1. INTRODUCTION
Speech intelligibility is the major concern in classroom acoustics, since speaking and hearing are the most important modes of communication in teaching and learning.

Findings [1,2] indicate that academic achievement - in particular reading skills - are vulnerable to the effects of chronic noise exposure. The general pattern of adverse psychological stress reactions is associated with chronic exposure to noise among children [3].

The teachers in many preschool and child care - as well as, in the Berwick Preschool studied here - frequently commented on how noisy the classrooms were. For many who work in preschool classrooms, there is a tendency to simply accept the fact that young children can be noisy. Regardless of the many reasons, it is clear that there is a fair amount of noise in preschool classrooms. Individuals working in early childhood classrooms tend to tolerate the noise as the "price of doing business".

2. EVALUATION
All of the classrooms were architecturally identical and had same classroom equipment. The floor area was 73 m², and the volume was 269 m³ in the classroom.

2.1 Objective measurement
As shown in Figure 3.3, all of the classrooms had $RT_{mid}$'s that exceed the 0.6 seconds limit of ANSI S12.60-2002 for core learning spaces with enclosed volumes less than 283 m³. The variation of the RTs in the different classrooms may be caused by the different furniture layouts and the toys, as well as usual experimental variations.

2.2 Subjective Survey
Eleven of a total of thirteen teachers in the Preschool responded to the questionnaire. The listening environments in the classrooms were considered less acceptable than the non-listening environments.

Teachers were asked about their perception of the consequences of a poor listening environment in the classrooms. ‘Increased fatigue’ was frequently experienced by most teachers in the classrooms. Teachers were also asked to assess the interference with their ability to hear because of different sources of noise inside and outside the classrooms. In particular, children’s talking was considered as a major source of noise in the classrooms.

3. SIMULATION
Basically, acoustical treatment of the classrooms involved controlling the material and the volume of the background noise levels exceeded the 35 dB(A) limit of ANSI S12.60-2002 in all of the classrooms.
classroom. The basic materials for the floor, wall, and ceiling were selected based on the current classroom materials, and each component was changed to a different material, one by one. CATT room acoustical simulation software was used for prediction.

![Classroom models](image)

**Fig 3. Classroom models**

**Table 1. Classroom configurations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Control</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Rubber sheet</th>
<th>Thin carpet</th>
<th>Plywood</th>
<th>3/4&quot; porous</th>
<th>Ceiling tile</th>
<th>Glass</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No treatment</td>
<td>Current</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>177.2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floor</td>
<td>Floor</td>
<td>73.2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>177.2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpet</td>
<td>Carpet</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>73.2</td>
<td>177.2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wall</td>
<td>Wall</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>144.8</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceiling</td>
<td>Ceiling</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>95.4</td>
<td>81.8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume</td>
<td>Lowceiling1</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>147.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>178m³</td>
<td>Lowceiling2</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>95.4</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lowceiling3</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>95.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.6 shows the predicted RTs in the 125 Hz to 4000 Hz octave bands, as well as RTₘᵢᵈ. Both changing to higher absorptive material and reducing volume were effective at decreasing the RT in the classroom, to acceptable values.

The speech level of the speaker is a major component of speech intelligibility. However, it is inversely related to the total absorption of the room. Adding absorption decreases both speech levels and RT.

Figure 4.8 shows the RASTI with background noise in unoccupied classroom. None of them exceeded 0.75 which corresponds to excellent speech intelligibility. Therefore, the classroom does not have good conditions for speech even when it is unoccupied. The RASTI was simulated in more realistic condition with classroom activity noise as shown in Figure 4.9. With the higher background level, the RASTI was higher when the RT was longer in general.

4. DISCUSSION

None of the classrooms in the preschool was acceptable according to the criteria relevant to this study: ANSI S12.60-2002. Based on the in-class sound levels, teachers apparently always talked with loud voices during the class. The sound levels to which the teachers were exposed were close to typical occupational noise limits. Teachers agreed that the non-acoustical environments in the classrooms were fair, but the acoustical environments had problems.

In noisy environment, the speech level and volume of the space were dominant factors for speech intelligibility; however, in quiet environment, the absorption was more effective than speech level or volume. Ceiling heights are critical as well. While the existing heights created interesting looking spaces, they were problematic in terms of noise levels and reverberation.

Decreasing the volume of the classrooms would be the most effective solution. Installing a suspended acoustical ceiling would be an option. They decrease the RT and increase RASTI.

REFERENCES


ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors wish to express their thanks to the Berwick Preschool for the opportunity to test; thank especially due to Ms. Diane Burger, director of the preschool for her close cooperation. Likewise we are grateful to the teachers in the preschool.