I used while planning and analyzing this study. In addition, I stated the research question and sub questions I answered while conducting the research and a description of the action research methodology which I used to conduct the research. An overview of the study and participants were included as well as a preview of the study findings. Finally, I ended the chapter with contributions in which I anticipate from conducting the action research dissertation.

Chapter two consists of a detailed literature review on action research methodology as well as a more detailed explanation of the theoretical framework of sociocultural theory, behaviorist theory and the influence of disability studies used to frame and analyze the study. The final section in chapter two describes the educational problem and how Social Stories are utilized in this study.

Chapter three refers to the action research methodology as it pertains to this study. In addition, I describe the context of the research location and the participants involved. The overall design of the study in addition to the recruitment of participants are also included in chapter three. The action research cycles and the mini cycles are explained in order to elaborate on the process which occurred. Finally, the chapter concludes with information on data collection and analysis used for this study.

Chapter four details the analysis and findings which took place at the conclusion of data collection. I begin the chapter by answering the three sub questions of the study. Each sub question is answered in detail and findings for each child are explained separately when needed. In addition, I explained the overall findings which encompass the sub questions. I conclude this chapter with an explanation of the unexpected findings which I found as a result of the data
collection. I determined the unexpected findings to be instrumental to my teaching practices for future years and deemed them equally as important as the questions I posed to answer.

Chapter five is dedicated to the process of action research and how this process would continue if I were to continue the next cycle. In this section, I illustrate the next stage of the action research cycle if this study were to enter the next phase. I describe the alternative strategies I would implement as well as the new questions I would answer.

In chapter six, I highlight the findings of the study and describe the limitations of this research. In addition, I include the actions taken as a result of the study and implications of the research. This chapter is used to conclude the dissertation and highlight any suggestions for future study.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

Children enter kindergarten with varying experiences and academic skills. In order to meet the needs of all the children, teachers are required to differentiate lessons and teach social skills at each child’s level. Meeting the children at their level assists to maintain growth. As Hatch (2005) describes, “operating kindergarten as if all children bring the same experiences, strengths and needs to school is a mistake” (p. 4). Each child is unique, and we must work hard to understand his or her strengths and needs socially as well as academically in order to benefit the child.

Teachers utilize multiple strategies to accomplish this task. Some of which they learn in pre-service teaching courses or professional development after entering the field of teaching. Either way, we are consistently searching for new ways to assist our students with academic and social goals. Hatch (2005) proposes “that kindergarten teachers use all of the tools at their disposal to create learning opportunities that improve the life changes of all the children they teach” (p.19). Students’ success relies on our willingness to learn and utilize multiple strategies to assist them with their goals.

As a general education teacher in an inclusive classroom, I discovered Social Stories to be one effective strategy to be used with students diagnosed with autism as well as typically developing children who require additional cues and visual reminders to assist with daily task and behavior intervention. Social Stories provide information about social situations and give the child strategies to help him or her make appropriate choices (Gray & Garand, 1993). Social
Stories are also utilized to develop and teach new skills such as initiating a conversation or stating needs and wants (Soenksen & Apler, 2006).

Planning for Social Stories is a process which I examined further for the purpose of the study. During the study, I examined my own practice as it pertains to the use of Social Stories and decisions I made while writing and implementing the strategy. As a general education teacher in an inclusive classroom, I examined how decisions were made during planning sessions and after reflecting on the observations of student interactions and social behaviors.

The literature review includes three sections. The first section focuses on literature related to the educational problem. I document the challenges that some children with autism face in the area of social interactions with peers and adults. This includes aspects of autism that represent challenges in the classroom, challenges with peers, and how social interactions may affect their ability to learn in school. Although the study did not include any children diagnosed with autism, it is important to understand the basis of which Social Stories were originally created.

The second section includes the theoretical frameworks in which I use to frame the educational problem. I explain the use of sociocultural theory and use a disability studies lens to expand my thinking. I describe sociocultural theory and its relation to the use of Social Stories. In addition, I reference the use of Vygotsky’s notion of the zone of proximal development with Social Stories and how Social Stories are a tool to be utilized for children who display undesired behaviors in the classroom. With a disability studies lens, I focus on how I think about and position my students, as well as how Social Stories provide the child with access to the classroom and learning opportunities. Additionally, I describe Social Stories from a behaviorist
theory perspective due to the nature of Social Stories as they assist with conditioning the child to understand the environment and change his or her behavior.

In the final section, I address the problem of how I as a general education teacher in an inclusive kindergarten classroom support socialization and provide instruction for students of all needs and diagnosis. I describe the research in this area as well as the gaps around the use of Social Stories in the classroom. In addition, I give a detailed description of the content of Social Stories and how they are used to assist children. Information regarding the benefits of Social Stories and research behind their use is also included. This literature review outlines the scholarly literature available in order to lay the framework for the study.

**Educational Problem**

Teachers acquire many strategies to assist their students with social needs including behavior management techniques and social skills curriculum. The use of Social Stories is one strategy I found to be beneficial during my teaching career to assist students who require visual cues to understand social situations.

Social Stories were originally created by Carol Gray to teach social skills to students with autism, but I found them to be beneficial for typically developing students as a way to assist them with behavior and social needs as well. The Social Story describes the behavior that is occurring and assists the child with understanding the situation while giving the child alternative behaviors or strategies. Carol Gray (2004) developed the guide on how to create Social Stories and when to use them, however there is limited scholarly research on the decision-making process teachers use when creating Social Stories, when making changes or when to end a Social Story and move on to a new Social Story.
Many authors study the use of Social Stories and their effectiveness rather than the planning process. Therefore they did not require an elaboration on the planning process for their studies. Additionally, these studies only used one Social Story as the intervention and did not require information regarding decisions on when to end a Social Story and changes that were required for the current Social Stories. I value the studies which have taken place and have been influenced by their results. Some examples of studies which use Social Stories but do not explicitly explain this process are conducted by Chan and O’Reilly (2008), Delano and Snell (2006) and Scattone, Tingstrom and Wilczynski (2006).

Chan and O’Reilly (2008) conducted a research study titled *A Social Story Intervention Package for Students with Autism in Inclusion Classroom Settings*. The purpose of the study was to “examine the use of a Social Stories intervention package on the social communication behaviors of two students with autism” (p. 405). Chan and O’Reilly (2008) describe the participants, settings and target behaviors in the methods section of the study; however, information regarding how they discovered the target behaviors and how they planned for the creation of the social stories was missing. Although this information is missing, the authors described the study in detail including baseline information, the social story intervention package and the follow up procedures. The missing information did not affect the results as the purpose was to examine the intervention.

Delano and Snell (2006) conducted a study titled, *The Effects of Social Stories on the Social Engagement of Children with Autism*. The purpose of this study was “to evaluate the effects of Social Stories on the duration of appropriate social engagement in three children with autism” (p. 30). Delano and Snell established general criteria from which the students would be identified in order to participate in the study. They determined the subjects for this study based
on teacher recommendation and the teachers reported what they determined to be the children’s needs. No indication of how the teachers determined those needs was given. The authors continue to discuss that they conducted an informal assessment of the children in the study, not to determine target behaviors, but rather to determine preferred play activities for the study. The Social Stories were not changed during the time of the study. Instead, a detailed explanation of the dependent measures, experimental design and the procedures are given. The analysis of the study measured the effectiveness of the Social Stories and conclusions were made to reflect that effectiveness.

Scattone, Tingstrom and Wilcynski (2006) studied Increasing Appropriate Social Interactions of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders Using Social Stories. The “study was designed to evaluate the effectiveness of Social Stories in increasing the appropriate social interactions of children with ASD [Autism Spectrum Disorder] toward peers when used without other systematic behavioral interventions” (p. 212). Similar to the previous authors, Scattone, Tingstrom and Wilcynski (2006) do not elaborate on the target behaviors and how they were discovered. They list the capabilities and needs of the children as described by the teachers and the parents of the children. One additional piece of information this study provides that the other two did not is an explanation of the Social Stories used in the study. They explain that the first author created the Social Stories and the third author reviewed the Social Stories to ensure they adhered to the guidelines developed by Carol Gray (1998). Additionally, they provided the social stories in the appendix. Although this planning information is minimal, the authors give a detailed explanation of the design of the study using a multiple baseline design and the procedure for this implementation. Similar to the other two studies, there was not a need to explain the
process of the Social Stories. The goal of the study was to look at the effectiveness rather than the process.

As described, many studies which use Social Stories address the use of Social Stories to assist children with daily social skills rather than the planning process used prior to and during their use. Although a significant amount of information is supplied, I have yet to see research that purposely addresses the collaborative planning and implementation process utilized when creating and implementing Social Stories.

**Theoretical Framework**

While sociocultural theory lends itself to the research of how teachers make decisions about Social Stories and behaviorist theory reflects the underlying goal to change child’s behavior, my teaching philosophy is also heavily influenced by disability studies. Both disability studies and sociocultural theory assisted with the evaluation of the process of planning sessions which revolved around the use of Social Stories.

**Disability studies influence.**

Historically, students with disabilities have been viewed as needing to be corrected or fixed. They were given a label and “othered” in the sense that people believed they were not capable of completing the same tasks as their typically developing peers (Reid & Knight, 2006). From a larger perspective, society has also oppressed people with disabilities in the movies, literature, and newspapers, therefore creating the stigma that people with disabilities are vulnerable, dependent on others, and have little control of their lives. People with disabilities are often viewed as having a struggle with which they must overcome or cure in order to be successful. They must “overcome” their disability (Ferri, Connor, Solis, Valle, & Volpitta, 2005).
Disability studies in education (DSE) is conceptualized in a way to assist educators with teaching practices in inclusive classrooms. Baglieri and Knopf (2004) state “the goal of DSE scholars is to eliminate social, cultural, and political barriers that prevent access to employment, academic, recreational, and residential opportunities afforded to those without the variations that society labels as impairments” (p. 525). By adhering to this goal, we are allowing all people to attain equal opportunities. DSE scholars are against “educational practices related to normalizing, labeling, and categorizing individuals” (p. 525) with disabilities.

**Normalizing**

Disability studies theorists express that “differences are pervasive, ordinary, and acceptable” (Baglieri & Knopf, 2004, p. 526). There is not a need to normalize children who are different in order to make them fit into our categories of normal. In an inclusion classroom, students are able to work together regardless of disability and learn to recognize each other as contributors to each other’s education. As teachers we must assist our students in order to prevent them from seeing differences as negative. One way of assisting with this is by removing labels from our discussions about children.

**Labeling.**

A child’s identities, and the way he or she is perceived, are also large concerns of mine. Disability studies has influenced my thinking in the area of identity due to the oppressive act of naming. Using a disability to identify a child dehumanizes the child and acknowledges the disability rather than the child and the child’s assets (Diedrich, 2005). People with disabilities are identified and labeled at an early age in order to receive services and aid; however, this is unnecessary if we differentiate based on children’s needs and give every child the assistance he or she needs regardless of labels. Disability studies theorists look at this as an oppressive act due
to the stigma which is attached to the label. Children deserve the services and assistance in which they need to be successful regardless of the identification of a disability.

Instead of focusing on the label given to the child, I focus my attention on creating an environment equal for everyone in the classroom. My goal is not to diagnose a child in order to assist them with social or behavioral needs, but rather to assist the child with his or her understanding of the social situation in order to help him or her learn and maintain friendships with peers. “Social competence and continuity of peer relations, as well as the degree of support that a child receives from teachers, parents, and especially classmate, are all important influences on the child’s success in school” (Johnson, Ironsmith, Snow & Poteat, 2000, p. 209). As educators, we must understand how all aspects of the child’s interactions affect the child.

Although children must receive a label to receive services inside and outside the classroom, there is a stigma attached to the label which may inhibit the child from receiving the best possible instruction. Connor (2005) clarifies this concept: “When students are unable to meet predetermined standards due to the absence of certain abilities, the label is conferred” (p. 160). By labeling and continuously identifying what children cannot do, we as educators face the risk of students’ taking on the role the school has created for them and not working to their full potential (Connor, 2005). It is the job of the educator to maintain high expectations for all their children to prevent students from giving up on themselves.

Addressing the needs of our students.

Connor (2005) also references the deficit-driven lens. By referencing what children cannot do rather than what they can do, school systems are doing the children a disservice. Disability studies postulates that our curriculum should not be deficit driven. We need to address the needs of our students, as well as enhance our curriculum with the activities our children are
most successful with. Children have so much to offer teachers and their peers in the class; we must be open to new ideas and ways of teaching (Reid & Knight, 2006).

Social Stories are personalized to the child and use the child’s strengths with visual cues to assist the child. Thiemann and Goldstein (2001) acknowledge that a key strength for children with autism is their ability to understand directions and information with visual cues. This is also true for most kindergarten children. Visual aids are a resource many primary school teachers use to assist with daily teaching and social assistance. Pictures and visual schedules are used consistently to assist with everyday tasks and routines. By incorporating a child’s strengths into our teaching practices, we will more adequately meet the needs of our students.

Influences on my research.

Disability studies has impacted my thoughts on research in many ways. It is an appropriate lens for this study as I am not attempting to diagnose any children in order to assist their needs. I am simply observing behaviors and antecedents which are occurring and which may distract children from learning. In addition, I am giving the children replacement behaviors to assist them with daily routines. I acknowledge that all children in the classroom have a voice and power and my goal is to assist them in order to succeed. I position my students at the center of my thinking, and my planning revolves around their needs and accomplishments. I must alter the classroom environment to assist the child. I also include the child in the decision making process and maintain high, but reasonable, expectations for the child. As such, I agree with Palmeri’s (2006) view:

Rejecting the conventional medical model of disability that focuses on rehabilitating individuals with disabilities so that they can fit into an ableist society, disability studies theorists proffer a social/political model of disability that foregrounds the need to adapt
social discourses and material environments to ensure equal participation for citizens of diverse ability. (pp. 49-50)

With this in mind, the use of Social Stories is used to assist the child in understanding what is happening around him or her, and therefore help the child to feel more comfortable and less anxious about his or her environment. In addition, I as the teacher am reflecting on my practices in order to exhibit change in my teaching as well as my classroom environment to adapt to the needs of the child.

Disability studies specifically identifies the need to “equalize the playing field” for people with disabilities. The disability studies lens is used to look at and work against exclusion and promote inclusion for all students. The Social Story gives all children access to, and the resources needed, to understand the social environment and therefore assist children with cooperative relationships. I believe all children should be met at their own levels and given the tools they need to succeed. We should not make the child fit the mold of our classroom, but rather have our classrooms fit the child. By doing this, we are giving the child the ability to succeed at his or her level.

With the use of disability studies and my views on naming and positioning my students as the center of my planning, I have created a better understanding of how my study in the area of planning, implementing and evaluating with the use of Social Stories impacts my teaching as well as the learning of my students. I consistently review the needs of my students to plan and implement new strategies and use this information while evaluating the effectiveness of the current strategy to ensure the needs of the students are met.
Sociocultural theory.

In addition to the disability studies influence, sociocultural theory has impacted my thinking and research. Wang (2006) describes sociocultural theory by stating, “Sociocultural learning theories take a learning-centered approach.” It uses “the roles that social relations, community, and culture play in cognition and learning” (p. 151). This caught my attention due to the continuous social interactions that take place in a kindergarten classroom. I desired a better understanding of how the social relationships of my students impacted their learning and how a lack of social understanding may affect my students.

Sociocultural theory relies on the work of Lev Vygotsky (Wang, 2006). Vygotsky (1978) states “Learning and development are interrelated from the child’s very first day of life” (p. 32). The work of Lev Vygotsky is centered on learning and the development of children. Vygotsky (1978) explains that learning occurs in a multitude of ways. Children learn by creating meaning from social events as well as by “imitating adults and through being instructed about how to act” (p. 32). In this way, our every day experiences are the basis for our learning and development.

Additionally, Vygotsky (1978) acknowledges that our learning occurs in conjunction with our developmental level; however, the developmental process does not work parallel with the learning process. We can push children to learn as their developmental age is maturing. As educators, we can bring children to the zone of proximal development. “The zone of proximal development defines those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in an embryonic state” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 33). When teaching, we must recognize the skills the children have, the skills they need, and determine how we can instruct them at the level that is just beyond their immediate knowledge.
Zone of proximal development.

Vygotsky (1978) defines the zone of proximal development as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 33). This definition reiterates the need to push students to their potential development with individualized instruction. As educators, we are better able to understand the development of our students with the incorporation of individualized instruction through differentiated lessons. The disability studies theorists acknowledge that teachers must “create curricula based on where the students are” (Baglieri & Knopf, 2004, p. 527) rather than where we are comfortable teaching them. For this study, I used my disability studies view, sociocultural theory and the knowledge of the zone of proximal development to administer Social Stories with children in my inclusive kindergarten classroom.

Sociocultural theory and the use of Social Stories.

This study on the process of using Social Stories in an inclusive kindergarten classroom characterizes how and why I make decisions regarding the use of Social Stories and how those decisions impact the planning process. The students are the forefront of my thinking during the planning process and I use my observations and knowledge to meet the needs of the children. By giving the children the skills and opportunities to interact with peers and adults, we are giving them the necessary abilities and resources to learn.

A child’s personal experiences and motivators are incorporated into the instruction. I conducted an interview with the parents prior to beginning the Social Story intervention with one child and shortly after starting the intervention with the second child to determine the children’s interests and motivators. By incorporating the interests of the child, the child is able to build on
prior experiences and relate to the Social Story; therefore, creating a common ground between
the child and the teacher (Bonk & King, 1998). In addition I learned helpful tips from the
parents as to what was helpful in the past when their child had difficulty. Using the children’s
past experiences helped me to make planning decisions and incorporate motivational activities
into my lessons.

Sociocultural theory has reinforced my beliefs on teaching and learning. I believe
children learn by interacting with their peers and by developing relationships. In this way, I
reviewed the planning sessions with my colleagues to ensure the instruction with the use of
Social Stories was beneficial to the students and addressing the children’s social learning needs.
Social Stories are geared toward helping the child understand the social scripts of others and
therefore, assist with interactions occurring with others and promote learning through social
interactions.

The Social Stories became the mediating tool for socialization in the classroom and
assisted with bringing the children to their zone of proximal development. Vygotsky (1978)
states “Children can imitate a variety of actions that go well beyond the limits of their own
capabilities. Using imitation, children are capable of doing much more in collective activity or
under the guidance of adults” (p. 34). By creating Social Stories to assist the children with
understanding their surroundings and acknowledging replacement skills to assist the child, I
consciously brought the children to their zone of proximal development and provided them with
imitation opportunities. I assisted them with skills in which they were struggling with prior to the
Social Story. They were able to learn with some assistance and imitation skills which were
provided in the Social Story.
Social Stories assist with the interactions in the environment and allow the child to internalize the skill and use it in similar situations. Vygotsky (1978) elaborates on this further. We propose that an essential feature of learning is that it creates the zone of proximal development; that is, learning awakens a variety of internal development processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers. Once these processes are internalized, they become part of the child’s independent developmental achievement. (p. 35)

In this way, the Social Story is the mediating tool in which the child utilizes in conjunction with the teacher to “awaken” the skills utilized when interacting with peers and adults. The child then has the opportunity to internalize the new skills and relieve his or her anxiety in the classroom.

Both disabilities studies theory and sociocultural theory have informed my thought processes when thinking about the research topic and my teaching. Although I have used Social Stories while positioning myself from a sociocultural perspective, they originate from behaviorist theory with the notion of altering the child’s behavior to meet the child’s needs.

**Behaviorist theory.**

Behaviorist theory is heavily influenced by the work of B.F. Skinner. He connects behaviorist theory to operant conditioning and the use of reinforcers and punishers to assist with shaping a behavior (Skinner, 1974). He acknowledges that our environment plays a large role in our behavior. A person “acquires a repertoire of behavior under the contingencies of reinforcement to which it is exposed during a lifetime” (Skinner, 1974, p. 228). The behaviors we exhibit are influenced by our experiences. In this way, Social Stories assist with influencing our behaviors, especially in areas which we have not had formal teaching such as social skills.
Social Stories guide the child to understand his or her environment and social situation. Additionally, I incorporate a reminder of the child’s reward system into the Social Story to assist with the child’s motivation to perform the desired behavior. The Social Story and the reward are considered a stimulus for the desired behavior. Skinner (1974) explains the stimulus response relationship by stating:

Stimuli do not elicit operant responses; they simply modify the probability that responses will be emitted. They do so because of the contingencies of reinforcement in which they have played a part, and they may act in combination with other conditions, possibly but not necessarily to the point at which a response occurs. (p. 245)

The Social Story assists with explaining the situation, guiding the child with replacement behaviors and reminding the child of a reward that will be elicited if the desired behavior is performed.

Skinner (1974) explains how reinforcers assist behaviors. “It is commonly said that a thing is reinforcing because it feels, looks, sounds, smells or tastes good” (p. 52). The reinforcers are elicited at the end of the Social Story to remind the child of his reward system if the desired behavior was performed. Although the extrinsic rewards are not ideal, they are helpful when assisting young children who have not yet developed intrinsic rewards.

For this study, two types of reinforcers were discovered. Extrinsic reinforcers were discussed during the parent interviews and unknown reinforcers were discovered through the Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA). The parents were asked what motivates their child and responses regarding rewards were given. This was beneficial for the study as it became time to create behavior systems and incorporate the rewards into the Social Story. Skinner (1974) explains “it is sometimes possible to discover what reinforces a person simply by asking him
what he [sic] likes or how he [sic] feels about things” (p. 53). Traditionally, the teacher creates a FBA to determine the antecedent for the behavior and the consequence which reinforces the behavior. This was also created to acknowledge common reinforcers such as a need for attention or avoidance of a task when deciding the exact skill or need to address with the Social Story.

Although I use a sociocultural perspective and a disability studies lens to use Social Stories, they originate from a behaviorist theory due to way in which the Story assists in changing the child’s behavior. The Social Story becomes the stimulus and the response is the desired behavior.

Addressing the Problem

It is important to provide context in regards to Social Stories literature. Social Story are used to help children with autism understand the social scripts of others; however, as mentioned previously in this chapter, there are limited studies conducted on the use of Social Stories (Thiemann & Goldstein, 2001). “A Social Story describes social situations in terms of relevant social cues and identifies appropriate responses for individual students” (Hagiwara & Myles, 1999, p.82). Carol Gray developed this strategy to help children with autism feel less anxiety in inclusive classrooms (Gray & Garand, 1993). Some of the behaviors typically addressed through the use of Social Stories are: coping skills, talking out, hand washing, staying on task, social skills, communication, bedtime routines, mealtime skills, anxiety, reducing aggressive behaviors, shouting, and new routines (Graetz et al., 2009).

As mentioned earlier, only a small amount of research is available on the use of Social Stories in the classroom and even less on the implementation process of Social Stories. Many research studies on the use of Social Stories demonstrate positive results; however, in most
studies the researchers identified their limitations and explained that their results were inconclusive due to other factors that were present during the intervention such as additional strategies which continued to take place other than Social Stories, attendance and maturation of the students (Thiemann & Goldstein, 2001). Due to the nature of this action research study, I am not evaluating the effectiveness of Social Stories, but rather examining the planning process which takes place while incorporating Social Stories as a mediating tool in an inclusive classroom. For this reason, I did not rely solely on the use of Social Stories, but rather incorporated additional strategies which I have found to be successful through my experiences as an elementary school teacher. The additional strategies will be explained further during the analysis of the study.

Gray (1998) gives some guidance to the implementation of Social Stories. She explains the importance of looking at the child’s needs and individual learning styles prior to creating a Social Story for the child.

Understanding the learning style of individuals with [High functioning autism/Asperger’s Syndrom] HFA/AS lays the foundation for further modifications based on individual student needs and abilities. Each Social Story and Comic Strip Conversations presents social information using a written style, vocabulary, format, materials, and instructional techniques individually tailored to maximize student success. (p. 170)

Although Gray (1998) discusses this much needed guidance, she does not mention the need to reevaluate the Social Story throughout the implementation or give advice on when to move on to a different skill. Researchers have created their own timeline of finalizing the Social Stories depending on the length of their study and the fading phase they incorporate into the study.
In addition, Gray and Garand (1993) indicate the purposes for Social Stories. They state that Social Stories are beneficial when including children with autism into the general education class, introducing changes in routines, teaching procedures, explaining the behaviors of others, and when teaching social skills. Due to the nature of this study, only the uses which pertain to the general population of kindergarten children are explained further in the paragraph that follows.

**Uses for Social Stories.**

Although the original criterion for participation in this study was the presence of characteristics displayed by children diagnosed with autism, this was no longer identified as the study progressed. For the purpose of this study, the identification of disabilities was unnecessary and Social Stories were used with any child who demonstrated a need for visual reminders to assist with behavioral or social needs. Therefore, examples of Social Stories which may be used for the general kindergarten population are the introduction of changes in routines, teaching of procedures, and the teaching of social skills.

Changes in routine may be as simple as what will occur during a fire drill, the description of a planned field trip or what happens when we have a substitute teacher. The Social Story is introduced prior to the event to teach the child what will occur and strategies for the child to utilize in case he or she begins to feel anxious about the situation.

The teaching of procedures revolves around the steps needed to accomplish a task. Some procedures I have used are hand washing, raising ones hand for attention, and getting ready to leave school at the end of the day. The step by step description of how the task is completed relieves the anxiety of what to do next.

The third purpose of Social Stories mentioned above is the teaching of social skills. This ranges from initiating a conversation with peers to asking for a hug rather than grabbing people.
The purpose of Social Stories varies depending on the needs of the child, but continues to be centralized around the use of visual cues to assist with processing desired skills. When writing a Social Story, the author must understand what the child is seeing, hearing and feeling during the target situation and the story must be at the comprehension level of the child (Gray & Garand 1993).

**Context of Social Stories.**

According to Gray and Garand (1993) Social Stories are best used with higher functioning children with autism who possess language skills. Due to this fact, many typically developing children fit this criterion and may benefit from the use of Social Stories. Social Stories are a helpful tool when assisting children in the learning of school routines and teaching of replacement strategies for undesired behaviors. Gray and Garand (1993) indicate that Social Stories have been used with children in elementary and secondary school and the stories may be modified from the original use to meet the needs of the students. Although the writing and reading of Social Stories was not modified for this study, the Social Stories were used with the general population rather than solely with children diagnosed with autism.

**Evolution of Social Stories.**

Reynhout and Carter (2006) acknowledge that Social Stories have evolved from Gray and Garand’s (1993) first recommendation to their current structure. When Gray originally created Social Stories, she recommended omitting pictures with Social Stories due to their distracting nature; however, her more recent work suggests the use of pictures may be beneficial due to the need for visual supports (Reynhout & Carter, 2006). An additional change to the structure of Social Stories includes the types of sentences utilized. The original Social Stories consisted of three types of sentences: descriptive, directive, and perspective. There are currently six types of
sentences in a Social Story: descriptive, directive, perspective, affirmative, cooperative and control. “A Social Story always contains descriptive sentences, with an option to include any one or more of the five remaining sentence types” (Gray, 2004, p. 6). For the purpose of this study, only four types of sentences were used: descriptive, directive, perspective, and affirmative. Descriptions of each of these sentences, as well as examples, are given in the next few paragraphs.

Social Story sentences and examples.

Graetz and colleagues (2009) provided examples of the Social Stories used in their study using the original three sentence format. The first type of sentence is the descriptive sentence. This type of sentence is generally stated using multiple simple sentences. These sentences “describe the social situation in terms of relevant social cues” (Reynhout & Carter, 2006, p. 445): “My name is Ronnie and I go to Lawrence Middle School. Every day we have P.E.” (Graetz, et al., 2009, p. 95). The next few sentences are the directive sentences. These sentences give the child the appropriate behaviors needed to be successful (Reynhout & Carter, 2006): “Everyone stands up. Everyone plays. I will stand up. I will play” (Graetz, et al., 2009, pp. 95-96). The third type of sentence is the perspective sentence. This sentence tells the child how others are feeling or their responses (Reynhout & Carter, 2006). “It makes my teachers and friends happy when I stand up and play” (Graetz et al., 2009). The fourth sentence, the affirmative sentence, “enhances the meaning of surrounding statements, often expressing commonly shared value or opinion within a given culture” (Gray, 2004, p. 8). The affirmative sentence immediately follows one of the first three sentences to either “stress an important point, refer to a law or rule, or reassure” (Gray, 2004, p. 8). Two examples of an affirmative sentences from Gray (2004) are “This is a good idea” (p. 8) or “This is very important” (p.8). The sentence affirms that it is a
good idea to stand up and play with his or her classmates during physical education or that it is very important to participate in physical education with his or her classmates.

There are many aspects to consider when writing a Social Story for a child. First, the child’s perspective must be taken into consideration. “The author must adopt and maintain the perspective of the child for whom the story is written” (Reynhout & Carter, 2006, p. 446). This occurs by knowing what motivates the child as well as what the child needs in order to be successful when reading and understanding a story. Second is the way the sentences are written. The sentences must be stated in positive terms designating what the child should do rather than what the child should not do to prevent any misunderstanding (Gray & Garand, 1993). Third, as stated before, the child’s reading level must be considered. The reading level is one reason that picture cues are used with Social Stories of children in primary grades or non-readers in older grades (Gray, 2004).

Although Social Stories were developed with guidelines and structure, and mainly for children with autism, I have found Social Stories to be beneficial for typically developing children who require a more visual method of teaching and behavior modifications. By determining the needs of the child and visually acknowledging those needs while providing replacement behaviors, the child recognizes what is required of them in order to achieve the reward he or she desires.

Conclusion

With the diversity and vast needs of children in kindergarten, teachers must remain informed of strategies and interventions available to assist children with social and academic needs (Hatch, 2005). One social intervention available is the use of Social Stories (Gray, 2004). Although Social Stories are typically utilized with children diagnosed with autism, they may be
attempted with typically developing children as well. This literature review illustrates the educational problem of the limited amount of research on how teachers make decisions when implementing Social Stories.

I use a disability studies influence and a sociocultural theory lens to view my teaching practices and planning process while elaborating on the behaviorist theory in which Social Stories originate. I incorporate time into the daily schedule to allow children to work collaboratively and share ideas. I also view all of the students as having something to offer the other students. I have high expectations for all of the students while giving them the resources needed to succeed. The disability studies influence and sociocultural theory lens have allowed me to express myself during the research process and assisted with my reflection on observations in the classroom.

In order to address the problem, it was required that I remained prepared with educational strategies and remained open to the advice of my colleagues. Close observation of student needs and behaviors were recorded and discussions were evaluated. Decisions around Social Stories were specific and addressed the needs of the children as well as the antecedents which caused the behaviors. The use of Social Stories is only one way to assist with teaching social skills. I have found this strategy to be beneficial, and established the use of Social Stories as a teaching strategy and visit how I make decisions around the use of this strategy.

The next chapter will describe the methodology and design of the study. I discuss action research as a methodology and the challenges which are associated with its use. Additionally, I discuss the impact of action research and my role in the study. I give details about the process I used and how this study relates to action research methods. The study context and overall design of the study are included to elaborate on the location of the study. I included information
regarding the larger action research cycle and the mini cycles which occurred during the observation cycle of the larger study. Additionally, the participants are described and information regarding the recruitment of the participants is given. Data collection methods and analysis are described as well. Dimensional analysis is introduced along with how it was used for this study.
Chapter 3
Methodology

Introduction

Students enter kindergarten with various cognitive and social abilities. Some are reading and writing while others are learning to recognize their name. Others are playing cooperatively while some struggle with initiating a conversation. Due to the child’s age and “wide variations in their development” (Edwards, 2002, p. 48) it is difficult to know if the child may have a disability, or just need guidance and formal strategies to aide in this difference. Teachers may use academic strategies as well as social strategies, such as Social Stories, to differentiate instruction for each child. Although Social Stories are typically used with students with autism, I have found them to be beneficial for children who may require assistance with social situations. The dilemma, however, is that there is a limited amount of research on Social Stories as a social intervention for all students (Graetz et al., 2009; Sansosti & Powell-Smith, 2006).

This chapter describes action research methodology as it pertains to this study, the context of the study, as well as the study design. A description of the action research cycle which encompasses this study, as well as the mini cycles which occur during the observing phase, are outlined. In addition, I explain how participants were recruited and my basis for that recruitment. Finally, I describe the data collection methods and use of dimensional analysis to analyze the data.

The purpose of this study was to examine my practice as I used Social Stories in an inclusive kindergarten classroom. My overarching question for the study is how do I, as a general education teacher, implement the use of Social Stories with students in an inclusive kindergarten classroom? The sub questions for the study are as follows:
1) What information do I use to make decisions when using Social Stories?

2) What external and internal factors do I consider when…
   a) writing and changing Social Stories?
   b) discontinuing the use of a Social Story?

3) How do I decide when, or when not, to use Social Stories?

These questions were designed to assist with the examination of planning and implementation process of Social Stories when working with children in my classroom who demonstrate a social or behavioral need. Action research is the chosen methodology for this study.

**Action Research Methodology**

When using action research, researchers explore their own practices and incorporate individuals who previously were thought of as colleagues into the study as researchers. They reflect on their practice to instill change. Researchers involving themselves with the action research process may encounter issues with the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The challenges with IRB will be further explained next in this chapter. Researchers also require an awareness of the impact of an action research study, cycles of action research, and the pros and cons of being an insider in the action research process with other insiders. These topics will be further explained in this chapter.

**Challenges with IRB.**

Although action research was recently recognized as a valid form of research in the wider research community, educators have found it to be informative prior to this acknowledgement (Herr & Anderson, 2005). According to Herr and Anderson (2005), action research is difficult for traditional Institutional Review Boards and researchers to understand due to the way action
research is conducted. “IRBs are confused about risk factors in a setting in which research
subjects are participants in the research at the same time that they are, often, subordinates within
the organizational settings” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 1). Review boards are concerned for the
best interest of the participants and are cautious when it comes to allowing participants to be part
of the research process.

During the IRB process, I encountered minor setbacks. It was evident that action research
was an unfamiliar area for the review board and questioned my study on several occasions. I
received emails questioning my participants and their role in the study. One comment indicated
that I was the sole participant in the study and required the removal of all other participants from
my documentation. After many discussions and explanations, I was able to keep the students,
parents and colleagues as participants.

Impact of action research.

In action research, researchers investigate areas of interest they believe may be impacted
by additional information and take action to implement change. When a researcher is interested
in an area, they may begin to think about how they can impact the field with additional research
and data. The research may begin small, but has the possibility of expanding into many areas.
“Action researchers, then, should expect that their research questions will cut across and
introduce the possibilities for change on multiple levels” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 72). There
is a possibility of impacting many people and many situations within one environment. For
example, a teacher’s research may impact other educators, parents, paraprofessionals and
students due to their incorporation in the study. In turn, the participants may expand on the
research further based on their experience.
Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen (2007) give their perspective on the impact of action research. “Action research has the potential for empowerment and the inclusion of a greater diversity of voices in educational policy and social change” (p. 7). They continue to discuss the possibility of allowing the voices of people in the classroom to be heard. This includes teachers, aides, and students. This happens on a continuum where students and teachers interact to foster change and tackle future challenges.

I have experimented with Social Stories for the past four years and have found significant success. However, I had yet to study this in a systematic way. By conducting research in the area of the implementation process of Social Stories, I was able to involve my colleagues and collect a significant amount of data on my teaching practices as they pertain to Social Stories. We worked together to make decisions about strategies, Stories, and ways of implementing the Stories. In addition, I intend to make an impact in the school district by offering teacher in-service workshops to share the process of creating and implementing Social Stories. I believe many teachers will be interested in learning the process in order to make decisions and change their teaching practice to better meet the needs of their students.

The reflective process of action research is more than just a way to think about one’s teaching. It is a beginning step to implementing change. I used action research to explore my teaching and decision making, therefore answering my research questions was a personal task. I considered how and why I made decisions about Social Stories and reflected on the interactions which occurred with my students. I then interacted with my colleagues whom I worked closely with to identify and articulate the decision making practices in the classroom.
**Action research cycle.**

Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) have created an action research cycle in which researchers explore while implementing their research questions. There are different variations in the cycle (see Figure 1 in Appendix A), but they originate from the same premise. The first cycle begins with the researcher’s question which develops into a plan of action for implementation. The second stage is acting on that plan and observing what happens when the plan is implemented. It is essential to pay attention to details during the second stage and record all data. With participatory action research, a great deal of discussion must take place during the final stage of the cycle, reflecting. During the final stage, researchers discuss the data and make informed decisions for the following cycle. After the final stage, the researchers progress into the cyclical stage of planning again.

I worked collaboratively with my colleagues (i.e., consultant teacher and classroom aides) to plan, observe and reflect upon the implementation of Social Stories with the children. The action research study consisted of one large cycle with many mini cycles consisting of planning, acting/observing and reflecting. Each time we made a decision to start or stop a new Social Story, we began an additional mini cycle. The special education consultant teacher and I met for planning sessions on three separate occasions and the classroom aides and I met on five occasions, but changes were also made before and after meetings due to the changing nature of the children’s needs. Each child maintained different cycles due to their differing needs and some Social Stories were changed immediately after implementing due to a problem or need for a correction or clarification.

During the observation stage, my colleagues assisted with the implementation of the Social Stories as well as the data collection process. The special education consultant teacher and
classroom aides helped to make informed decisions about the Social Stories and the implementation of strategies. The decision making process was a collaborative effort, and all suggestions and comments from my colleagues were recorded and considered. I used a journal during the process to reflect further on our decisions after planning sessions as well as to reflect on daily activities and how behaviors changed throughout the process.

As I thought about my decision making process during the reflection stage, the journal assisted with making sense of everyone’s thinking process and the reasoning behind our decisions. The reflection occurred after I had the opportunity to contemplate our decisions at the end of each day. In conjunction with consistent communication, the reflection process was very beneficial to the research. It assisted with making decisions regarding new Social Stories or changing a Social Story we were currently using.

**Role of the researcher.**

The form of action research I conducted is referred to by Herr and Anderson (2005) as action research conducted by an insider in collaboration with other insiders. I worked with colleagues in an environment I am familiar with and participated in daily. I currently work in the district where I conducted the research, and I have worked with the same colleagues for the past four years. We have a bond and we trust each other’s decisions. We work collaboratively on a regular basis and make decisions together. The shift to conducting research together was an easy transition for all of us with the action research project.

Since the students in this study are also the students enrolled in my class, I had access to the research site daily as well. I had contact with the students as well as my colleagues regularly. The daily contact was advantageous when making decisions and interpreting what was observed in the classroom. There were at least two adults in the classroom all day and when the children
transitioned to lunch and special areas such as art, physical education, music and library, one of the classroom aides remained with them. We were able to observe and document the different interactions and situations that occurred throughout the day to make informed decisions during planning sessions. Progress and required changes were noted in journals and daily record charts to be used during discussions at planning sessions.

**Advantages and disadvantages to insider action research.**

Herr and Anderson (2005) identify many advantages and disadvantages to insider research in collaboration with other insiders. They indicate that this form of action research may have a greater impact on the setting in which the research takes place. I have the best interest of the students, and the district, in mind. Therefore, by presenting this information to my colleagues, they may discover an additional strategy to utilize with children in an inclusion classroom. The colleagues who participated in this study would also be able to speak on behalf of the evidence due to their participation in the observation process with me. This creates a more democratic environment in the district allowing us to plead our case through teacher in-services while also allowing other teachers to decide if Social Stories are something they would like to attempt.

One of the disadvantages mentioned by Herr and Anderson (2005) is the unequal power relations that naturally occur when working with colleagues. Although I consider all of my colleagues as equals, and we have worked collaboratively in the past, I am viewed as the leader in the classroom. My colleagues may have agreed with or went along with something I asked them to do due to the fact that I am seen as the decision maker in the classroom. I attempted to prevent this from happening by having open conversations with my colleagues and affirming them as an integral part of the decision making process. I continuously reassured my colleagues...
that their opinions and thoughts were important to me and the students. Additionally, I am not responsible for evaluating any of the colleagues in my classroom. The classroom aides are evaluated by the administrator which makes this relationship more of a collaborative effort than a supervisor demand.

**Context**

The study took place in a kindergarten classroom in a suburban public school district in the Northeastern United States. To protect the participants and the school district, I have developed a pseudonym for the school, the Friarville Central School District. The Friarville Central School District serves approximately 4300 students. In the district, 16% of students have an Individualized Education Program (IEP). An IEP is a written plan for students eligible for special education services. The Friarville Central School District serves 1% English Language Learners (ELL). ELL students are in the process of acquiring and learning English language skills (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

The gender breakdown of students at the Friarville Central School District consists of approximately 52% male and 48% female. The race and ethnicity of the participants reflects the breakdown of the Friarville School: 89.7% Caucasian, 4.7% African American, 2.9% Hispanic, 2.5% Asian/Pacific Islander and 0.2% American Indian/Alaska Native. The percentage of economically disadvantaged students is 31.5% (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

The primary school consists of the following grade levels: universal pre-kindergarten, kindergarten and first grade with an enrollment of 596 students in the building (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). I chose the Friarville School District due to my affiliation with the district. I am currently a kindergarten teacher in the district and have worked in an inclusion classroom with students with autism and other disabilities for the past four years. Due to my
affiliation with the school, I am an insider in this action research study. The study includes two children assigned to my kindergarten class (one with an IEP and one without), both mothers and fathers of each child, two classroom aides, and the special education consultant teacher. The classroom aides and special education consultant teacher work with the children on a daily basis in and outside of the classroom.

**Overall design**

Social Stories have typically been used with children with autism in an inclusive classroom (Gray, 1998), but there are times when other children who are not diagnosed with autism can benefit from the use of Social Stories. The educational issue that I am examining in this study is that there is limited research in the area of how teachers make decisions when using Social Stories.

Social Stories were used with two children who displayed a need for assistance with behavior, Michael and Peter (names have been changed to protect the identities of the subjects). Peter was the initial subject for the study and was chosen for recruitment based on information from his IEP. As mentioned earlier, he is not diagnosed with autism; however, his IEP describes specific behaviors and goals, such as difficulties with transitions and changes in routines, which are traditionally identified for children diagnosed with autism. Additionally, Peter’s parents identified him as a child with “some autism-like behaviors”. A detailed explanation of participant recruitment is described later in this chapter. An interview (Appendix B) with Peter’s parents occurred prior to the first day of school due to the early recognition of his needs from the pre-school teacher and his parents.

In addition, after the first month of school, Michael’s family was approached for recruitment due to the need for additional strategies to assist with behavioral needs we observed
in the classroom. Typical strategies such as a behavior chart with a reward system and the creation of a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) and ultimately a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) were utilized prior to the use of Social Stories for Michael, but it was evident that there was a need for additional visual reminders to assist him. After Michael’s parents agreed to have him participate in the study, I conducted an interview with them to establish a foundation of information about Michael as well.

I anticipated that the study would begin on the first full day of school when decisions for Social Stories begin. However, we had a great need in the classroom to address multiple behavioral issues with multiple students before focusing on the study. The behaviors displayed by Michael and a child who was not included in the study required my attention prior to the utilization of the first Social Story. Some behaviors consisted of hitting and kicking other children in the classroom, screaming and throwing items such as pencils, books and crayons, and kicking objects in the classroom such as tables, chairs, and cabinets.

The interview with Peter’s parents and informal discussions of Social Stories began on the first day of school, but Social Stories were not yet implemented. Discussions regarding the use of Social Stories for Michael began during week five; however, they were not tape recorded due to the delay in adding Michael to the study. The use of Social Stories is a common strategy in which I utilize for children who are displaying difficulty with behavior which results from a need to understand a social environment. During week six of the study, the first Social Story was implemented for Michael. The study proceeded for twelve weeks and consisted of two interviews and eight recorded planning sessions. Five of the planning sessions were recorded with the two classroom aides, Lysa and Mya, and three planning sessions were recorded with the special education consultant teacher, Ruth. During this time, I observed the children in social and
academic situations and consulted with my colleagues to determine the need and structure of the Social Stories.

During the study, we altered the Social Stories as needed and made decisions to either continue a Story or end the current one to begin a new Story with a new skill. In some cases, we identified multiple needs, and were required to make a decision about which Social Story to begin. On other occasions, we decided to stop a Social Story and take a break from Stories for a short while. These meetings were a key resource to the children’s progress with social skill intervention and in the data collection process. More information regarding when the Social Stories began and the duration of each story is explained in the next section with a description of the action research cycles which took place during this study.

Cycles During the Action Research Process

As described previously in this dissertation, action research is a cyclical process. In reference to the overall design, only one cycle took place during the study. However, within the larger cycle of acting/observing, multiple mini cycles occurred with the planning for each child involved in the study.

First action research cycle.

This study was designed to explore the decision making process with the use of Social Stories in my inclusive kindergarten classroom. The research cycle consisted of planning for the study (getting colleagues on board, interviewing the parents, and organizing planning sessions), acting on the plan (this is shown in the many mini cycles which are described in the next section), and reflecting on how the study impacted my teaching. (See Figure 2.) In order to complete the next cycle after the reflection stage, I would be required to make changes to the
study and begin a new observation stage. In chapter five, I will give a description of what that next cycle would look like.

![Action Research Cycle Diagram](image)

Figure 2. Action Research Cycle

**Mini cycles.**

Although only one action research cycle occurred in reference to the study, many mini cycles were needed within the acting and observing phase in order to develop the study effectively. The mini action research cycles during this phase involved planning with my colleagues for Social Stories, implementing the Social Stories and observing the effect of the Social Stories, and finally reflecting with my colleagues on the observations while planning for the next step. Each child exhibited his own set of cycles as each child had differing needs. In addition, each child reacted differently upon the onset of the study, therefore creating an alternative timeline for each child.
Child 1: Michael.

As mentioned before, Michael was added to the study six weeks in, but his Social Stories began prior to his addition to the study. Michael was displaying behaviors such as hitting and kicking tables and chairs and refusal to comply with school rules which granted meetings with the special education consultant teacher, our school psychologist and the parents to create a behavior intervention plan (BIP). When creating the BIP, we decided to attempt the use of Social Stories to aide with Michael’s refusal to do work and follow classroom procedures. Three cycles occurred during the twelve weeks of the study for Michael. (See Figure 3.)

Our first Social Story began five weeks into the study after many unofficial discussions of what caused the issues and how to best address them. An official meeting took place with the school psychologist and special education consultant teacher to create a FBA and BIP for Michael. The decision to begin a “My Job in School” Social Story was made. The story was implemented five weeks into the study and began cycle one for Michael. The cycle continued as we observed how Michael read the Story and how his behavior improved with each read. We noticed Michael following our classroom directions and completing his work with pride as he would receive a Thomas the Train sticker on his work after he completed it. My colleagues and I met again a week later during week six to discuss our observations. During this time, we discussed additional needs as well, but it was determined that we needed to wait prior to introducing a new Social Story since we were unsuccessful in previous attempts to introduce a new Social Story so soon.

Cycle two began for Michael seven weeks into the study when we met to reflect on his progress and additional needs. It was decided through our meeting and my discussions with Michael’s parents that we needed to teach Michael how to be patient when he wants an adult’s
attention. With the assistance of my colleagues, I created a “Patience” Social Story for Michael which included pictures of Michael raising his hand and waiting for a teacher. Due to the amount of time spent taking pictures and the many days we had off this time of year, the Social Story began three weeks later during week ten of the study. During this cycle, we also observed Michael’s behaviors and Social Story reading. The information we gathered was then discussed at our next planning session two days later. We met again a week later to discuss more observations and determine our next step.

Cycle three began with a meeting during week eleven of the study. We decided that although Michael is very sweet and affectionate, we required a method to teach him about the appropriate use of affection. We described the inappropriateness of giving kisses to classmates and teachers because kissing is for families. This Social Story entitled “Kissing is for Families” began one week later during week twelve of the study, which was also the final week of the study. We implemented the Story and reflected on it two days later. Although this was a very short time, we had some positive results to share and discuss future steps for Michael.

Although the study had ended twelve weeks into the school year, it was determined that Social Stories, along with other strategies, were very beneficial for Michael, and we would continue to use them as needed.
Figure 3. Action Research Cycles when Planning for Michael
Child 2: Peter.

Peter’s Social Stories began in week six due to other strategies that were being used and the more pressing issues occurring in the classroom. Peter also went through three cycles of planning, observing/acting and reflecting. (See Figure 4.)

Peter’s first cycle began long before a Social Story was implemented for him. During our first planning session for Peter, during week two of the study, we brainstormed many different needs and possible Social Stories we could use. However, we began using other classroom strategies instead. During our second planning session when discussing Peter during week six, we discussed observations of Peter that required a Social Story. We then created a checklist to document the behaviors and recognize the antecedents of the behaviors. Additionally, we discussed the terminology appropriate for the Social Story.

The Social Story began two days after this planning session; however, we encountered a problem with the delivery of the Social Story. Peter refused to read the Social Story with me. During the observation phase, we came to the conclusion that a way to interest Peter in the Social Stories was required. Although the team did not meet in the traditional sense, we contributed in daily conversations regarding strategies. It was determined that Peter becomes interested in things that the other children have, so we decided to read the Social Story with another child in the room first to capture Peter’s interest. This strategy proved to be beneficial and became a new strategy for reading with Peter. We continued to observe Peter’s behavior and reading of the Social Story during this phase while reflecting on what we observed.

Peter’s second cycle began a week later during week seven of the study. We met to reflect on Peter’s Social Story and needs. It was determined that this Social Story did not meet the needs we observed. After reflecting on the possible antecedents causing the behavior, we
concluded that a new Social Story would target the need associated with the behavior we were observing. The new Social Story was called “Be Patient”. Due to many days without school, absences and the need to take pictures for this story, we began the Social Story three weeks later during week ten. I implemented the Social Story and we began our observations. We met after one day due to a problem with the Social Story. We recognized immediately during our observation that an explanatory sentence was missing which greatly affected Peter’s behavior. I altered the Social Story and continued with observations for another week. During week eleven, we met to reflect on this Social Story and discuss new needs. This discussion led us to cycle three.

We discussed Peter’s need for a Social Story similar to Michael’s story called “My Job in School”. I immediately began taking pictures of Peter performing the desired behaviors and expectations of school and implemented the Social Story three days later. The classroom team began observations and informal discussions of progress immediately. One week later, we met again to reflect on our observations. This proved to be very beneficial for Peter, and it was determined that we would also continue the use of Social Stories for Peter as needed.
Figure 4. Action Research Cycles when Planning for Peter
The mini cycles were essential to the larger cycle as they drove my instruction and guided my teaching practices. The key factor to the Social Stories was the pre-planning to determine the cause of the behavior and what replacement behaviors were needed to assist with the issue at hand. The observations of student behaviors proved to be a crucial piece of the larger cycle.

**Participants’ Recruitment**

The Friarville Primary school consists of three pre-school classrooms, twelve kindergarten classrooms, and twelve first grade classrooms. Five of the twelve kindergarten classrooms are considered inclusion classrooms while seven are Academic Intervention Service (AIS) classrooms. The rooms which are considered inclusion classrooms are supported by a special education consultant teacher and AIS classrooms are serviced by a reading teacher for a portion of the day.

During the placement process of incoming kindergarten students, the school psychologist at the Friarville Central School District uses IEP information to place students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms. The school psychologist takes the time to assign children to rooms which will best meet their needs. Teachers who receive children who are labeled with autism have had training in this area and are prepared to assist children with the special education teacher. The school principal works with the school psychologist to place typically developing children in classrooms based on a formal screening which occurs for incoming kindergartners in the spring. The typically developing children are screened to distribute the varying ability levels to each teacher. This assists with ensuring that one teacher does not receive children who all display the same ability level. Both children with disabilities and typically developing children are distributed to each classroom to promote inclusion.
During the initial process, the school psychologist contacted the parents of all students with autism, or behaviors which are traditionally identified with autism as described on their IEPs, to discuss their initial interest in the use of Social Stories. Peter’s parents demonstrated an interest and Peter was placed in my classroom. Over the summer, teachers were informed of their class roster. At this time, we were also given parent information and access to students’ IEPs. I then contacted Peter’s parents by phone and requested to meet with them to discuss the study and give them the permission form. Our meeting took place in my kindergarten classroom.

Michael does not have an IEP, but, was recruited after displaying a need for a new strategy to assist him with an undesired behavior displayed in class. I contacted his parents four weeks into the school year and requested a meeting. We met seven weeks after the study began to conduct the interview and discuss the study. Michael’s parents were supportive and eager to assist Michael in any way possible. The meeting with Michael’s parents took place in my kindergarten classroom at the end of the school day.

I originally intended to only recruit children for this study who demonstrated characteristics of autism; however, after working with Michael and Peter during the first few weeks of school, I decided to open the recruitment to Michael who demonstrated a need for additional visual support and a need to understand the school setting. Although this is outside the typical use of Social Stories, I found the strategy to be beneficial and address the needs of both children in the study.

In preparation for the study, I discussed my interest in the area of Social Stories with the building administrator. Consideration was taken when making staff assignments for the year to ensure staff comfortable working in this environment would be placed in my classroom. In August, support staff were notified of their placements for the school year. I contacted the
support staff assigned to my classroom by phone shortly after this information was given. I met with all support staff on the first work day in September. The meeting took place in our classroom and colleagues were given an information letter as well as given a chance to ask questions regarding the study before deciding to participate. Both classroom aides (Lysa and Mya) and the special education consultant teacher (Ruth) were interested in participating in the study and understood the components of the planning sessions.

Participants

As indicated in the information regarding recruitment, two students, their parents, two classroom aides, a special education teacher and I participated in this study. Table 1 indicates information about the participants.

Michael and Peter were enrolled in my kindergarten class and are both five years old. As previously mentioned, Michael is a typically developing child who demonstrated some behavioral concerns. Peter has an IEP to assist him with transitions and daily tasks. Peter’s IEP indicated a need for a two to one aide for a portion of the year to assist him with the transitions of kindergarten. Both the mother and the father of both children participated in this study. They participated in an interview to allow me access to background information regarding the children.

The aides in this classroom during the time of this study were Lysa and Mya. Both aides had nine years of experience being either a classroom aide or a one on one aide with children. In an inclusion classroom, the role of the classroom aides is to assist the children with academic and social tasks as directed by the teacher and the child’s IEP. In this study, the classroom aides assisted in this way and additionally, assisted in the planning process of the use of Social Stories by participating in discussions and generating ideas to assist the children based on observations.
The special education consultant teacher, Ruth, has twenty-nine years of experience as a special education teacher. In the Friarville primary school, the special education teacher is referred to as the consultant teacher. The consultant teacher works with three different classrooms and divides her time between the three classes. She pushes in to the classrooms for forty minutes of our ninety minute reading block and pulls children for intensive support for thirty minutes in the afternoon during rest time. In addition, the consultant teacher and the classroom teacher are given common planning time one day per week while the children attend library. For this study, the consultant teacher and I met weekly to plan during this time. Although we met each week, due to other needs in the classroom and additional obligations, we did not discuss Social Stories and the students in the study at each meeting.

As the researcher, I also participated in the study. I have nine years of teaching experience. Four of these years have been in an inclusion classroom with children identified with varying disabilities. In my role as the classroom teacher, I participated in classroom discussions, created and administered the Social Stories for the children and communicated with the parents for the interview and on an as needed basis. Although I created the Social Stories, my colleagues supported the creation by supplying me with ideas, wording and discussions of antecedents of behaviors.
Table 1. Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Aide</th>
<th>Aide</th>
<th>Special Education teacher</th>
<th>Parents of each child</th>
<th>Teacher/Researcher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>Lysa</td>
<td>Mya</td>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>Mom &amp; Dad</td>
<td>Maria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>5 Years</td>
<td>9 Years of experience</td>
<td>9 Years of experience</td>
<td>29 years of experience</td>
<td>9 years teaching</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old</td>
<td>Old</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>IEP – Speech and Language</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4 years inclusion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection

I collected data through three different sources to ensure I was capturing information in many different ways. To collect data, I used an interview with both sets of parents, a researcher’s journal, and audio-recorded planning sessions with colleagues. Anderson, Herr and Nihlen (2007) explain many different methods of data collection and identify interviews and journals as appropriate methods of data collection. They do not reference audio recorded planning sessions, however this is specific to my study on the reflection of the planning sessions. This would be similar to what Anderson, Herr and Nihlen discuss with observations as data collection.

Interview with parents.

Anderson, Herr and Nihlen (2007) state that interviews are useful when inquiring how another person feels about a topic. The purpose of a parent interview for this study was to receive the parents’ perspective on their child and determine difficulties and strengths the child may display at home as well as what may cause the child anxiety at school. In addition, I was able to discuss what motivates the child and strategies that the parents identified as helpful. The
questions were designed to elaborate on typical anxiety-producing situations and bring strategies to the forefront for solving difficult situations.

The interview identified some background information about both children in order to prepare for situations or explain antecedents of situations which were occurring. With this background knowledge, I was able to avoid or prepare for situations which may disrupt the child’s comfort level. Each interview lasted approximately thirty minutes and was recorded and transcribed by me. All references to names of participants from the interview transcripts were removed. The data from the interviews assisted with planning as well as allowed me to reflect on the planning process.

**Researcher’s journal.**

A researcher’s journal is described by Anderson, Herr and Nihlen (2007) as a way to “encourage description, interpretation, and reflection” (p. 208) from the researcher. For this study, a journal was kept to document my communication with parents, thoughts, and daily observations. The journal was used to reflect on my practices and record my thoughts before and after lessons and planning sessions. In addition, I was able to reflect on the parent communication that occurred through the use of daily communication books, phone calls, emails, and meetings. I summarized the information from phone calls, emails and meetings with parents while describing my response and occurrences which took place in the classroom. Additionally, I recorded behavioral observations about how the children were interacting and responding to the Social Stories in the journal. All information was then summarized for data collection and qualitative coding. Analysis of the data occurred by using all data sources and coding material based on themes that emerged.
Audio-recorded planning sessions.

The planning sessions with colleagues were a crucial part of the study. This is similar to the observations described by Anderson, Herr and Nihlen (2007). They describe observations as a way to “focus on what is happening” (p. 185). When studying how I make decisions during planning sessions, recording the planning sessions in order to reflect on them later was a key component to my research.

Weekly meetings are common practice in my district for the consultant teacher (CT) and classroom teacher, but conversations with our classroom aides typically occur in passing or sporadically. All planning sessions with my colleagues occurred in the classroom. Planning sessions were held before school with the classroom aides and during the school day during the designated common planning time with the special education consultant teacher.

I originally anticipated planning sessions would occur weekly with both classroom aides and the consultant teacher, and although we met weekly, we did not always discuss Social Stories or the two children in the study. The consultant teacher and I met a total of three times and the classroom aides and I met a total of five times to discuss the children in the study and Social Stories. During all planning sessions, we created checklists and discussed external and internal factors which may have caused the need for a Social Story, as well as when it was time to move on from one Social Story and begin another.

All eight planning sessions recorded were relevant to the study and ran for approximately ten minutes. They were audio-recorded and transcribed by me. All references to names of participants were removed from transcripts to protect the identities of the participants. Transcriptions were analyzed using dimensional analysis to determine relevant information. This coding process was used on all the transcriptions.
Analysis

The data collected through the interview, observations, researcher journal and planning sessions gave me the necessary information regarding my planning process, and the analysis of the data collected during this time assisted with answering my research questions. I utilized the journal, interviews and audio-recorded planning sessions to assist with answering the three sub questions I identified earlier in this chapter by naming the dimensions which were discovered upon analyzing. I was able to discover themes and commonalities which guided my decisions throughout the study.

With the assistance of my research questions and theoretical framework, I analyzed the data with dimensional analysis (Kools, McCarthy, Durham & Robrecht, 1996). The lens of sociocultural theory assisted with the examination of my planning session to view how the social process unfolded. In addition, I examined my planning as I incorporated the views and abilities of my students. This happens naturally as I plan, but I was sure to document how the incorporation of student views affected the planning sessions.

By analyzing the parent interview, I was able to take note of what difficulties and strengths the parents identified and capitalize on those strengths during class. When I reflected on this process, I was able to view how and why decisions were made and the external and internal factors that led to the decisions. My planning was centered on the students’ needs and ways that I am able to impact their academic and social learning through the use of Social Stories.

**Dimensional analysis.**

Dimensional analysis has a foundation in grounded theory. However, dimensional analysis has its own “unique set of operations” (Kools et al., 1996, p. 314). Dimensional analysis
uses a natural analysis approach to coding and interpreting data. Our everyday experiences take part in our analysis and therefore, are used to help with our problem solving and solutions. We may attempt to separate ourselves from the data and view our research objectively; however, our daily interactions and interpretations are consistently at the forefront of our minds and are seen as we interpret our data. “The aim of dimensional analysis is to discover the meanings of interactions observed in situations” (Kools et al., 1996, p. 316).

According to Kools and colleagues (1996), dimensional analysis involves breaking down the data into dimensions. By doing this, the researcher looks at everything that is involved with the data. Dimensionalizing while simultaneously designating the data is the process in which the researcher names the data. This is also referred to as coding when using grounded theory. Some parts are then dismissed as irrelevant and others stand out to become dimensions for analysis. Designation gives the researcher the necessary vocabulary for analysis and the tools for “consideration of the relative importance, relationship, or meaning of specific concepts” (Kools, et al., 1996, p. 317).

After the designating process, the researcher should have multiple dimensions to explore and decipher what dimensions are slightly meaningful, irrelevant or critical to the study. The dimensions that are critical then become the “critical mass” and provide an explanation to the phenomena that is studied (Kools et al., 1996). It is now time for the researcher to examine the data and dimensions by “organizing them within the explanatory matrix into a logical configuration that would provide meaning” (Kools et al., 1996, p. 317). As the researcher moves to the explanatory matrix, the analysis moves “beyond description and into the realm of explanation” (Kools et al., 1996, p. 317).
The explanatory matrix consists of four conceptual components. These components are context, condition, processes and consequences. The context refers to the environment in which the research took place. “Conditions are dimensions of a phenomenon that facilitate, block, or in some other way shape actions and/or interactions” (Kools et al., 1996, p. 328). Processes refer to any actions that occur whether or not those actions are intended or unintended. The final component is consequences. The consequences refer to the outcome of the actions. Not all components are used when analyzing the data. The researcher must determine which of the components gives a more thorough explanation of the phenomenon being studied. A perspective is determined when one dimension gives the greatest explanation of the situation being examined. Although other dimensions may still be used, the perspective is used to organize the remaining dimensions (Kools et al., 1996).

My use of dimensional analysis.

I was able to identify dimensions of analysis through the coding process. The identification of data and labeling what is seen is called naming (Kools et al. 1996). By naming the data from the interviews, researcher’s journal, and planning sessions, I gave meaning to the interactions that took place during the study.

Dimensionalizing process and vocabulary used.

As previously stated, the data regarding each student was analyzed independently. The attempt to discover dimensions holistically proved to be difficult, and I found that the cycles of research became blurred. However, after naming the data, it was pulled together in order to determine a central perspective. The study required an analytical view of the two children independently to determine the mini cycles which occurred; however, the planning sessions and decisions made during planning were the main focus of the study.
During the analysis process, I discovered many dimensions for each child and additional dimensions relevant to the planning process. After the initial process, a total of two-hundred ninety-one dimensions were discovered. Many of the dimensions were deemed irrelevant or overlapped with the two children and a central perspective was discovered. The central perspective will be explained later in this chapter.

As mentioned in the previous section when discussing dimensional analysis, dimensionalizing the data provided me with vocabulary to assist with the analysis. Some larger categories were discovered as character/background, social needs, interests/motivators, rewards, meetings, reasons for behaviors, social strengths, Social Story comments and Social Story reading. Under these categories, additional dimensions were named such as rewards, patterns of behavior, anxiety, refusal to read, and positive reinforcement. After naming the dimensions, I found many of them to be related to the research questions. However, one dimension fit more than the others to the overall study and became the central perspective. After identifying the central perspective, an explanatory matrix is created to identify the dimensions which explain the data.

**Central perspective and explanatory matrix.**

The perspective dimension for this study revolved around the discussions which occurred during planning sessions. During the dimensionalizing process, I named this “discussions of needs and wants.” Many decisions were made during the course of the planning sessions and previous information was discussed to determine how and why Social Stories were created, altered or ended.
After determining the perspective dimension, other dimensions were placed in the explanatory matrix described by Kools and colleagues (1996). The matrix consists of the context, conditions, processes and consequences. Table 2 outlines how the matrix was used for this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Conditions</th>
<th>Processes</th>
<th>Consequences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schedule/time of day which behaviors occurred/equipment and location</td>
<td>Antecedents for the behaviors/needs and wants of the children</td>
<td>Creation of Social Stories to assist with antecedents and use of needs and wants to capture the attention of the children</td>
<td>Assistance with behaviors and the reduction of anxiety involving the social or academic tasks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Explanatory Matrix

The context component describes the “boundaries for inquiry” or the “environment in which dimensions are embedded” (Kools et al., 1996, p. 318). Discussions of Peter’s schedule and the time of day which behaviors occurred as well as discussions of equipment and location in the room were considered in the context.

The conditions refer to dimensions which impact the study. The dimensions describing the antecedents for the behaviors and discussions of the needs and wants of the children with the aides were critical to the conditions portion of the matrix.

The processes refer to actions or interactions caused by the conditions described above. The actions which took place as a result of the conditions (describing the antecedents for behavior and discussion of needs and wants) were the creation of Social Stories to assist with the
antecedents and using the needs and wants in the Social Stories in order to capture the children’s attention.

The final component is consequences. Consequences refer to outcomes of the actions. In this study, the consequences were assistance with behaviors and the reduction of anxiety involving the social or academic tasks. The outcomes of the Social Stories gave insight to the next step in our planning process and guided my instruction and student needs.

Using dimensional analysis assisted my thinking of ways in which the ideas came together. By naming the data and discovering common themes and actions, I was able to demonstrate the impact that this process had on my planning process. There were additional areas which assisted in the answering of the research questions; however, the central perspective reflected the broad understanding of the study.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined action research methodology and how action research is appropriate for this study. In addition, this chapter provided information regarding the context where the study took place and the participants who were involved. The study design was also outlined for the reader and the action research cycles were elaborated on for a conceptual view of the study.

Additionally, in the chapter, a detailed description of participant recruitment was given along with assurance that participants were protected against identification in future publications. Data collection and analysis are outlined and described to help the reader understand the data sources. A brief description of dimensional analysis, as well as how dimensional analysis was used in this study, was also provided to give the reader a better understanding of the analysis process. Finally, a connection to the dimensional analysis process and the dimensions discovered in the action research study were outlined and explained.
In the next chapter I explain the analysis which took place during the course of the study. I answer each of the three sub questions with examples from my data and discuss the overall findings of the study. Additionally, I include the unexpected findings which were discovered during the analysis and how those findings changed my practices for future years.
Chapter 4

Data Analysis and Findings

Introduction

While interacting with my colleagues during the use of Social Stories with students, I found numerous themes and interesting discoveries. With the use of purposeful meetings to discuss student needs and successes, I was able to document the planning process which my team and I undergo on a regular basis. Although in the past we may have completed this same task informally and in passing, it was an extraordinary task to analyze the arranged planning sessions. In reference to my research questions, there were some findings I expected to encounter such as discussions of Social Stories guidelines, identifying and utilizing the needs and interests of the students, and the impact of the planning sessions with my colleagues. However, I also discovered information during the analysis unrelated to Social Stories, but helpful to teaching and planning for future years such as the benefits of the interview.

When beginning the analysis, I first separated the data into sections based on the children we were discussing for planning. I originally attempted to analyze the planning sessions as a whole, but discovered that the decisions that were made were extremely different for each child, and it would not be possible to analyze them holistically. I found many of the same themes and discoveries for both children, but by looking at each child independently, the cycles of planning became clearer.

Although many additional strategies such as behavior charts, reward systems and praise were used to assist with undesired behaviors for both children, Social Stories were the basis for this study and the Social Stories strategy was discussed most often during planning sessions and parent interviews. As a team, my colleagues and I recognized that the behaviors we observed
were the children’s way of communicating their wants and needs. Therefore, we used those behaviors as a way of determining the antecedent for the behaviors and the Social Stories, along with the above mentioned strategies, were our tools to assist the children with their needs.

In this chapter, I discuss the findings for the three sub questions and how these answer the overarching question of how I, as a general education teacher, implement the use of Social Stories with students in an inclusive classroom. In addition, I describe additional findings that were found during this process and how the findings have impacted my teaching. I used dimensional analysis to discover themes in the data and used those themes to aide with answering the questions.

**Findings for Sub Question One**

The first sub question refers to the information I used to make decisions when using Social Stories. In reality, any information that involves the children is utilized for this decision, but I specifically found several areas to be advantageous. Looking at the children’s character, learning style, social needs, observations of the students’ behaviors and observations of Story reading and progress were the key factors in these decisions. I will describe each of these areas in detail in reference to both children in the study. This information was identified in planning sessions, researcher observations and parent interviews.

**Character and learning styles.**

I received character and learning style information on both children during a parent interview and had the opportunity to collaborate this information through researcher observations. My colleagues and I used charts to record intervals of behaviors to determine time and duration of the observed behaviors in order to essentially create a functional behavior
assessments prior to the creation of each Social Story and discover the antecedent of each behavior.

**Peter.**

Peter’s mother described him as a visual learner, having his own agenda (wanting to do his own thing), active, loving and sweet. These characteristics became apparent as I observed Peter in the classroom. I recognized Peter’s reliance on visual aids immediately as he used the classroom schedule to identify the next activity to take place in the classroom. I observed Peter wanting to have his own agenda when he resisted adult direction and cried when he did not want to complete required tasks during academic times.

Some of the required tasks were more difficult such as using phonemic awareness to stretch words during writing time, but other tasks were mastered by Peter such as writing his name on the paper. The observed behaviors occurring when asked to perform mastered tasks proved that it was not the difficulty of the task that caused Peter’s behavior. Additionally, Peter has a two-on-one aide, Lysa, to assist with transitions; however, Lysa also assisted Peter with academic tasks which were slightly more difficult.

Peter’s active moments were observed specifically while remaining on the rug for instructional tasks such as whole group reading and calendar time or during unstructured time at his table. The sweet and loving side of Peter was displayed as he consistently requested hugs and to hold an adult’s hand while walking in the hall. This information guided the creation of Social Stories for Peter.

The first Social Story created for Peter was about remaining in his personal space and keeping his hands and feet to himself. With Peter’s mother describing him as active and observations of Peter physically climbing across the table, sliding into other children’s personal
areas, and grabbing children while speaking to them, meant that this first Social Story was imperative. Being a visual learner meant that it was essential that I use pictures that Peter could directly relate to. I took pictures of Peter’s hands and feet, the table Peter sits at with tape outlining “his area”, the teachers, and our classroom rules. In addition, knowing that Peter likes to maintain his own agenda, I added a sentence about receiving reminders from teachers if he moves out of his personal space.

Peter’s second and third Social Stories referenced Peter’s reluctance to follow instructions and his frustration when he does not desire to complete tasks required of him. Both Stories remind Peter of how he may feel during this time, based on the observable behaviors of crying and screaming we witnessed, and reminded Peter of extrinsic rewards such as computer time, stickers, and coloring pages to look forward to if the rules were followed. In addition, both Stories appealed to Peter’s sweet and loving side. He enjoys pleasing the teachers and knowing we are proud of him. In the “Patience” Social Story, Peter was told:

If I feel like my body is losing control, I can read a book from my book box or color a picture from my basket…. If I work quietly, my teacher will give me a smile in my book and she will be very happy.

The “My Job in School” Social Story reminded Peter of his reward system. We found earlier in the year, that earning rewards such as computer time, stickers and coloring pages encouraged Peter to keep his frustration under control.

Michael.

The information I acquired about character and learning style during the interview with Michael’s parents, and observations during class time, were equally as beneficial. Michael’s parents described him as a very sweet and caring little boy, who also became frustrated easily.
He is highly motivated by praise, is a visual learner, and loves Thomas the Train. I observed the sweet and caring side of Michael on a regular basis. He is very affectionate and desires hugs daily. His frustration was apparent during undesired academic tasks such as writing and centers. During this time, Michael vocalized that he did not want to do the work, threw his papers, ran to the door, scribbled on his work or the work of others, and kicked tables, chairs, or walls. We witnessed Michael performing these same tasks on a separate occasion with little to no difficulty, and therefore concluded that the tasks were not above Michael’s ability level, but rather not what he wanted to do at the time.

Michael also resisted tasks which required him to switch from desired activities such as the computer to academic tasks. He communicated through his behavior that he preferred to do some of the tasks required of him, but he wanted to chose when and how long those tasks took place. I discovered that by praising other children for exhibiting the behaviors I required of Michael, Michael became motivated to then perform the behavior to also receive the praise. His motivation of earning Thomas the Train stickers was clear after the initial use as a reward when tasks were completed.

Knowing this information helped in the creation of Michael’s Social Stories. Many strategies such as the reward system, use of praise, and behavior charts were attempted prior to the first Social Story. A formal Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) was created by the school psychologist and a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) was created. After four weeks of unsuccessful strategies, a new strategy was required. The first Social Story created for Michael was “My Job in School”. This story referenced his desire to please his teachers and receive praise by indicating that his teachers will be happy if he finishes his work because then he is learning in school. I referenced his frustration by stating “I may feel angry or frustrated if I do
not want to do my work, but I need to do my job in school in order to learn and work with my friends”. His reward system was also incorporated into the story by reminding him of the reward he will receive if he completes the academic tasks.

In addition to frustration regarding undesired tasks, we began to observe additional areas of frustration for Michael. The need for immediate attention from an adult is a characteristic we noticed as well as one his mother had referenced during our interview. Michael’s second Social Story, “Patience”, was created to teach him strategies to prevent him from becoming frustrated when he desired a teacher’s attention. We began collecting data to determine the frequency and duration of the behaviors after Michael was not called on by a teacher when he raised his hand. We discussed this data during our planning sessions. Michael would raise his hand, but immediately begin shouting out to acquire the teacher’s attention. In other circumstances, Michael would raise his hand to participate in an activity or answer a question. If Michael was not called on, he would become irate and begin kicking things or people around him and refuse to participate in other activities immediately following this activity.

The “Patience” Social Story taught Michael to raise his hand for attention and a teacher would assist him. The Story also states that a teacher may not have the opportunity to reach him immediately and that he may need to wait a moment for a teacher to be available. In addition, the Story acknowledged situations where Michael raises his hand to respond to a question. It reassures Michael that other children may be called on to respond and he may have an opportunity to respond during the next activity.

Michael’s third Social Story, “Kisses are for Families”, was created due to his overabundance of affection. We loved the sweet and caring side of Michael, but it became imperative that we teach Michael how to appropriately be affectionate in school. We observed
Michael giving kisses to peers and teachers and running up to teachers and peers to hug them without requesting a hug. There was not a need to track behaviors for this situation so we met to discuss ideas for Social Story sentences and pictures we would use for this Story. The Social Story explained that kisses are for families, but he can ask a peer or adult for a hug rather than a kiss. The Story also described rejection and strategies were given to Michael if someone declined a hug.

All three of Michael’s Social Stories were created for a visual learner in that they have many personalized pictures inserted into the story. Each picture was taken specifically for Michael of Michael performing the desired tasks. In creating the “Kisses are for Families” Social Story, pictures were taken of Michael talking to a teacher, giving the teacher a hug, and walking away from the teacher in order to describe the asking, receiving, or rejection of the hug. Michael was able to relate to the pictures as we had practiced all of these skills while reading the Social Story and while taking the pictures to create the Social Story. When reminding Michael of the Social Story throughout the day, I was able to refer to the pictures in the story since that is what he remembered the most. Comments such as, “What did the story pictures show you to do if you want to hug someone?” Michael would respond with, “Ask first.” Michael occasionally required these reminders and would relate to the pictures from the story to assist with remembering what he needed to do in order to receive a hug. Michael demonstrated an immediate reaction to this Social Story and began asking for hugs on a regular basis.

As explained, the character information learned from teacher observation and the parent interview in conjunction with the child’s learning style were essential to the planning sessions which then led to the Social Story. We were able to discuss those traits when making decisions in regards to Social Stories.
**Social needs and observations of students’ behavior.**

The students’ social needs greatly impacted the decisions that were used for the Social Stories. Some social needs were described during parent interviews and others were discussed during planning sessions with colleagues. When discussing each child with his parents, I would receive information about pre-school or home, but when discussing social needs with colleagues, we would discuss needs that were observed in the classroom. Each child had differing needs which were addressed on an individual basis.

As colleagues, the special education teacher, classroom aides, and I worked together during the planning sessions to meet the needs of the children. At each planning session, we would begin by discussing the many behaviors we observed in regards to each child. The data regarding time and frequency of each behavior was discussed and antecedents of the behaviors were explored. After an exhausted list was created, we began developing strategies to assist the children in relieving the anxiety around the situation. In many cases, we referenced Social Story ideas, and other times, we looked for additional strategies such as a more detailed picture schedule and additional rewards or tasks to maintain the interest of the child. This was a collaborative effort each time I met with either the special education consultant teacher or the classroom aides.

**Peter.**

Peter’s social needs were based mostly on his difficulty with transitions and unstructured time between activities such as cleaning up between centers, the minute or two immediately prior to the transition to the rug for calendar, washing hands for lunch and other occasions where we had one minute or two minutes prior to the next activity. Peter’s parents had explained his need for an aide in pre-school based on his trouble with transitioning between tasks and his need for
predictable routines. This information guided our decisions regarding Peter’s Social Stories. All three Social Stories which were created for Peter revolved around his needs for predictable routines and strategies for unstructured time.

Peter demonstrated difficulty with unstructured time in the classroom from the beginning. This was observed through specific behaviors such as pushing things on the table, acting silly with the children at his table, and putting his hands on the other children during this time. Even after reminders to keep his hands to himself and stay in his seat, the behaviors continued. We observed several weeks of this behavior and held many informal and formal planning sessions to discuss the situation while recording the intervals of time and duration of behaviors on a recording sheet. One conversation regarding the implementation and creation of a Social Story during planning sessions began with a discussion regarding rules and the incorporation of following rules in a Social Story.

Mya: He knows what he needs to do. He can’t control it.

Researcher: OK. So a following the rules Social Story?

Lysa: Following the rules because he’s starting to be drawn in especially at lunch. Some of the more wound up wild kids, he’s drawn in and ya, if it’s something with self control. He doesn’t have that.

Mya: Uh huh.

Lysa: He doesn’t have self control. Which would go along with following the rules.

What’s right and wrong. (PSA 2, line 85 -92³)

³ Transcribed data are arranged by acronyms based on who participated in the recording session. PSA acronyms refer to Planning Sessions with Aides. 1-5 indicate which planning sessions they came from. PSR refers to Planning Sessions with Ruth. 1-3 indicate which planning session the notes came from. RJ refers to the researcher’s journal. IM refers to the interview with Michael’s parents and IP refers to the interview with Peter’s parents.
As we attempted to create the Social Story to assist Peter with his difficulty during the unstructured time, we began incorporating replacement behaviors to occupy Peter during this difficult time. Some of the replacement behaviors brainstormed by the team were stringing beads on a string, coloring a Toy Story picture, playing on the computer, or reading a book from the book box on his table. Later discussions took place during the creation of the Social Story to clarify Peter’s needs and how to focus the Social Story for Peter.

As a result of the discussions, Peter’s “Be Patient” Social Story was created. I used the information from the team to create the Social Story, and referred back to the team prior to initiating the Social Story with Peter. After finalizing the details and replacement behaviors in the Social Story, pictures were taken of the different items used to preoccupy Peter during unstructured time and the story was introduced. I read the Social Story with Peter at his seat showing him the different items as they were introduced in the Social Story. The Social Story is only read one time per day and this particular Social Story was read on three separate occasions. The object of this particular Social Story was to give Peter strategies to remain occupied during the short spurts of unstructured time. The data collected and information discussed with my colleagues regarding the observed behaviors contributed to the decisions used when creating and utilized this Social Story for Peter.

**Michael.**

Michael’s social needs revolved around complying with directions, being patient while waiting for a teacher’s attention and being excessively affectionate toward adults and other students. Other needs and observations were discussed during planning sessions, but these were identified by the team as requiring the most attention. Although patience and signs of affection
were described as characteristics of Michael, they were also observed as social needs requiring our attention.

During the first four weeks of school we observed many behaviors from Michael which made it difficult for him to function in school. At times, Michael refused to join us on the rug or do his center or whole group work. All of these behaviors were identified collaboratively while conducting a FBA on Michael. We also observed behaviors such as scribbling on his work or the desk, kicking furniture or throwing items, and on rare occasions we also experienced hitting or kicking teachers and administrators. We immediately put a behavior system in place where Michael received extrinsic rewards for completing his work and following directions, but found limited success. In addition, the school psychologist assisted with the creation of a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) and a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) to assist Michael with his frustration in school. It was determined from the FBA that Michael wanted to be home with his mother and did not want to complete the required tasks in school. Knowing that Michael loved to see pictures of himself and loved positive praise Social Stories were recommended in Michael’s BIP.

Many of my conversations with the classroom aides and the consultant teacher revolved around the data collected for the FBA. We used this information to frame Michael’s first Social Story. We decided that a Story called “My Job in School” was the best fit and referenced Michael’s refusal to work. Pictures were taken of Michael exhibiting the desired behaviors in school (i.e., finishing his work, putting his work away, and sitting nicely on the rug) and a Social Story was created for him. The Story told Michael that everyone has a job in school and his job was to complete his work. He was also reminded of his rewards if he completed his work. I read
the Social Story with Michael four days during a one week time period. We observed Michael
during this time and continued to praise him as he displayed the desired positive behaviors.

Michael’s next social need revolved around receiving teachers’ attention. Michael’s Mom
also mentioned a concern with his patience during our interview, and as a result, we discussed
this need further during our planning sessions. The team sat down and discussed behaviors that
we observed occurring.

Researcher: He raises his hand and expects that you’re going to call on him immediately.

Mya: Right.

Researcher: And if you don’t that is when he gets…

Lysa: He starts calling on you. He’ll call out your name. (PSA2, line 37-41)

Although this concern was not as great as the one before, we found a need to help Michael
understand that his contribution and needs are important to us, but that we may not respond to
him immediately. We discussed wording to incorporate into the Social Story and what pictures
would be best to go with the wording. I then created the Social Story and took the pictures to add
to the Story. Upon completing the Story, I returned to the team to be sure it reflected our
conversation and concerns. I then read the Social Story with Michael each day for four
consecutive days. After implementing the Social Story, Michael required occasional reminders,
but we once again found great success with his understanding of the situation.

Michael’s final social need during the time of this study was an inappropriate amount of
physical affection towards teachers and students. We observed instances of Michael attempting
to give his friends a kiss. He also tried to give the classroom aides a kiss. Prior to kissing,
Michael started with hugs. He would go to anyone in the class or in the hall and give him or her a
hug. This was not a problem, but would occur randomly throughout the day. The observation of kissing increased the need for addressing the behavior through a Social Story.

Lysa: My neck, he tried to kiss me on the lips then the neck and then he tried to kiss me on the cheek and I kept turning. And I told him that is not appropriate. That kisses are for home and mommy and daddy. He said, “I just wanted to give you a kiss.” And I said, well, you can’t do that at school. And then later, Mya said he did that to a student.

Mya: He’s a very affectionate child, and he needs to know when and where it’s appropriate.

Researcher: Well, we need to give him… we need to say kissing is not okay, but we need to give him a replacement behavior instead. So, to raise his hand and ask a teacher for a hug? (PSA3, lines 20-26).

During this conversation, the team agreed on terminology to use in the Social Story. A bigger conversation revolved around the pictures we needed to take. We brainstormed the types of pictures that would reflect what we needed. Pictures were then taken of Michael hugging a teacher, walking away from the teacher (in case someone said “no” when he asked for a hug) and a picture of his mom was incorporated when saying that kisses are for family. These pictures fit the story and proved to assist Michael with this skill.

This Social Story was read to Michael during the last week of the study on two separate occasions. This was very helpful and has expanded to asking any adult for a hug rather than running up to them and hugging them without permission. With our constant observations and discussions, the Social Stories were created to precisely meet Michael’s social needs.
Observation of Social Story reading.

All observations of child behaviors were important to this study. One of the key observations I attended to was how the children read the stories with me. This information assisted me with decisions regarding how much of the information the children were retaining and how interested they were in the content of the Social Story. Both boys showed some interest at times and refusal to participate at others.

Social Stories are created to assist with varying needs of children. In my experience with researching how others have used Social Stories, I have found that researchers who create Social Stories which involves a daily routine, the story is read each day prior to the time of the activity in which the Social Story was created. After a duration of time determined by the teacher or researcher, the Social Story is reduced to reading it less frequently. This may be every other day, or less depending on the teacher, researcher and the needs of the child. A typical Social Story is ended when it is determined that there is no longer a need for the Social Story. Additionally, the Social Story may be revisited as teachers feel a need for them.

Peter.

Peter originally refused to read any Social Stories with me. He showed no interest in hearing what the Story was about or looking at the pictures of him in the Story. However, we noticed that Peter desired performing activities similar to the other children at his table. This proved to be advantageous with Peter’s Social Stories. On the third attempt of the first Social Story, I read Michael’s Story with him first. After pulling Michael to the back table to read, I pulled Peter to the back table to read his “Personal Space” Social Story. He came willingly and seemed to enjoy the Story. He did not discuss the pictures with me or answer all of the comprehension questions accurately, but the initial interest in the Social Story demonstrated
progress. I am delighted that I did not abandon Social Stories with Peter after the first few attempts.

During the next three and one-half weeks after the attempt, we realized that Peter’s first Story was not as helpful as we had hoped. With this observation, we abandoned that Story and we created a new Social Story for Peter. Peter was interested and successful with the Story, “Be Patient” on the first read. In addition, he answered all of the comprehension questions nicely. As I will explain later, we immediately realized that the Story needed to be altered, but at this point, Peter was demonstrating a higher interest for the Social Stories.

In addition, Peter continued to demonstrate success with our third Social Story, “My Job in School”. For both the “Be Patient” and “My Job in School” Social Stories, he was able to insert words that the pictures represented after only a few reads. The third Social Story reflected significant progress with Social Story reading. Peter showed appreciation for the pictures of himself in the story and having the one-on-one time to read the Story.

Michael.

Michael had a contrasting reaction to the Social Stories. Michael read his first Social Story, “My Job in School” with ease and excitement. We read this Social Story four times before deciding to take a break from it. After only the second read, Michael was reading portions of the Story with me and retelling the Story based on the pictures. After one full week of reading the “My Job in School” Story, Michael began refusing to read the Social Story. We do not know the reason behind the refusal and when I asked Michael, he responded that he did not want to. Michael demonstrated progress with following our classroom rules and completing his work, therefore I did not have an issue with ending the Social Story at this point. It also became evident by Michael’s refusal that there was no longer a need for this Social Story at this time. Due to this
reaction, I discontinued the use of the first Social Story with Michael until it was determined that a second Social Story was required based on Michael’s behavioral needs.

Michael’s second Social Story was implemented one month after the beginning of his first Story, ten weeks into the study. Michael displayed resistance with this Social Story upon the first three reads. Prior to this time, I did not pay attention to the difference in the method in which I delivered the Social Stories. When reading the first Social Story with Michael, I settled myself at a table in the rear corner of the classroom and invited Michael to accompany me to read the Social Story. However, when beginning the new Social Story, I attempted to read the Story with Michael at his table rather than the rear corner of the classroom.

During the third attempt to read the second Social Story, I spoke to Michael at his seat to discuss the decision to move to the back table. He was reluctant at first, but moved to the back table with me to read the Story. Michael read this Story with me and became excited upon seeing the pictures of himself raising his hand and sitting “criss-cross applesauce” on the rug. Michael read the Story with me two additional times nicely during the next week, but refused on the next try. This again, was a signal to take a break from Social Stories with Michael. This also indicated there was a need for something more motivating for Michael in the Social Story in order to maintain his interest.

Through discussions and observations with Michael it was apparent that he had a deep regard for his mother. He carried a picture of her in his folder and enjoyed looking at it during the day. I used this information when creating Michael’s last Social Story as I anticipated this need for a motivator to maintain his interest in reading the Social Stories. Michael’s last Social Story, “Kisses are for Family” was very successful. Prior to the first read of this Social Story, I revealed to Michael that a picture of his mother was added to the Story. On the first day of the
read, Michael was delighted to come to the back table to read the Story with me. Michael demonstrated his comprehension of this Story immediately when he asked for a hug from Lysa. The excitement of reading this Story however, did not last long. We read the Story three days in a row and by the third day, Michael was demonstrating refusal to read the Story with me. I believe Michael became bored with the reading of the Social Story and required something more motivating.

In answering the research question regarding the information I used to make decisions when using Social Stories, I discovered that there were many areas to examine related to making such decisions. Understanding the children’s character assisted me with information to add to the Social Stories and knowing that the children were visual learners reassured my use of Social Stories as a strategy to assist them. Incorporating the social needs of the children and observing student behavior allowed my colleagues and me to determine the antecedents of the behaviors and create the Social Stories to meet the specific needs of each child. Finally, the observation of Social Story reading allowed me to identify the children’s willingness to read and comprehend each Story. The information I examined was based on observations, recorded planning sessions and parent input.

**Findings for Sub Question Two**

The second sub question was used to examine the external and internal factors I considered when using Social Stories. This consisted of factors I considered when writing or changing the Social Stories, and factors I considered when ending the Social Stories.

**Factors considered when writing or changing Social Stories.**

Prior to writing or changing any Social Stories, many factors were considered. First and foremost, I adhered to the Social Story guidelines designed by Carol Gray (2004). As I wrote
each Story, I referred to a checklist of the different types of sentences and key considerations which were needed when writing. In addition, I considered the needs and interests of the children, suggestions from colleagues about behaviors and underlying reasons for the behaviors, and effectiveness of the decisions we made.

**Guidelines.**

As I described in chapter two, Carol Gray (2004) has developed strict guidelines to be used when creating Social Stories. Although creating the Social Stories according to the guidelines is important, many researchers have altered the Stories to better fit their needs. For this study, I remained true to the guidelines as I was not looking at the effectiveness of any one part of the Social Story. The types of sentences used are unique to Social Stories, but there are additional requirements which need to be considered when writing. Two distinct requirements of Carol Gray’s (2004) guidelines are the use of positive language in the Social Stories and the way in which Stories are introduced.

Carol Gray indicates that the Story must tell the child what to do rather than what not to do. This was a difficult task because on many occasions we were describing unwanted behaviors that the children displayed such as on occasions where Peter began crying or expressing his disinterest when he approached an unwanted task. During a conversation with the special education consultant teacher, I explained a previous conversation with the classroom aides, Lysa and Mya.

Researcher: He’s doing well with the schedule and the pics, but Lysa felt that when he approaches something that is difficult, he doesn’t always want to try it. He has to be convinced to try it. So try it, say he can do it without the whining. But I’m going to word it differently, because we can’t have “no” in the Social Story. (PSR 2, lines 76-81)
This comment during our planning session became necessary due to the suggestions to add “no whining” to the Social Story. When adhering to the guidelines, the terminology must be stated in a positive manner. As a team, the consultant teacher and I developed a rough draft of a Social Story. We then re-worked the terminology together to incorporate positive language and describe the desired behaviors rather than the undesired behaviors. Ruth, the special education consultant teacher, also has experience creating Social Stories and was very helpful with this process.

In addition, I was sure to follow the rules of introducing Social Stories. On many occasions during planning sessions my colleagues and I had multiple ideas for Social Stories. We discussed several behaviors and their antecedents based on data we collected during the school day. We then considered creating a Social Story to assist with each behavior, but were required to choose which areas of need were most significant and demanded our attention first. We spent a significant amount of time discussing our options and determining which Social Story was needed most. We also considered what could be addressed by the use of additional strategies rather than using a Social Story to address each behavior. At one of our planning sessions where we discussed Peter, we decided to change the “Patience” Social Story to add more information, but we also discussed the need for a Social Story regarding behavior, a “Being Good” Social Story. I commented that the suggestions were terrific and specified Peter’s needs, but the “Patience” Social Story required fixing first. Lysa and Mya agreed with me and we decided to postpone the creation of a “Being Good” Social Story due to the fact that we cannot introduce more than one Story at a time.

*Needs and interests.*

The needs and interests of the children were considered during planning sessions to both write and change Social Stories. Some of the needs and interests were discovered during
planning sessions while discussing observation of behaviors and the identification of underlying causes of those behaviors along with motivators to be used as rewards for completing the desired behaviors.

The children’s needs were identified through behaviors that were exhibited in the classroom. At the onset of the behaviors, we began data collection to determine the time and frequency of each behavior for each child. Some of the behaviors on the list for both children were crawling under tables and chairs, spitting, screaming, crying, pushing and hitting peers, refusal to complete tasks and refusal to join group activities. My colleagues and I spent many planning sessions examining the data to determine the antecedents for each behavior and proposing strategies to help eliminate some of the dangerous or disruptive outbursts that were occurring. By addressing the underlying issues, we were able to procure strategies that would resolve the issues rather than cover them up. This was not an easy task, and resulted in many new ideas for Social Stories and ways in which the Social Story can explain the situation in the environment for the child.

In Peter’s case, he struggled with unstructured time due to a need to remain occupied. The behaviors of climbing on his desk and touching his peers while sitting at the table were the surface behaviors which he exhibited. After long discussions, we recognized these behaviors as communication of his need to keep himself occupied. With the use of a Social Story, we introduced activities to assist Peter during this time. As mentioned earlier, these activities included stringing beads on a string, playing on the computer, and coloring a Toy Story coloring page.

With Michael, his mother had expressed a possible reason for his tantrums at school. When speaking to Michael at home about why he was misbehaving in school, he expressed to his
mother if he was bad enough, they (teachers) would send him home, and he could spend time with mom. Although mom thought this was sweet, she agreed that it needed to end.

As a team, we agreed that wanting to see mom could be the antecedent of his violent behavior. However, that was a difficult task to address since he never expressed that to us at school. We brainstormed additional ideas and decided that some of his behaviors stemmed from wanting to do preferred tasks rather than academic tasks. We had many conversations about the requirements in kindergarten being much more difficult than the requirements in pre-school and possible reasons for Michael’s behavior. Researcher: “It’s more of trying to avoid the task until it’s his time. It’s all about his agenda” (PSR2, line 60). I went on to explain how the tasks are not beyond his difficulty level; however he prefers to accomplish the tasks on his terms.

I was able to prove that the tasks were not above Michael’s difficulty level with an explanation of an activity. On one occasion, I read with Michael’s reading group during guided reading, and he refused to read with me. He pushed himself away from the table, turned his body to face a different direction and crossed his arms while saying “No”. After a few moments of attempting to convince Michael to read with me, I sent him on to his next center. At this point, I was unsure of the reason for the behavior, so I pulled Michael aside during rest time with the same book and he read the story beautifully with voice and expression. This reassured my assumptions that Michael was capable of completing the work, but needed motivation to complete it when required rather than on his terms.

In Peter’s case, we had numerous assumptions as to the explanations behind certain behaviors. With reference to Peter’s IEP, our first consideration was the difficulty he demonstrated with transitions. Many of his behaviors occurred during unstructured time (the minute or two between tasks when other children are finishing up, or lining up to go to specials
or lunch). Once we identified the antecedent as “difficulty with unstructured time” causing the behavior (silly or whining about not wanting to go somewhere), we were able to create a Social Story that occupied his attention during this time. We found this to be beneficial in reducing the undesired behaviors.

Other discussions of motivation for Peter’s behaviors consisted of questioning the time of day behaviors occurred, difficulty of tasks, possibility of being enervated due to the length of day in comparison to a pre-school day, and the fact that we had just returned from a long break for Thanksgiving and the holiday season was approaching. We looked at the data and noticed that during the beginning of the week and in the mornings, we observed less defiant behaviors. However, as the week and day progressed, there were more refusals to work or join in group activities. Since up to this point we had not had an extended vacation from school, the discussion of the time of year causing the behavior was difficult to examine, however, from my experience as a primary school teacher, many children at this age demonstrate difficulty during this time. As for difficulty of tasks, Peter displayed the same behaviors for mastered skills, such as writing his name, as new skills, such as writing a sentence to a prompt. Although all of these reasons were considered, as we collected more data, we did not find any correlation to time of day or difficulty of tasks.

In addition to revealing the underlying issues causing a behavior, we spent a considerable amount of time identifying motivators for the children. Discovering motivators for each child is essential to many classroom management strategies. This may also be incorporated into a Social Story if it is part of a behavior system. Each child received rewards as motivation from a previous strategy which was then incorporated into his Social Story. Knowing that Michael enjoyed playing with his trains during rest, we incorporated this into his first Social Story. The
Social Story reads: “If I do my work, I will be able to play at rest time and my teachers will be happy.” Above the word “play” in the Social Story is a picture of Michael holding his trains and smiling. A similar strategy was used for Peter as he enjoyed receiving silly bands or computer time at rest time if he completed his assigned tasks.

The discussion of underlying needs and motivators is important to have when planning for the use of Social Stories. My colleagues and I spent a significant amount of time identifying the needs and motivators and collaborating to make use of the information. This information can give insight about the child and assist with making the Social Story more effective and beneficial.

**Suggestions from colleagues.**

A considerable external factor considered when using Social Stories are the suggestions given from colleagues involved in the study. My colleagues played an extensive role in the creation and changing of Social Stories. We met to discuss behaviors we observed in the classroom, created spreadsheets to collect data on the time and duration of the behaviors and discussed the data to determine antecedents and consequences for the behaviors. We then developed Social Stories or other strategies to prevent the antecedent from occurring. During each planning session we brainstormed replacement behaviors to add to the Social Story to assist the children with their needs.

With Peter, my colleagues presented several ideas for Social Stories, rewards, and possible strategies to help occupy Peter during unstructured time. Although not all the ideas were used due to time constraints and the procedure for following Social Story guidelines, it was very advantageous to have colleagues available to brainstorm ideas and assist with deciding which Stories were most beneficial. One Social Story which required the most assistance was the
“Patience” Social Story. Two ideas generated from our planning sessions for this Social Story were creating a sticker counting book to keep his hands and mind occupied during unstructured time and the addition of activities to be used in order to allow choice during unstructured time. All of the suggestions came from behaviors that were observed in the classroom and the team.

Lysa: He likes something once then he wants a change.

Mya: How about a puzzle over there, something else to keep him busy.

Lysa: And the coloring pages, the Toy Story ones, he’s like “AGAIN!” (PSA5, line 69-71).

We used this information to add desired activities to assist Peter with his needs. We added the sticker counting book as well as computer time and drawing a picture. This information was very helpful as the classroom aides have a lot of one-on-one interactions with children during the time that I am addressing the entire group or working with a small group of children. With three teachers (classroom aides are referred to as teachers) in the room for the majority of the day, we are able to discover more needs and desires than I could if I made all the decisions alone.

**Effective and ineffective decisions.**

A key external factor considered in the use of Social Stories is the effectiveness observed as the Stories are implemented. This observation is crucial as things may need to be altered or reflected on during the first read of the Story or after several reads. Although I have used Social Stories during the past four years, I continue to encounter new ideas and mishaps which occur when creating or reading a Social Story.

**Effectiveness of pictures.**

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, one of the most effective strategies I used when creating Social Stories was the use of real pictures of the children performing the desired
behaviors. Seeing themselves performing the desired behavior in the Story helped them to apply the skills described in the Story and gave them motivation to read the Stories with me on a regular basis. I uncovered this benefit due to the inaccessibility of a program we typically used to create Social Stories called Boardmaker. The Boardmaker program contains multiple pictures traditionally used in Social Stories as well as with a Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) program. Our computers were updated this past summer and the program was not compatible with our new operating system. Therefore I did not have access to Boardmaker.

Upon learning that Boardmaker was not an option during the creation of the first Social Story, I began to take personal pictures of each child performing the tasks indicated in each Social Story. I asked the children to pose for a picture while they were completing their work, putting their work in their mailbox, sitting criss-cross applesauce on the rug as well as many other situations which were included in the Social Stories. I informed the children that the pictures I was taking would be in a Story for them to read at a later time. Although this made the Social Story creation more time consuming, it was worth the additional preparation time and effort. Had Boardmaker been an option during this time, I may not have observed the same results and realized the value of the personalized pictures.

*Ineffective decision to begin a Story too soon.*

In addition to effective decisions, some ineffective decisions were made during this study. Fortunately, I learned from them quickly and made corrections to adjust for the children. The first error was with Michael’s original second Social Story. The Story was never implemented due to the difficulties we had with the Story, and therefore did not become the second Social Story in the study. His first Story was “My Job in School”. The same day we implemented the Social Story for Michael, we discovered that when Michael feels as if his body
is losing control, we can teach him to ask for a break. He typically loses control when he is asked to complete an undesired task. At that time, he would have the opportunity to establish control prior to attempting the task by asking for a break.

After observing the benefits of Michael’s first Social Story on the first day, the special education consultant teacher and I discussed and created the “Break” Social Story the very next day. Michael was not ready for a second Story and displayed behaviors to indicate his discomfort. I read the Social Story with Michael and as soon as we had finished reading, Michael asked to take a break. It is common for children to request a break immediately after the introduction of breaks and is considered acceptable. Michael chose to draw a picture for his mom as his break. As indicated in the Social Story, when it is time to return to the task he was engaged in prior to the break, he needed to comply. We gave Michael five minutes to work on the picture, but Michael refused to join the class in the academic task as he insisted he had not completed his picture for his mother. I gave him a few more minutes, but to no avail, he continued to defy my instructions.

One planning session with the consultant teacher encompassed a detailed conversation of our “Break” Social Story. Many options were discussed. Ruth: “Don’t tell him the story until you want him to take the break” (PSR2, lines 15-16). Another suggestion was the use of a timer to indicate a finite amount of time for Michael to undergo his break and transition back to the academic task. With Michael’s break option of drawing a picture for his mother, we would need to indicate that Michael is able to continue the same drawing each time he requests a break instead of demanding to finish it all in one sitting, which could take a very long time. Although we originally felt this was a necessary Social Story, and we began the Social Story before
Michael was ready for a second one, we later disregarded the Story due to the discovery that it was no longer necessary as time went on due to Michael’s behavior improving.

Unstructured time activities.

My second ineffective decision occurred with Peter’s “Patience” Social Story. When I originally created Peter’s “Patience” Social Story, his difficulties with transitions to new tasks did not come to mind. I introduced the concept of working on simple tasks (i.e., looking at a book, coloring a Toy Story picture or drawing a picture on plain paper) during unstructured time. He seemed excited to participate in these activities until it was time to transition to the next task. At this point, Peter began to cry, stomp his feet, and scribble on his paper to complete the task quickly.

As a team, it was decided that additional information was needed in the Social Story to indicate strategies for Peter if he did not finish the task before it was time to transition.

Researcher: We need to use a timer of some sort because he does not want to end coloring. So we need to set a timer and tell him that when the timer expires, you can set the task to the side and return to it next time we return to our seats. The next time there is a transition. (PSA3, lines 82-84)

We were all in agreement that this was a necessary addition to the Social Story and reviewed the Social Story to determine where the new sentences would be added. Unfortunately, my next ineffective decision with Peter occurred as I attempted to correct this mistake because I neglected Peter’s need for visuals.

Need for visuals.

Upon discussing the first error regarding Peter’s Social Story during our morning planning session, I discussed with the team the possibility of waiting until the next day in order
to allow myself time to make changes to the Story. I concluded that I did not want to wait until the next morning to correct his Social Story because I was anxious to teach the skill. Researcher: “I’m not going to read it with him today… You know what, I might still read it to him today and explain the modification and jot myself some notes, and actually read it with modifications tomorrow” (PSA3, lines 139-141). While reading the Story with Peter, I verbalized the changes rather than adding picture cues with the words. It is apparent that I neglected the needs of a visual learner when I made this decision. I later realized if I had taken the time to change the Story with visual cues prior to reading it again, I would have attained more desirable results.

Peter did not understand the changes I verbalized and had additional difficulties with the transition again. Lysa:“That’s what I had to re-explain to him because when we went to the rug, he ended up kicking somebody and pulling hair. He was mad and very defiant, because he wanted to finish” (PSA3, 85-86). After this attempt, I added a picture of a timer to the story and words to assist him with the issue of not wanting to finish. The timer was used to indicate an end to the activity and assistance with transitioning to the academic tasks. This seemed to help with the behaviors that resulted from the Social Story.

As described, I considered many factors when writing and changing the Social Stories. Adherence to the guidelines identified by Carol Gray, reviewing the needs and interests of the children, working with my colleagues to determine antecedents of behaviors and reflecting on my effective and ineffective decisions assisted with the use of Social Stories in my classroom.

**When to end the Social Story.**

The second portion of the sub question refers to knowing when to end a Social Story and advance to a new one. This is also considered the beginning and ending of a new action research mini cycle. The mini cycles which occurred with the use of Social Stories for each child was
outlined earlier in this study. The observation of behaviors and the discussions which occurred based on those behaviors were the key component of Social Story usage. My colleagues and I observed and recorded many behaviors throughout the study in communication books, daily logs, and behavior charts. I then synthesized this data and reflected on it in my researcher’s journal. Through these records, I viewed evidence of either the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the Social Stories used. I then discussed these reflections with my colleagues to receive their feedback.

**Peter.**

Peter’s initial Social Story regarding personal space was deemed ineffective due to the observation that he still required many reminders to remain in his personal space. We discussed generalizing this Social Story to other aspects of the day, but we later learned that the underlying issue was the difficulty with unstructured time, not staying in his area as previously thought. It was evident that alterations were required when the behavior did not change. This Social Story was terminated in order to allow the transition to Peter’s second Social Story.

His second Social Story, “Patience” addressed this issue more appropriately. The essential replacement behaviors were indicated to assist Peter with keeping his hands and feet to himself. The tasks described in the Social Story were exactly what he needed. Although after a short time, I ended the reading of the Social Story with Peter, we did not end his unstructured time tasks. The tasks continued because we found them to be effective; however, the reading of the Social Story to describe the tasks, was no longer needed as he began accessing the tasks independently without reminders. We introduced a new Social Story immediately.

Peter’s final Social Story, “My Job in School” was created to assist Peter in the completion of tasks without verbally and physically expressing his dislike for the tasks. This
Social Story continued after the study ended due to the lack of improvement observed at the time the study ended. Although we did not find success immediately with this Social Story, we did see an extensive improvement after the holiday season. As a team, we came to the conclusion that Peter must have needed a break from school and a fresh start after the holidays.

*Michael.*

Additionally, each of Michael’s Stories had a noticeable end but for a contrasting reason. We observed the desired improvement in Michael’s behavior after the initial Social Story, “My Job in School”, but we continued to fear that Michael’s undesired behavior may return if we discontinued the use of the Social Story. Due to this fear, I continued to read the “My Job in School” Social Story with Michael. After two weeks, I found that Michael became uninterested in the story. I decided to end the use of this Social Story in order to continue Michael’s interest in the Stories and maintain the desired behaviors we were now experiencing.

Michael’s second Social Story, “Be Patient”, was not found to be effective for an equal duration of time. Michael began refusing to read the Social Story with me from the initial read, but became interested again after I noticed his need for routine. After I finally regained Michael’s interest in Social Stories, we only read the Story four times before Michael began refusing to read it with me again. He demonstrated an understanding of the skill based on his performance of the desired behavior of raising his hand and waiting to be called on. I did not find a need to continue the Story with him at this point.

Our third Social Story with Michael, “Kissing is for Families,” was read twice with refusal to read on the third day. He read the Story and demonstrated his understanding of the message immediately by asking an adult for a hug within minutes of reading the Story. Although
we were only able to read the Story with him a few times, we were inspired by his use of the skills we demonstrated in the Story.

Michael’s Social Stories have been utilized since the completion of the study on days where refusal occurs. He has demonstrated an understanding of school rules and academic requirements on most days, but requires reminders on occasion in order to progress through the school year.

Findings for Sub Question Three

The final sub question was dedicated to how I decided when or when not to use Social Stories. This was a difficult task at first because we wanted to create a Social Story for every behavior we observed. I also wanted to begin the use of Social Stories immediately during the first week of school. Unfortunately, although it was an ambitious thought, it was not realistic due to the time required to observe the children and the additional undesired behaviors which occurred during this specific school year with other children in the class. Some considerations I made when determining whether or not to use a Social Story were, the severity of the behavior and the learning style of the child, the excessive number of ideas with a short amount of time, observation of other available strategies that would aide with the behavior, and time required to create the Social Story.

Study began later than expected.

My original plan to begin the use of Social Stories the first week of school was unrealistic for the following reasons: the time in which is required to observe the needs of the children extended beyond the interview with their parents, and there were additional behavioral concerns which required my attention.
Observation of behaviors.

In a kindergarten classroom, it is difficult to begin a detailed strategy such as Social Stories prior to becoming acquainted with the children. Obtaining first hand information about students is a large component of the use of Social Stories. Although Peter’s parents had supplied information about Peter prior to the first day via an interview, I was able to acquire additional information during classroom observations. I required the opportunity to track behaviors and discover the antecedents of the behaviors. One instrumental discovery during my daily observations was that Peter did not have difficulty with transitions until services such as speech and consultant teacher pull outs began. In addition to observations of Peter’s needs, it was evident that Michael required some assistance with behavioral concerns despite the absence of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

At this time, I continued to observe the children and record anecdotal notes of the observations as well as discuss these observations with my colleagues. We also created spreadsheets to collect data regarding the time and duration of the behaviors. This proved to assist with the Social Story creation because it gave us the data required to meet the needs of the children and expanded our comprehension of the observations by connecting antecedents to the behaviors we observed. Although this is all beneficial to the creation of Social Stories, it is time consuming and requires considerable data collection. Therefore preventing me from initiating a Social Story during the first week of the study.

Behavior concerns.

Furthermore, as a kindergarten classroom with minimal feedback from prior school experiences, I was not aware of additional behavioral issues displayed from children who were not in the study that required immediate attention and delayed the commencement of Social
Stories. I decided that the classroom environment required stabilizing in order to allow time and effort to implement the Social Stories. This resulted in the installation of several behavior systems in the classroom to accommodate the multiple needs of other children in the class including the two children involved in this study. After the classroom became stabilized, I displayed additional confidence as I began the use of the Social Story study.

**Severity of behaviors and learning style.**

Additional factors used to decide whether or not I used a Social Story for a situation was the severity of a behavior and the learning style of the child. Both students began with a Social Story that addressed unsafe behaviors and both children were identified as visual learners.

**Severity of behaviors.**

Michael’s defiant behavior and refusing to complete school work, escalated to hitting and kicking furniture, teachers, administration, and other children. Due to the severity of these behaviors, this resulted in multiple trips to the office and our support room to assist him in regaining control of his body prior to returning to the classroom. Since Michael was not identified as a participant at the onset of the study, I did not originally consider Social Stories as a strategy.

After many unsuccessful strategies were implemented such as the creation of a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP), behavior chart with reward system, and weekly counseling services, the team decided to implement a Social Story and reflect on its effectiveness. After this story, it became evident that Social Stories were effective for Michael and as other behaviors arose, Social Stories were created for them as well. Although Michael no longer demonstrated extreme behaviors, the decision was made to create a Social Story to help with waiting to be called on and kissing friends and teachers in school.
Peter’s first Social Story was also based on severity. Although we later discovered the antecedent behind the behavior as preferring to have fun rather than complete work, we created the first Social Story to address the behaviors we observed. Peter’s “Personal Space” Social Story was created to prevent him from crawling on the table and into the personal space of other children. He continuously grabbed and pulled on other children and prevented them from learning and completing their work. Although no one was hurt during the behavior, other children became upset and deserved an equal opportunity to learn. It was determined by the team that Peter required assistance to terminate the behavior.

The severity of the child’s behavior is an important criterion when deciding when to use a Social Story. Knowing a child’s behaviors and assisting with the safety and learning of the rest of the class is a priority of mine as a teacher.

*Visual learners.*

The research on Social Stories demonstrates the use of Social Stories to enhance the meaning of a situation through written words. Pictures may be added if the teacher feels they are necessary (Gray, 2004). For this reason, I have found them to be beneficial for two students who were identified as visual learners by their parents. In this study, Social Stories were used to help these two children in kindergarten understand their behaviors, the reactions of the teachers, and remind them of their reward system when rules are followed. The impact of pictures as reminders was essential to the visual learning style and aided with the processing of the desired behaviors.

*Excessive number of ideas.*

Throughout the study during planning sessions, my colleagues and I generated many Social Story ideas for Peter. Some ideas were the use of a “schedule” Social Story, a “break”
Social Story, a “don’t give up” Social Story, a “strategies” Social Story, a Story about “changing colors on the behavior chart”, “coming off the playground”, a Social Story about “being good and showing ready”, and a Social Story about “doing something the first time it is asked”.

As indicated above, these Social Stories were not created; however, many of the ideas were placed into Social Stories in order to assist with multiple areas of need. For example, Peter’s “Patience” Social Story exhibited strategies and activities in order to earn his rewards. The “My Job in School” Social Story references desired behaviors and completing the task the first time. “When my teachers ask me to do my work, I need to work very hard until I am finished”.

The generation of ideas was helpful in the creation of Social Stories, but we sometimes were too ambitious with wanting to assist with all of the undesired behaviors in which we collected data. By combining some of the suggestions into one Social Story, we were able to address Peter’s needs while remaining realistic in the introduction of Social Stories during the time of the study.

Other strategies available.

Social Stories were the basis of this study; however, they were not used in isolation. In some cases, I chose to attempt an alternative strategy to assist with a behavior rather than a Social Story. This decision was made on an individual basis and reflected the needs of the child. As mentioned earlier, both children employed additional behavior strategies other than Social Stories, many of which were in place prior to the first Social Story.

Peter’s first strategy was a picture schedule to aid with predictable routines. This strategy was implemented prior to a Social Story due to Peter’s familiarity with the use of picture schedules in pre-school. In accordance with mom’s suggestion that a master schedule presented
to the entire class would suffice, we introduced a large schedule located at the front of the classroom to the entire class as well as Peter on the first day of school. Mom: “He just needs something that he can refer to” (IP, line 21).

This was effective until services began and Peter was removed from the classroom for speech and special education consultant teacher services. His personal schedule was now different from the schedule at the front of the room. He demonstrated some behaviors which exhibited the need for additional assistance with this change. Some behaviors we saw were crying, throwing his rest rug, and stomping his feet. Researcher: “He missed rest the other day, and he was mad because it’s on the schedule that we are supposed to have rest. So I think he needs his own individual schedule” (PSR1, lines 55-56). At this time, an individual picture schedule was introduced. Again, Peter was familiar with this strategy from pre-school and adapted to it quickly. We discussed the possibility of creating a Social Story to introduce this new schedule, but deemed it unnecessary based on our observations.

Another classroom strategy that was utilized for both children was a behavior chart with a reward system. This strategy was created for both children prior to the use of Social Stories due to my knowledge of such systems being effective with past students. This strategy was later added to the Social Stories as a reminder. For Michael, the reward system and the Social Stories were put in place at almost the same time. He loved his train stickers and this proved to be very efficacious for him.

Researcher: He’ll do any work if we say we’re going to put a train sticker on when he’s done.

Lysa: Right. He was easy to find a motivator. (PSA2, line 30-32)
The use of rewards is a common strategy at the primary level for undesired behaviors; however, they are traditionally weaned away as other strategies or internal rewards are established. The reward system was also used with Peter. He earned computer time and Silly Bands when he earned five smiles prior to rest time which takes place during the later part of the school day.

As in many classrooms, multiple strategies are attempted when undesired behaviors are displayed. Social Stories were not an exclusive strategy during the time of this study as I have found many strategies to be effective over the years. It is very difficult to create multiple Social Stories for one child and use them throughout the day, therefore, additional strategies were utilized in place of Social Stories for some behaviors or needs.

**Excessive time required to create Social Stories.**

In many instances we discussed the need for a Social Story, but by the time the pictures were taken and the final decisions regarding terminology were decided, we had developed another strategy for the child to use.

The use of pictures of the children performing the desired behaviors was very conducive to the Stories. However, when working with kindergarten children, attempting to alter my schedule to take pictures became a challenge. I was required to interrupt a guided reading lesson or ask the child to pretend to perform that task during play time. This proved to be very time consuming. My next task was to download the pictures onto my computer in order to use them in the Social Stories.

The terminology used in each Social Story was also a creative process. There were many occasions when we described the behaviors based on what we saw, such as “No whining” or “we need to stop the deliberate behaviors that we’re seeing” (PSA5, line 50). This resulted in a conversation as a team on how to change the terminology into positive words. We worked
together to brainstorm ideas. Multiple suggestions were discussed as I wrote them down. We began modifying our sentences numerous times and in some instances ended our session without coming to a conclusion.

Knowing the depth of this procedure, I occasionally left one meeting with the ideas we generated for a Social Story and returned to the next meeting with the Social Story created to review. When I sat down with the team to discuss the details of what was written, we decided that changes were required. I began by having the team read what I had written, then asked them if they thought it would work based on what we saw.

Lysa: We need to try it and see.

Researcher: Should we add the part of rewards to this story?

Mya: Maybe.

Researcher: So to say…

Lysa: Will it be too long?

Researcher: So maybe, “If I do my work without crying, I will be able to earn my smiles.”

Mya: Earn my smiles and my rewards.

Researcher: “Earn my rewards” instead of “play at playtime.” (PSA4, lines 73-80)

This change meant that I could not introduce the Social Story that day and required time to make that change prior to reading it with Peter. Although the conversations regarding changes were long and tedious, they became essential prior to the administration of a Social Story to prevent complications when reading the Social Stories with the children.

Deciding when or when not to use a Social Story was a complex task. Reflecting on the needs of the children required time as well as the examination of the behaviors to determine their
severity. In addition, I took into consideration the visual learning styles of the children to determine if this strategy would be beneficial and examined alternative strategies which have assisted children with similar behaviors in the past. I took into consideration the time required to create Social Stories and the extensive ideas generated during planning sessions with my colleagues. The planning and process relied heavily on the needs and observations of the children as well as the professional judgment of my colleagues.

Overall findings:

As described in the above sub questions there are many components to planning when implementing the use of Social Stories with students in an inclusive classroom. The first component is recognizing that this strategy should not be used in isolation, but rather in conjunction with other common classroom strategies. Two additional components of planning are the use of colleagues for collaboration and identification of behavioral needs and social strengths of all the children in the classroom.

Not used in isolation.

As I mentioned earlier, I did not use Social Stories in isolation, nor would I recommend other teachers rely solely on the use of Social Stories to assist with undesired behaviors in the classroom. With visual learners, any visual prompting such as schedules or pictures are beneficial. In this study, the parent interviews provided me with additional strategies that were previously found productive.

Peter’s parents disclosed several strategies which were implemented as successful in pre-school. These proved to be accommodating in our classroom as well.

Mom: First and then has worked a lot.

Researcher: OK
Mom: Because his biggest thing is like if he doesn’t want to do something, he wants to do this instead. First we’ll do this, then we can do this. (IP, lines 108-111)

I disseminated this information to Lysa and Mya in casual conversation, and we adhered to these phrases regularly in the classroom.

Lysa: We could try. Ya, then see his reaction to it. A lot of times when he is struggling with something, I use first and then. And then he’s okay with it. First ya know this, then we’ll do… Ya know then he usually will accept it. (PSA1, lines 91-93)

This became a common strategy to use with Peter as it was found to be terminology he was comfortable with and accepted.

Another key phrase Peter’s parents mentioned was “Show me ready”. Again, I shared this information with Lysa and Mya and it proved to be efficacious as well. On many occasions Peter would express his desire to “be good”, but he simultaneously would perform undesired behaviors. We would then request that he shows us the desired behavior rather than telling us he wants to “do the right thing”. Lysa: “I’ve said, ‘Don’t tell me you want to be good, show me good by making good choices.’ Reminding him of what being good means. But I think he’s struggling with that” (PSA3, lines 127-129). We altered the terminology slightly from the description his mother gave us, but they had the same meaning and he understood what was needed from him.

With Michael, I learned that positive praise or praising others could guide Michael into performing the desired behaviors.

Mom: If I start telling the girls that they did something good, that will help bring him around. He wants to get that praise, so they’re sitting there quietly, “I guess I better do that too.” That will help a little bit. (IM, lines 335-338)
In the classroom, we found this to be extremely valuable. Michael thrived on positive praise. A simplistic strategy such as a “thumbs up” motivated Michael to continue the desired behavior.

Mya: I see a lot of compliments. If we give him compliments and praise, he does thrive on that.

Lysa: Thumbs up.

Mya: Ya, thumbs up is a big thing. (PSA2, lines 9-11)

This strategy was used regularly with Michael, as well as the remainder of the class, whether he was displaying undesired behaviors or having a great day.

**Benefits of colleagues for collaboration.**

The classroom team, two classroom aides and special education consultant teacher, are the backbone to my classroom. The information they supply during our discussions are essential and crucial to the effectiveness of the classroom. Time is used efficiently to observe the children’s behaviors, record data on the behaviors, discuss the observations and assist with brainstorming ideas to benefit the progress of the children. There is consistent effort to collaborate and effectively construct decisions in order to create a fun and safe learning environment.

For this particular study, specific times were scheduled to create common planning opportunities with the classroom aides to discuss Michael and Peter. In reality, conversations regarding the needs of the children and strategies to assist with those needs are discussed on a daily basis, but in passing rather than scheduled times. During the twelve weeks of this study, we gathered together for eight scheduled meetings. Three of these meetings took place with the special education consultant teacher, Ruth, and five with the classroom aides, Lysa and Mya.
This does not reflect the extensive unscheduled meetings in which we spoke in reference to the children in passing and conversations regarding students who were not represented in the study.

During each planning session, we began by discussing the most significant needs or any celebrations of success that we observed. We took turns stating observations and conferring with each other’s thoughts, and we developed checklists together to collect data for future discussions and strategy development. When similar observations were discovered, and data was collected to determine the antecedent of the behavior, we then began brainstorming strategies and ideas to assist with the behaviors. Due to their keen observations and insightful discussions, the team assisted me to recognize insights I may not have noticed prior to our meetings.

During one planning session early in the year, we began looking at behaviors Peter displayed and determined there was a need to observe these behaviors more closely. Meanwhile, we began brainstorming ideas to assist with the behaviors while we collected data.

Lysa: If something doesn’t go his way or if he… like when he has to change colors or something, his initial reaction is to whine.

Researcher: Yes, changing colors is an issue. Changing colors and behavior.

Mya: Ya and coming in off the playground.

Lysa: Right, he started to show problems with that.

Mya: Crying coming in off the playground. He could probably use something like a timer or a warning.

Researcher: A one minute warning. (PSA1, lines 37-47)

Later in this discussion, a spreadsheet was created to track the occurrences of these behaviors to determine the need for a Social Story or alternative strategy. Both Lysa and Mya assisted with tallying behaviors and noting what occurred prior to the behavior to assist with data collection.
for future planning sessions. This data was then used at our planning sessions to make decisions when using Social Stories.

All three of my colleagues are experienced and knowledgeable in regards to children and classroom strategies. Their opinions and strategies have proved to be the key to our classroom success by assisting with brainstorming, data collection and decision making.

**Identification of behavioral needs and motivators.**

As mentioned earlier, needs and motivators were discussed during planning sessions and parent interviews. This information is the basis for all Social Stories as Social Stories are used to teach children about their surroundings and supply the child with strategies to assist with social needs. In this study, the Social Stories were used for both social and behavioral needs. Without the identification of the antecedents related to the undesired behaviors, as well as motivators and strengths to use as replacement behaviors, we would not be able to create Social Stories to help the children.

In some instances, we identified a child’s need based on a behavior we observed, but later learned we had misunderstood the cause of the behavior. In Peter’s first Social Story, we concluded that he required assistance remaining in his personal space, but in reality, he required strategies to occupy himself during unstructured time. His replacement behaviors (i.e., coloring a Toy Story picture, stringing beads, playing on the computer) were chosen based on his desires. Upon identifying the appropriate antecedent, we found increased success.

In Michael’s case, the identification of his needs was discovered by observing his behavior in multiple situations. We concluded that Michael required assistance with understanding the routines and requirements of school. In response to the identification of this need, the Social Story “My Job in School” was created. The Social Story proved to be very
successful along with the many rewards and positive praise received for demonstrating desired behaviors.

**Unexpected Findings**

The use of Social Stories is a strategy I have utilized for the past four years. At the onset of this study, I imagined this year’s experiences would be similar to those I possessed in the past. Although much of the planning occurred as I expected, one unexpected finding revealed a tremendous amount of information.

**Parent interview.**

The parent interview (Appendix B) was a key resource for classroom management techniques and the use of Social Stories. As I mentioned earlier, the interview presented me with strategies I could initiate with the children, antecedents for their behaviors, interests or motivators for each child, and fears or triggers to take into consideration. Not all of the suggestions were related to the use of Social Stories; however, they remained beneficial when working with the children on a daily basis.

**Behavior antecedents.**

As previously mentioned, recognizing the antecedent of a behavior is essential to assisting a child to discontinue an undesired behavior. Based on the underlying cause of a behavior, the approach and strategy can be altered to better reflect the needs of the child. The parent interviews guided my knowledge of this information and prepared me for some of the behaviors I encountered.

Michael’s parents had described him as sweet and caring with some obsessive compulsive tendencies. We observed this regularly when working with Michael, and by understanding this characteristic of Michael, we were able to approach certain behaviors with
care and understanding. On occasion, Michael would call attention to a pen mark on the dry erase board or misplaced item in the classroom and require that it be fixed prior to the continuation of his work. After the situation was dealt with, Michael would continue with his work without incident.

One specific incident was discussed during a planning session with Mya and Lysa. Michael’s attention was focused on the computer screen during math. Mya was working with Michael at the time and handled the situation beautifully to regain Michael’s focus.

Mya: Yesterday I noticed when we were sitting near the computers at math stations, he kept staring over at the computers. And I said, “Michael let’s pay attention, let’s do our work.” He had to get up and clear the screen and put the cursor dead center on the screen with the mouse on both computers. He was fine after he did that. I said, “Go ahead.” He did it then sat right back down and said, “There, that’s better”. (PSA2, lines 11-17)

If Mya had not been aware of Michael’s needs, this could have resulted in a power struggle, but instead, it was resolved and Michael was able to refocus on his math.

During the interview with Peter’s parents, I learned that Peter may become frustrated when he needs assistance with a task.

Mom: He gets frustrated though before he’ll ask for help. I mean you kinda gotta…

Dad: When he starts showing that he’s frustrated, then you help, it levels out a lot easier.

(IP, lines 85-86)

I shared this information with Lysa and Mya due to their one-on-one interactions with Peter during small and whole group instruction. They were able to relieve some of Peter’s frustration with additional scaffolding and assistance with tasks that were perceived to be more difficult for Peter. With this assistance, Peter was able to maintain focused on academic tasks.
Without the interviews with Peter’s and Michael’s parents, I would not have learned about the behavior antecedents and may have approached them differently, and possibly caused more harm than good.

**Interests or motivators.**

Information on interests and motivators is the key to any behavior management system as well as the Social Story strategy. This information from the parent interviews was especially advantageous when attempting to eliminate undesired behaviors. Each parent indicated highly motivating interests to assist with reinforcement in the classroom.

Michael’s parents expressed his interest in Thomas the Train, construction vehicles, bulldozers, and Lego’s. The motivator that I found most successful was Thomas the Train. Michael’s mom and I purchased many stickers and coloring books to use with Michael. Each time Michael completed his work, he received a Thomas the Train sticker on his paper. Each day Michael remained on green, (class behavior system) he received a Thomas the Train sticker on his communication slip. Michael became intrinsically motivated to do well and relished in the opportunity to share his success with his bus driver and friends.

Peter’s parents also communicated his interests with toys, Batman, Toy Story and Turtles. I found success originally with coloring pages from the movie Toy Story. In addition, I purchased special Toy Story crayons and many Toy Story stickers to use as rewards and for his counting book. Although this proved to be beneficial at first, Peter became uninterested in the coloring pages and new rewards were discovered. He still however, used the special crayons to draw a picture in the morning during unstructured time while all the children arrived for the day.
**Fears or triggers.**

The third substantial result from the parent interview was the identification of fears or triggers. Both Michael’s and Peter’s parents identified incidents to avoid when working with their children.

Michael’s parents identified his fear of loud noises. The fear was a considerable concern when we discussed fire drills in school. To my advantage, our first few fire drills are conducted by way of directions announced through a speaker system. We do not use a fire alarm due the age of the children in the primary building. The use of a speaker system seemed to ease his anxiety about the fire drills. After a short time period the fire alarm was used; however, Michael understood the procedure and his confidence aided in his comfort of the situation. He was able to comply with the procedure of the fire drill without incident.

In addition to loud noises, Michael has a fear of large crowds. This information would have been valuable prior to the first day of school. Due to adding Michael to the study later in the school year, this interview did not occur until we began seeing undesired behaviors from Michael. One of the observed behaviors occurred during “Dinosaur School”. This is a kindergarten program designed to teach social skills with the use of puppets and scripted lessons. During Dinosaur School, another class joins us for instruction due to the use of two or three puppets for each lesson. We soon found Dinosaur School to be an antecedent for Michael. He would demonstrate such behaviors as facing the back of the room, kicking people near him, and pulling down books or pieces of the calendar. The reason for these behaviors was unknown until the interview was conducted with Michael’s parents and we discovered Michael’s fear of crowds.
Had I acquired this information regarding Michael’s fear prior to this time, I could have developed preventative alternatives such as sitting at a desk with an aide, developing a Social Story about large crowds assembling, or asked him to discuss his needs with a teacher prior to the arrival of another class. Now that I possess this information, I intend to have strategies in place for our field trip in March.

Peter’s parents described suggestions for particular behaviors rather than stating triggers or fears Peter may have. They mentioned that at times ignoring a behavior can assist with eliminating the undesired behavior. Dad: “If you ignore him, like it goes away after a minute” (IP, line 139). We encountered the usefulness of this strategy upon the changing of a color on the behavior system from green to yellow or yellow to red. We observed Peter beginning to cry or yell out as his color was changed. We found that continuing to discuss the situation with Peter agitated him further. However, if we ignore the crying and give him a timer with one minute displayed, he began to calm down and discontinue the crying as the minute expired.

Peter’s parents also identified transitioning as Peter’s greatest challenge in school. With this information, I was able to address this concern prior to the first day of school in order to prevent any discomfort or anxiety Peter had regarding daily routines. The picture schedule was an enormous asset the first week of school.

After experiencing the benefits of these interviews, I decided that this information is crucial to identify regarding all of my students each year. It would be impossible to interview each set of parents prior to the first day of school; however, I developed a parent survey to allow parents the opportunity to describe their child and answer questions regarding their child’s needs and motivators. Parents are required to complete many forms on the first day of school, and I prefer that parents take the time to complete the survey. For these reasons, I anticipate sending
the survey (Appendix C) home with my introduction letter over the summer for parents to complete at their leisure.

Conclusion

My overarching question for this study was determining how I as a general education teacher, implement the use of Social Stories with students in an inclusive kindergarten classroom. This was discovered by looking at planning sessions with colleagues and the process of making decisions when using Social Stories. Some aspects which were examined in detail were the external and internal factors I considered when writing Social Stories, deciding when to end them and when or when not to use Social Stories.

I discovered that the key elements to this process were a parent interview and collaboration with colleagues. In the absence of these pieces, the study would not have been as successful with the decisions around the use of Social Stories. With this discovery, I intend to continue the collaboration and efforts which were used during the time of the study.

In the next chapter I will describe the next action research cycle which would occur if I were to continue this study. The addition of strategies and new research questions are given and a description of changes which would occur. I will expand on the process I used to implement the study and how it reflects action research methods.
Chapter 5

Impact of Action Research

Action research is unique in its methodology and design. Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen (2007) describe action research methodology as “using data to come to conclusions” (p. 145). The research is about “collective meaning-making and action – in other words, it is about praxis” (p. 145). In my research, I was not attempting to test a hypothesis, but rather dissect my own teaching practices when planning and administering Social Stories with children.

In this section I first discuss what the next stage of the action research cycle would be if I were to continue research in the area of the planning process used to make decisions when using Social Stories with children in an inclusive kindergarten classroom. I discuss the two strategies I would expand on from the original study and conclude with new research questions I would aim to answer with the next cycle.

Next Stage of the Action Research Cycle

As previously mentioned, this study required one action research cycle. In order to conduct the next cycle, I would be required to change aspects of the planning during the reflection stage and plan a new approach. This section describes the changes required during the planning sessions in addition to an interview with all the parents as major alterations to the study. In addition, I refer to different questions I would answer in a new study with the use of Social Stories.

Alternative strategies.

If I were to continue with the next action research cycle, there are two strategies I would like to expand on from the current study. First, I would like to combine my planning sessions
with the special education consultant teacher and classroom aides, and second, I would like to interview all the parents prior to the first day of school.

**Planning session with aides and consultant teacher combined.**

As mentioned earlier, planning sessions with the consultant teacher is a common requirement for teachers in an inclusion classroom in the Friarville Primary School. In addition, most teachers strategically discuss issues with their classroom aides despite the lack of a designated time for discussions to take place. For this study, I deliberately conducted planning sessions with both the classroom aides and the special education consultant teacher. The shortcoming of this strategy was my inability to hold these meetings as one group rather than meeting with the consultant teacher at one time and the classroom aides at another. I believe we would have saved time and gathered more resources had we had the opportunity to meet together. I did not foresee this being an issue when I originally planned the sessions, but now that I had an opportunity to reflect on the planning sessions, and experience the outcome of the sessions, I see that we would have benefited from this collaborative effort.

The collaboration of all of us together will most likely be my biggest challenge in a future study. The common planning time arranged for the special education consultant teacher and classroom teacher in the Friarville Central School District occurs during library time, and the classroom aides are needed to assist the students during library. In this study, I met with the classroom aides before the school day began. The classroom aides arrive fifteen minutes prior to the arrival of the students, and we used this time to meet and record our sessions. This is not always ideal for the special education consultant teacher as they have meetings prior to the beginning of the school day, bus duty, or planning with other service providers.
This strategy would require prior planning to arrange for a day without meetings or bus duty for all parties to meet. The administration would have to be willing to make arrangements for this to occur. The Friarville School District has been very accommodating and helpful with the original study, and if I were to pursue the second cycle, I am confident the administrator would assist with this request.

*Interview all parents in classroom.*

In addition to common planning that involves all parties, I would also interview all parents of students entering my classroom. In previous paragraphs, I referred to this as being a difficult task to pursue each school year. However, if I were to conduct a second cycle, this would be essential to the research due to the amount of information that could be obtained with this data source.

During the original study, I anticipated one child as a participant, but later found that another child was a prime candidate for the study. If I had conducted a parent interview with each parent, I may have recognized this child’s needs and aided with his fears and needs sooner. I found many antecedents for his behaviors after interviewing his parents, and in retrospect, I could have been more prepared with strategies and information to help him succeed in the classroom.

I understand this will require time and effort prior to the first day of school, but it would be very beneficial if I discover that another child could benefit from the use of Social Stories. I would then have all the required information regarding the children enrolled in my class when observing behaviors and understanding the antecedents which cause the behaviors.
New questions to answer.

In order to expand on the areas described above, my research questions would be based on learning how these areas affect my planning. Two new questions would be: How does planning together with aides and the consultant teacher differ from planning with only the aides or only the consultant teacher on separate occasions? I would also research: How does conducting an interview with all the parents prior to the first day of school affect my use of Social Stories? I believe by looking at these two areas, I would be able to reflect on the changes I made in order to decipher the impact those changes have on my planning and teaching.

The new questions would be answered similarly to the way I answered the first questions with planning sessions, parent interviews and a reflective researcher’s journal. Additionally, I would add a parent survey about the interview to obtain information from the parents to understand their thoughts on the interview. I would be able to reflect on the new area of interest and find new ways to expand my knowledge of planning strategies.

Conclusion

The action research process was beneficial to this study. I discovered how I may change this study to answer new questions and expressed suggestions for new research questions to complete the next cycle of the research. This information continues to be an area of interest of mine and is something I am looking into studying further.

In chapter six, I will review the highlights of this study and express the limitations I encountered. In addition, I reflect on the actions I have taken as a result of this study and I include recommendations to practitioners for future study.
Chapter 6

Conclusion

In this chapter, I review the key findings of the study and express the limitations I encountered. In addition, I explain the actions taken as a result of the study and the implications of this research. Finally, I explain my suggestions to practitioners in regards to conducting future research in this area.

Summary of Results

This study was developed to assist me with the planning and reflection process of how I incorporate Social Stories with all children in an inclusive classroom. The use of action research methodology allowed me to use my observations and reflections to evaluate the next step in the study.

The literature establishes a wealth of information regarding the use of sociocultural theory and a disability studies influence which guided my process and analysis. The understanding that a child’s personal experiences guide their learning and interactions with other children was crucial to the use of Social Stories in a kindergarten classroom. Additionally, understanding my personal view of students with and without disabilities in my classroom, and attempting to push each child to their potential, regardless of a label, greatly influenced the way I interact with my students and follow through with instruction. I view my classroom as a learning community in which all children are treated fairly and are given equal opportunities. The Social Stories assist with equaling the playing field to address the needs and increase motivation in all students. Additionally, the understanding of Social Stories and their behaviorist theory foundation added background to this study.
In addition, the literature includes a wide variety of information in regards to the use of Social Stories and elaborates on the types of sentences used in a Social Story and how to initiate Social Stories with a child. Furthermore, I provided information regarding children with autism in which Social Stories were designed to assist. As I explained in earlier chapters, the literature lacks key information on how the planning process occurs when writing or during the use of Social Stories.

In order to expand on the literature available regarding the planning process with regards to the use of Social Stories, I developed this study. The study incorporated two children who displayed social or behavioral challenges in the kindergarten inclusive classroom. An interview was conducted with the parents of the children to receive additional information about the children regarding social needs, motivators and triggers. The interview proved to be advantageous during the planning sessions, reflection process and the analysis. In addition to an interview with the parents, planning sessions were recorded to reflect on decisions which were made regarding Social Stories and to document the interactions which took place regarding the two children in the study. Finally, a researcher’s journal was utilized to record data observed during daily interactions.

Action research methods was the chosen methodology for the study. The cyclical process of planning, acting/observing and reflecting in order to plan again was utilized throughout the twelve weeks of the study. Although one action research cycle took place in regards to the overall study, many mini cycles took place for each child during the acting and observing phase of the larger cycle.

This study answered one overarching question and three sub questions regarding the planning process utilized when using Social Stories. The questions addressed in this study are:
How do I, as a general education teacher, implement the use of Social Stories with students with autism in an inclusive kindergarten classroom? The sub questions are as follows:

1) What information do I use to make decisions when using Social Stories?

2) What external and internal factors do I consider when…
   a) writing and changing Social Stories?
   b) discontinuing the use of a Social Story?

3) How do I decide when, or when not to use Social Stories?

I used dimensional analysis to name the data and discover perspective dimensions for each sub question. Analysis of the data in conjunction with the above questions assisted with changing my future practices which will be explained later in this chapter.

**Limitations**

Upon the completion of the study, I encountered three limitations which I explain here. The first limitation is based on the time frame of the study. Although starting in September was an ambitious thought, I found it to be unrealistic. The second is the time allotment given to plan with the colleagues who participated in the study. The final limitation I encountered was that my team of colleagues and I developed multiple Social Story ideas. However, due to time constraints, we were not able to utilize more than three per student. What follows is a detailed discussion of the limitations.

**Start of the study in September.**

Due to the time allotted for this action research study, I was required to begin collecting data in September. Having taught kindergarten for the past five years, I knew this would be difficult, but I began the study regardless of my thoughts. Beginning in September proved to be a difficult experience due to the nature of kindergarten during the first month of school. Although
beginning early is important for some skills, it is also helpful to collect information by observing
the children prior to initiating the Social Stories.

I gathered information regarding the first child from a parent interview; however, this was
not enough. Although extremely beneficial, I required my own observation of the children to
understand their needs in the classroom environment. Additionally, I required time to create and
utilize checklists in order to obtain the frequency and duration of behaviors for the Functional
Behavior Assessments (FBAs). For future studies, I will collect information and intend to start
the study after the class has been established. This is a critical piece to the study and is
something that should be considered.

**Time to plan with colleagues.**

Planning time established with my colleagues was a large limitation for this study. We
designated days in which we would gather prior to the arrival of the students, but it would have
been more beneficial to meet more often. Due to early morning meetings and situations which
arose before school, I did not always have the opportunity to discuss the children with the
classroom aides prior the start of the school day.

Although we could not meet officially, we discussed needs and observations throughout the
day. Recording the conversations throughout the day would have assisted with the analysis.
However, that was not possible with so many children in the room and teaching requirements.

**Too many Social Story ideas.**

Although the classroom team did not always establish meeting times, when we met, we had a
tremendous amount of information to discuss. On many occasions, we identified multiple social
needs and possible stories to assist with those needs. We would discuss antecedents of the
behaviors and how to initiate a new Social Story to address the antecedents. Additionally,
altering the Stories to meet the needs of the children became our goal during many planning sessions.

We were confident that the Social Stories would be useful; however, we remained true to the guidelines by introducing only one Social Story at a time. We then observed the application of the Social Story to determine if the needs of the children were met. As Social Stories were observed to be beneficial or required alterations, we reconvened to decide if an entirely new Social Story was needed from our long list of Social Stories, or alterations to the original Social Story to adapt to the child’s needs. This time consuming process was necessary and therefore, three Social Stories were developed for each child during the twelve weeks of the study.

Actions Taken as a Result of the Study/Implications of the Research

As mentioned in chapter three, action research is used to make an impact on the research community as well as the people conducting the research. This study has significantly impacted my teaching, and I hope to impact the teaching of others. With the information I have learned, I intend to conduct professional development in the area of Social Story use.

In addition to an impact on the research community, this study has also impacted the decisions I make as a classroom teacher. I intend to change the way I plan with colleagues, and I have created a parent survey which will be distributed to all parents to aid with planning for students prior to the first day of school.

Professional development.

In discussions with the school principal, I have decided that the information I collected is important to share with colleagues in the district through professional development. Our superintendent for instruction has also agreed that professional development on the use of Social
Stories, as well as the benefits of collaboration with colleagues is something that elementary teachers would benefit from.

The professional development will begin with a background on Social Stories informing the audience of how they are used and how to create them. I will describe their typical use and how I strayed from the typical to implement Social Stories with the general population of students in my class. I will then describe the planning process I used and how the designated planning sessions with the classroom aides were more beneficial than the common “in-passing” discussions that generally occur. With the deliberate planning sessions, we were able to get to the bottom of the behavior and develop an extensive list of strategies and antecedents of the behaviors we observed.

I will conclude this professional development with a question and answer session and a short survey to determine additional areas my colleagues may want me to follow up on which involve the planning process of the use of Social Stories.

**Arranged planning sessions with classroom aides.**

As I mentioned in the previous section on professional development, I found the arranged planning sessions with the classroom aides to be imperative to the study. Since I began at the Friarville School District, we have always had common planning time with our special education consultant teacher, but never with the classroom aides. Although I continued to have daily discussions with the classroom aides, I found that many more decisions were made when we were able to sit down together to brainstorm ideas and discuss behaviors.

The first few planning sessions were used to brainstorm different needs of the children. We then began looking at the underlying issues that were causing the behaviors by creating checklists and discussing the time and duration of the behaviors. After making this
determination, we were able to create a list of strategies to assist the children with struggles and anxiety. I am unsure if this same result would have occurred had we not sat down to meet on a regular basis. I may have attempted different strategies for the sake of trying them without understanding the true issue at hand.

As a result of this discovery, I have decided to continue deliberate planning sessions with the classroom aides who work in my classroom. We continue to find time before the children enter the classroom to brainstorm the antecedents causing the behavior and strategies to assist with the behavior. I intend to continue this planning in future years as a teacher in an inclusive classroom.

**Creation of a parent survey for every child.**

Another outcome of the study is the creation of a new parent survey (Appendix C). The first day of school for kindergarten in the Friarville School District is a half day. On the half day, parents bring their children to school with all of their supplies and fill out paperwork. In addition, the parents and children complete a scavenger hunt to find the fun and exciting things in the classroom and school. I have typically created a form for parents to fill out regarding information about their child (i.e., holidays your child celebrates, Does your child have a nickname? Do you want your child to eat breakfast at school? May I display pictures of your child on our classroom website? etc…). This form has proved to be beneficial with short answers to assist with logistics of the classroom, but does not give me detailed information regarding the child’s emotional and educational needs.

I have now developed a more detailed survey to collect information about children in class to assist with planning. I contemplated conducting a short interview with each parent, but I fear that some parents will not agree to it, or that some interviews may take longer than the
expected fifteen minutes (therefore running into another parent’s time and causing tension prior to the first day of school). Instead, I have developed a short survey which will be mailed home prior to the first day of school to allow parents time to think of answers and give detailed information in order for me to read prior to meeting their child. This survey contains many of the same questions as the interview from the study and was developed due to the tremendous amount of information I received from interviewing the parents in the study. I also considered giving the option for parents to attach a picture to the survey allowing me the benefit of calling their child by name on the first day of school. I hope to pilot this survey at the end of this school year with my current class as I have established relationships which may facilitate receipt of feedback.

**Recommendations to Practitioners for Future Study**

I found action research to be a useful way of examining my decision making processes with the use of Social Stories. To conduct this study again, the use of action research methodology is necessary to achieve the reflective process in its entirety. I would also suggest researchers conduct this study in a district where they are considered an insider. Being an insider was an integral component of this study. As an insider, I maintained a good rapport with my colleagues and acquired access to parents for an interview. In addition to being an insider, I would suggest conducting an interview with all parents prior to the first day of the study.

**Insider.**

As mentioned in chapter three, being an insider gave me an advantage in this study. I had access to staff, students, and daily observations. The rapport with my colleagues influenced our discussions and cooperative planning. I did not limit the conversations with my colleagues to the designated planning sessions. We would talk about observations and new strategies daily to
ensure the students were receiving what they needed. Additionally, parent communication as an insider was advantageous.

**Rapport with colleagues.**

In order to acquire substantial results, the researcher must have a good rapport with the colleagues involved in the study. By trusting each other and speaking freely, we were able to put all possibilities on paper and examine them critically after our discussions. We also felt an obligation to discover the underlying issues behind the behavior and worked collaboratively with checklists for this purpose. If we did not trust each other, this task would prove to be much more difficult. If the researcher has the ability to work with colleagues he or she has worked with and trust, I have found that the time and effort can be spent on the planning rather than trust and rapport building.

**Parent communication.**

Furthermore, access to parent communication was beneficial and a necessary component for future research in this area. Parents were willing to discuss their children with me during an interview and give me important details regarding their children’s background, needs, and motivators. As previously stated, the parent interview gave me an incredible amount of assistance with planning and the creation of Social Stories. Parents are usually willing to have open communication with someone expressing their child’s best interest, but in my experience, they are more willing to speak with their child’s teacher than a stranger conducting research. The researcher may find resistance from parents if they are not involved in the classroom on a regular basis. By conducting this research in ones own classroom, there is a better chance of having successful parent involvement.
I also had opportunities for daily communication with parents. I wrote home as needed and made phone calls to ensure the parents understood the occurrences in the classroom. I was able to acquire more information through this continuous contact than I would have if I were an outsider without access to the classroom on a daily basis.

**Conduct interviews with all parents.**

My final suggestion for practitioners interested in conducting this research is to take the time to conduct an interview with the parents of each child in the class and receive permission from all the parents to include their child in the study. You will not use Social Stories with all the children; however, if a need arises, you will have the necessary documentation needed for the study. This will be time consuming and tedious, but could prove to be very beneficial. The information we could learn about each child may prove to prevent certain behaviors from occurring that may not be necessary. If I had know about Michael’s fear of crowds, I would have realized why he was behaving the way he was when we had Dinosaur School or right before our firemen visit.

Conducting such interviews to identify the children’s interests, motivators, fears, and triggers with parents of all the students may also incorporate more students into the study that the researcher may not have known had needs prior to the first day of school. Not all children coming into kindergarten are diagnosed with a disability, but may need some additional social support. The interview may help the researcher explore different strategies and ideas to assist more children become comfortable in the kindergarten classroom.

This chapter highlighted the key aspects of the study along with a description of limitations which I discovered during the study and recommendations for future study. The appendices mentioned in the study are attached and include Kemmis and McTaggart’s (1988)
diagram of the action research cycle (Appendix A), the parent interview used in the study (Appendix B) and the survey which was developed to use in future years (Appendix C).
References:


Appendix A

Action Research Cycle

My enquiry questioning is disrupted by my need to keep control in ways the class expects.

Record questions and responses on tape for a couple of lessons to see what is happening. Keep notes of my impressions in a diary.

Enquiry developing but students are more unruly. How can I keep them on track? By listening to each other, probing their questions? What lessons help?

Record on tape questioning and control statements. Note in diary effects on student behaviour.


Shift questioning strategy to encourage students to explore answers to their own questions.

Try questions which let students say what they mean, what interests them.

Continue general aim but reduce number of control statements.

Use less control statements for a couple of lessons.

Figure 1. Illustration of the action research process. From the Action Research Planner (p. 14), by S. Kemmis and R. McTaggart, 1988, Melbourne: Deakin University. Reprinted with permission.
Appendix B

Parent Interview – Maria Rota

September 2010

1) What would you like to tell me about your child?

2) What are your child’s interests? What motivates them?

3) How do you believe your child learns best?

4) What social skills would you like your child to develop?

5) In what social situations does your child thrive?

6) In what social situations does your child struggle?

7) What causes anxiety for your child?

8) What has worked for you when your child has struggled in social situations?

9) What was not successful in the past when your child struggled with a social situation?

10) What else do you want me to know about (child’s first name)?
Appendix C

New Parent Survey

1) Please list your child’s interests (things that motivate your child)

2) How does your child learn best? (Visual learner, Hands on, etc…)

3) In what social situations does your child thrive?

4) In what social situations does your child struggle?

5) What causes anxiety for your child?

6) What has worked for you when your child has struggled in social situations?

7) What else would you like me to know about your child?