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HOW TO BUILD A CLASSROOM COMMUNITY OF CARING,
SELF-DIRECTED LEARNERS THROUGH THE USE OF MORNING MEETING IN
THE FIRST TEN DAYS OF SCHOOL AND BEYOND

by

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A Capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirement for the degree of Master of Arts in Education

Hamline University

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Thank you to my family and friends for your continuous encouragement and support. I would be nothing without you all. Thank you to my Capstone Committee. Your guidance and patience helped me to complete this project. Special thank you to my students who helped shape this Capstone. I have learned a great deal thanks to all of you.

“By doing what you love, you inspire and awaken the hearts of others.”
-Satsuki Shibuya

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE:

Introduction.....	7
My Education Story.....	7
Montessori Morning Meeting Experience.....	9
Student Teaching Morning Meeting Experience.....	13

CHAPTER TWO:

Literature Review.....	16
What is a Community?.....	17
Need for Community Within the Classroom.....	19
Child-Centered Approach.....	21
Co-Operative Learning Approach.....	23
Responsive Teaching Approach.....	26
Rules and Logical Consequences.....	28
Guided Discoveries.....	29
Academic Choice.....	30
Classroom Organization.....	30
Family Communication Strategies.....	31
Morning Meeting.....	32

Morning Meeting Success Story.....	34
Summary.....	36
CHAPTER THREE:	
Project Overview.....	37
Design Framework.....	37
Greeting Component.....	38
Sharing Component.....	39
Group Activity Component.....	41
News and Announcements Component.....	43
Standards.....	44
Outcomes/Objectives.....	46
School Setting.....	46
Participants.....	48
Project Overview.....	49
Strategies, Materials, and Assessment of Project.....	49
Timeline.....	51
Summary.....	51
CHAPTER FOUR:	
Conclusion.....	52
Introduction.....	52
The Author as a Reviewer, Writer, and Learner.....	52

Reviewer.....	54
Writer.....	54
Learner.....	55
Literature Review.....	55
Project Limitations and Implications.....	56
Implications.....	56
Limitations.....	57
Next Steps.....	57
Benefits to the Profession.....	58
Summary.....	58
Conclusion.....	59
Bibliography.....	61

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Each year consists of roughly 6,000 hours of being awake. Children in America attend school between 170-180 days each year. Most American children spend six hours a day in school. That means that between kindergarten and senior year, students spend about 1,000 of those hours in a classroom setting each year, totaling over 13,000 hours in their adolescent life. That number does not include after-school programs or time spent doing homework. Students are spending most of their childhood inside the classroom.. They are engaging in potentially toxic social relationships on the playground and lunch rooms. Children are spending less time with their families and neighbors than ever before. Children are picking up on social cues and values from peers that may not get to know them on a personal level, nor what their personal experiences are outside of the classroom. Therefore, I have decided to focus my capstone on how to *build a classroom community of caring, self-directed learners through the use of morning meeting in the first ten days of school and beyond.*

From a young age, my parents taught me to stay true to my values, my beliefs, my hopes and dreams. They raised me in a close-knit community where both adults and children spent most of their time together, building relationships with each other, trusting each other, and enjoying their time together. Even with this strong foundation, when I entered my schooling years, I was surrounded by people who didn't hold the same beliefs as me. I was surrounded by people who had a different walk a life from mine. Surrounded

by people who may or may not come from a family as close as mine. I was engrossed in an atmosphere that I didn't have control over; where my family didn't have control over what was being said to me, what I was learning from other kids around me, where they had to trust that I stuck to my core beliefs. Thankfully, I grew up in a small town where most families had similar values, a community where people helped each other. I was lucky enough to have that.

School: an institution for educating children (Webster 6th ed, June 20, 2019).

That is Webster's definition. A place where students come to learn math, reading, history, science, social skills, etc. A place where students learn more than they ever bargained for. A place where kids pick up language. A place where kids pick up companions. A place where kids pick up right and wrong. A place where kids make a community. Whether that community is supportive or destructive. A place where they will spend most of their life. In a time where the close-knit, supportive, trusting family seems to be dwindling, the need for a strong, supportive, trusting, close-knit classroom community is needed more than ever before. The classroom is becoming one of the most important places for a child to learn how to respect and live with others (Bridges-Bird, 1995). As a teacher, I feel the pull to build a classroom community that establishes a welcoming and accepting environment for everyone that walks through that door. To build a community where everyone's voice is heard. A community where everyone's culture is celebrated. A community where we cheer each other on through trials and tribulations. A community where we are trusting. A community where we collaborate. A community where white,

blacks, Christians, Jews, poor, affluent can all come together and live harmoniously. A community where we care for all people, no matter their walk of life.

As I look back at my past teaching experiences I often wonder if I actually created the community that I wanted so badly to build. A community of self directed learners that felt safe and welcomed within their environment. Even though I do believe that I have started to learn how to create that community, I know there is still more work that needs to be done. It is an aspect that I want to continue to grow and nourish. In this profession, each year we get the opportunity to try again. Try new things. Learn from our past mistakes. Rebuild. Teachers are constantly trying new tactics that are impacted by the new students in their classroom. In the past six years, I have had the opportunity to work in multiple classroom settings, learning and stealing tips and tricks from seasoned educators. One thing that has always stayed the same, no matter where I go, has been Morning Meeting. Even with this constant, no two Morning Meetings are the same. That is the beauty of it. It can ebb and flow with the teacher, the students, the needs, the season, but it is always creating a classroom community. As I reflect on the past Morning Meetings I have experienced, I have taken into account aspects that work and don't work. I began to question how a strong community could be created and nourished within my own classroom.

Montessori Morning Meeting Experience

Four years ago I knew nothing about the Montessori philosophy. I had heard about it, but really didn't know what it all entailed. I thought it was a school for only the affluent and elite. Fast forward to a desperate twenty-five year old who needed any

teaching job she could get her hands on. I found a teaching assistant position in a lower elementary classroom at a local Montessori public school in St Paul, MN. Bless their hearts to hire someone who knew nothing about their philosophy. Looking back at it now, even though I knew nothing about Maria Montessori or her teaching, they saw something inside of me that even I didn't even see: someone who was full of compassion. Who dreamed of a place where children can come together harmoniously. They saw someone who had the Montessori philosophy running through her veins, without even knowing it. Through that experience I learned more about who Maria Montessori was, what responsive teaching was, what it really meant to be student-centered, and how to build a welcoming classroom community. Through that experience, I created my own teaching philosophy. My philosophy of education is that all children are unique, with likes and dislikes, and must have a stimulating educational environment where they can grow physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially. My desire is to create an atmosphere where all students can meet their full potential. I provide an environment where all students feel safe and are invited to share their ideas and to take risks.

The Montessori Method is founded on Maria Montessori's educational belief. Her basic principle was to "follow the child." (Standing 1984) A Montessori classroom is carefully prepared to allow the child to work independently or in small groups and allow for the joy of self-discovery. Teachers introduce materials and children are free to choose them, again and again, working and discovering, and ultimately mastering ideas. Lessons are given, but the goal is for children to discover the answers by using the "auto-didactic", or "self-correcting" materials that are found only in Montessori

classrooms. However, the most important aspect of the Montessori educational mission does not concern academics. Their primary goal is to foster and enhance each child's natural sense of joy and wonder. They believe children should enjoy their childhood, that the school day should include laughter and the buzz of creative silliness. They want students to love school and the process of learning. The idea that "education is not a chore, but a joyous exploration of life's mysteries," is the most important lesson that we hope to teach the student.

At the core of Montessori is shaping children to be respectful life-long learners. They create a calm atmosphere where all students are learning at their level, engaging in studies that they are interested in, working alongside each other harmoniously, and creating a community of respectful learners. As much as this is demonstrated by the guides (teachers) and other adults in the classroom, it is built through the daily circle time that starts and ends each and every day. (Standing 1984)

Every morning looked a little something like this: A little after 8:30 students would file into the classroom, say their good mornings to each other and then proceed to independently create a list of what they wanted to accomplish that day, getting right to work, without a single word from the guide. At 8:45, when all the students had arrived, one student would walk over to the classroom bell, ring it, and announce to the class that morning circle time was beginning. Every student would drop what they were doing, push in the chairs, walk over to the rug, form a circle, and wait for every student to join in. The teacher would lead in a group song, while every student would sing along. After the song, the child of the day (chosen the day before by a rotating schedule) would pick a

stick from the greeting cup and start the greeting around the circle. Throughout this whole process, every student was engaged, respectful and calm. After the greeting, the students would partake in a sharing time. Students had free range over their topic to share, and if they wanted to or not. Students would share anything from their favorite stuffed animal, their latest geometric math problem, to what happened last night at the dinner table. Every student gave the speaker their listening ears and their engaged eyes. This whole process was student led, with a little help from the guide. After sharing, they would participate in a team building activity, whether another song, a game, or an interactive read aloud. After, they would leave the circle and go about their daily to-do list.

This student-led morning circle time did not happen overnight or on day one. It took weeks to build. It took careful demonstrations from the classroom guide. It took time. But what was achieved just a couple short weeks later, was something beautiful. It became a place where six, seven, and eight year olds came together and forget about their differences and engaged with one another. They enjoyed each other's company. They started their days off on the right foot, building a classroom community, on their own.

The afternoon circle time was set up in the same format, except there was no greeting, and the sharing morphed into a compliment circle where they celebrated each other's accomplishments from the day. These children actively noticed what others around them did, achieved, struggled with, and celebrated all of it. At the end of circle time, the student of the day would move their clip down to the next person on the list, choosing tomorrow's student of the day. The guide would lead them in one more song,

and they would leave the classroom saying goodbye to the student of the day by hugging, high-fiving, fist bumping, or with a friendly wave. This was so incredible to witness each and every day, often with tears welling up in my eyes. When the school year came to a close, those children had formed real and raw relationships with each and every one of the children they shared those walls with. It is a community that I strive for, a community that I challenge myself to build each and every year.

Student Teaching Morning Meeting Experience

During my student teaching, I was welcomed into a classroom halfway through the school year to a group of second graders. Their teacher - my cooperating teacher - had set up a strong Morning Meeting routine in the first half of the school year. It was one that I took many aspects from when I started my own the following school year.

Every morning started off the same. Between 8:30 and 8:50 students would file in, read the Morning Message written on the white board, sign their names, and grab whatever the morning work was for that day. The morning work was always the same every Monday, every Tuesday, and so on. The students knew the routine. Their teacher welcomed them in by name, asking them about their morning. There was a hustle and bustle throughout the morning work time, but each student was engaged in their morning work. At 8:50, the teacher would ring the chime and call for the Morning Meeting. Students would put their work away and come to the circle, usually sitting next to the same students each day. The cooperating teacher would begin by saying good morning and reading the Morning Message and then choosing a greeting out the greetings cup. She would then choose a student to begin. The student would start the greeting and it

would make its way around the circle. Next, the teacher would choose a question based on the day, Mondays were always about what they did over the weekend. Tuesdays were always about a question that they had. Wednesdays were always about something funny that happened to them. Thursdays were always about themselves (their favorite food, color, etc). Fridays were always about what they were looking forward to that weekend. The students knew the routine. Looking back at it now, the routine was solid, something they could predict, but it also was something that could become stale for some students. After the share, they would pick a game together, based solely on suggestions and what the teacher ultimately chose. Fridays were always balloon volleyball. After the activity, they would start their day. When I took over the class for my four weeks, I decided to keep the schedule the same. It became a ritual for them. It was one part of the day where they knew the rhythm. They knew what to expect. I didn't want to change something that was so normal for them. It worked.

Their Morning Meeting was always the same, predictable, but solid. Even though aspects of it were similar to the Montessori circle time, much of it was different. The Montessori circle time was student centered and driven. The student teaching morning meeting was teacher-led and chosen. They both sat in a circle. They both greeted each other. They both shared. The Montessori circle was more open and free flowing, where the student teaching circle was question based and everyone had to share. They each had an activity. But again, the Montessori was based off of luck of the draw or what was needed for the morning, whereas the student teaching was based off of suggestion and routine. Neither was right or wrong. Both were engaging. Both created a sense of

community. So my question is, what elements make morning meeting a successful child-centered, community-builder that creates a welcoming atmosphere for an elementary classroom?

Chapter Two will discuss my research concerning community building, student-centered learning, and the Morning Meeting outline. The Responsive Classroom approach will be defined, and how the Morning Meeting can be effective for creating a classroom community will be discussed.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

There has been some debate over what schools need to be teaching our students in order to best prepare our children for the real world. Ultimately, even with the controversy, I believe we as educators have the same underlying goal: We want our students to be well-versed in academics, social interactions, and how to be caring members of the community. Many school missions - including my own district - include these beliefs in their school mission. Unfortunately, there is disagreement how educators should go about doing this. Many believe that we should be solely teaching our students the three R's: reading, writing, and arithmetic. Others believe that we should be teaching our students social skills that are necessary in order to work cooperatively with others around them. This debate will forever continue swinging back and forth like a pendulum. As educators, we know our students' ins and outs. We need to continue to know our students needs. We need to continue to do what is best for our students. With so much emphasis on standardized testing, as if there is less and less time to bond with our students. Less time for students to create real friendships. Less time to focus on what is really necessary, teaching our students, our future leaders, how to communicate with one another. How to settle arguments fairly and justly. How to collaborate. How to coexist. without this, I do not believe our students are going to achieve academic success.

In this chapter, I reviewed literature around my topic of *how to build a classroom community of caring, self-directed learners through the use of morning meeting in the*

first ten days of school and beyond. I will discuss what experts say about what a community is and why it is needed in the classroom, what child-centered and cooperative learning is, how these relate to the responsive classroom, and how the morning meeting incorporates all of these components. Throughout this examination, I will be discovering how students and teachers can build a classroom community of caring, self-directed learners through the use of Morning Meeting in the first ten days of school and beyond.

What is a Community?

According to Webster's dictionary (2019), a community is *a condition of living with others; friendly associations; fellowship.* Teachers and students alike need as many friendly associations and fellowship that we can get. Additionally, a community is *an interacting population of various kinds of individuals in a common location.* In a classroom, students are brought together, surrounded by the same four walls, but are all coming from different backgrounds and family lives. We are a community within ourselves, interacting in a common location. Lastly, Webster, also describes a community as *a social state or condition with joint ownership or participation.* As a classroom, we should be coming together, participating together, working together, taking ownership of what happens, together. The classroom community should not be a place where the teacher leads and dictates everything. It should be a community where everyone comes together to interact, live harmoniously, and participate together to create a caring and safe environment.

To add to these definitions, Thomas Sergiovanni offers the following definition of a community:

Communities are collections of individuals who are bonded together by natural will and who are together bound to a set of shared ideas and ideals. This bonding and binding is tight enough to transform them from a collection of 'I's' into a collective 'we.' As a 'we,' members are part of a tightly knit web of meaningful relationships. This 'we' usually shares a common place and over time comes to share common sentiments and traditions that are sustaining. When describing community it is helpful to speak of community by kinship, of mind, of place, and of memory. (Sergiovanni, 1994)

In all of these definitions, three elements stay the same: social interaction, common ties, and an area. Because of this, it is not surprising that sociology has developed the idea of community in two directions. First, as a type of relationship, or spirit among a group of people. The second broadens the sense of community, to refer to a local social system or a set of social relations in a particular bounded area (Lee, 2016).

When all of these are brought together in a classroom, the learning community becomes a purposeful, caring, and celebrative place. Peterson (1992) describes a learning community as being helped along by the interests, ideas, and support of others. Social life is being nurtured and used to advance learning in the best way possible. Caring and interests of others breathes purpose and life into learning. This is why the primary goal of educators during the first few weeks of the school year should be to lead students to come

together, form a group, and to be there for one another. As educators, we should create and provide a healthy place for our students to belong and to grow in their learning, feeling, and thinking. In the next section, I will discuss the need for community within the classroom and how educators can start to build community within their classroom.

Need for Community Within the Classroom

The idea of a community within the classroom is not a new idea. No one will deny that the life inside the classroom is a community within itself. Children are crowded together for six or more hours a day in a space that is no larger than most living rooms. In order to create community, the natural response has been to establish crowd control and then enforce obedience. Creating a community - bringing student together and keeping together - is a vital aspect of a teacher's work. Without it, real learning cannot take place, as even the most sound philosophies and techniques amount to little without a community to bring them to life. Even though this concept is not new, little has been written about what makes up a classroom community, how it is created, and what functions it fulfills (Peterson, 1992). In this chapter, I will show how making a community within the classroom influences the quality of learning and life in elementary and middle schools.

Our most pressing educational problems are created from human relation problems. They originate because students do not know how to relate to one another, to themselves, or to their environment. Children are increasingly feeling more and more alienated, angry, bored, confused shy, unloved. More and more students are unable to cope with these feelings so they are escaping through violent acts like drugs, alcohol, and even suicide. (Anderson, 1995) It is time to rethink and remake our social relations as

part of the educational reform. Schools are capable of helping many young people. Educators have the opportunity to address these societal problems. They have the ability to help young students become morally and ethically responsible. We need to transform our schools into institutes where students study the art and science of human relations. School must adopt practices that help young people become good persons who possess effective problem solving and human relations skills, not just academic skills.

Lois Bridges Bird (Bridges-Bird, 1995) tells us that learners thrive in safe, supportive environments. Students must be confident that they are safe from negative repercussions. Educators must begin with our children's strengths, celebrating all that they can do, encouraging them to build from there. Because of this, teachers should work to make connections with each of their students at the beginning of each day, starting from the first day of school.

Communities come from individuals. In order to create a strong community, we need to know each individual that makes up our community on a personal level. We must first get to know each student. We must discover their unique qualities, their interests, their abilities, their needs. By discovering these, we accomplish two important things. First, we make our students feel valued as individuals. Secondly, we start to incorporate their needs and interests into our curriculum and instruction. When they see us lead by example, they start to demonstrate the same to their peers, thus creating a community within the classroom. (Bridges-Bird, 1995)

By doing all of this, every lesson becomes meaningful because every student is engaged in the learning process. Just as Anderson proposes, schools and educators should

turn their focus to the new “R’s” of reflection, responsibility, relationships, and respect. (Anderson, 1995)

Child-Centered Approach

Educators must make second-by-second decisions that ultimately affect themselves and the students in their classroom. With the highly prescribed curriculum and focus on bureaucratic requirements, a great deal of judgment, decision-making is weighing heavily on the teacher, making them feel as if whatever choice they make will be wrong in the eyes of the parents, Department of Education, and any administrative staff. It is conceivable that these restrictions of making their own professional judgment can contribute to teachers feeling demoralized, without control, and even alienated. Teachers are losing their very instinctual joy that brought them to this line of work. They chose this profession to work with, sympathize with, and to bring joy to young learners. Some have researched that the demand to measure performance has significantly shifted and reformed how education is being promoted and practiced. There is need to ask hard questions to see if the current values are the most important for our young students. We need to bring back the original educational value of child-centeredness. (Doddington, C., & Hilton, M. 2007)

As Doddington discuss (2007) theorists including Dewey, Piaget, Rogers, and Vygotsky focused on how students learn best. Their work and research shows that students learn best in student-centered learning. Rogers himself wrote that “the only learning which significantly influences behavior [and education] is self-discovered” (Doddington, 2007). Maria Montessori would also conclude that through independent,

self-directed, previously presented interactions, children learn more and become more motivated to learn. In order to be a child-centered learning environment, the traditional teacher-centered understanding of learning must be put to the wayside, and students must be put in the center of the learning process.

Through these peer to peer interaction, collaborative thinking can be real and obtainable knowledge. When placing the teacher closer to the student level, knowledge and learning is maximized, benefitting the student, teacher, and classroom overall. According to Vygotsky, students typically learn vicariously through one another. He also states that “learning which is oriented toward developmental levels that have already been reached is ineffective from the viewpoint of the child’s overall development. It does not aim for a new stage of the developmental process but rather lags behind this process” (Doddington, 2007).

The Plowden Report took this ideal and set out to reform and modernize the entire system of primary school. They reconceptualized the whole relationship between teachers and young learners.

A school is not merely a teaching shop, it must transmit values and attitudes. It is a community where children learn to live first and foremost as children and not as future adults. The school sets out deliberately to devise the right environment for children, to allow them to be themselves and to develop in the way and to the pace appropriately to them. It tries to equalize opportunities and compensate for handicaps. It lays special stress on individual discovery, on first hand experience and on opportunities for

creative work. It insists that knowledge does not fall into neatly separated compartments and that work and play are not opposite but complementary (Plowden Report, 1967).

According to Doddington (2007) Schools that operate with this central value of concern for the whole child would ensure that the educational experience would reflect the richness and primacy of sense, perception and embodied mind, for these are the fundamental means by which we can fully educate children.

If education is to genuinely influence and touch the lives of young learners, it needs to at least begin with acknowledging the possibility and potential that children possess for caring and belief. To take these beliefs seriously and to allow students to articulate and explore them further would signal to the students that their ideas matter and that school is the appropriate place to express thoughts and concerns rather than just a place to learn the facts and adopt adult views.

Through child-centered learning, each students' unique capacity for thought and agency would be valued and they would be encouraged to express their personal concerns and ideas. Learning would then be steered in a way that allowed children to explore and strengthen their capacity for self-expression.

When child-centered learning is done and when educators start to focus on the whole child, three major points are achieved (Doddington, 2007):

- Senses and perceptions of the child would be cherished and strengthened
- Children's beliefs would be taken seriously and explored
- And expressions of genuine concern that matter would be encouraged

Co- Operative Learning Approach

We are social beings. We learn by communicating with others. It is the feedback and contact from others that sharpens our visions and refines our thoughts. The way that we know ourselves is through others, and our views of ourselves is tied to the relationships that we have with others. As educators we work towards providing caring, nurturing, collaborative communities in which children can learn. We have visions of a learning community that is dynamic, not passive, and that when conflict arises, it is viewed positively and resolved co- operatively. (Slavin 2985)

As Slavin discusses, (1985) social theorists including Allport, Watson, Shaw and Mead established the co-operative learning approach after finding that group work was more effective and efficient when compared to working independently. However, it was not until researchers May and Doob found that students who cooperate and work together were more successful in obtaining outcomes compared to those who worked individually to complete the same goals. They also discovered that independent workers had a greater likelihood of displaying and acquire competitive behaviors. Philosophers such as Dewey, Lewin, and Deutsh continued to influence the co-operative learning theory that is practiced today. Dewey believed that students should develop knowledge along with social skills that can both be used inside the classroom and outside the classroom within the society. Lewin presented that co- operative learning is based off the idea of establishing relationships between group members in order to carry out and achieve learning goals successfully together. Deutch believe that co- operative learning was dependent on positive social interdependence. Believe that students are responsible for

contributing to whole group knowledge. Overall, theories believe that co- operative learning leads to better communication, an increase in critical thinking, and higher acceptance and support within the individuals in the group (Slavin, 1985).

The long-term academic and social benefits of co- operative learning are overwhelming positive. Johnson and Johnson (Johnson, 1989) points out that co- operative learning experiences tend to promote higher motivation to learn, especially with intrinsic motivation. It also leads to more positive interactions with teachers and peers, higher academic achievement, and positive attitudes towards learning.

The benefits according to Cohen, Slavin and Johnson have been well documented (Cohen 1990, Johnson & Johnson 1990, Slavin 1989)

- Co-operation leads to higher achievement
- Co-operative learning facilitates deeper levels of understanding
- Co-operative learning is more fun
- Co-operative learning develops leadership skills
- Co-operative learning promotes positive attitudes to school
- Co-operative promotes higher self-esteem
- Co-operative is inclusive learning
- Co-operative learning brings about a sense of belonging
- Co-operative skills are the skills of the future

Through co-operative learning there are four major learning goals that are achieved: knowledge, skills, dispositions, and feelings.

As Johnson and Johnson state (1990), knowledge is important to co-operative learning because it shows children the notion of why it is important to work together rather than against each other. It explains to the students that the group is only strong when they are all working together instead of independently. It also teaches them that when we all learn from each other, we have many teachers, instead of just one sole teacher. (Johnson and Johnson 1990)

Skills are behaviors that become automatic, like not talking all at once, or using eye contact when listening to someone. Skills are improved with practice and co-operative games and activities. Students also learn mediation skills and how to resolve disputes between conflicting views through these activities and games.

Dispositions are habits or personality traits. Building dispositions about how to behave while working and learning takes time. Some students may come to school with dispositions that are co-operative and helpful, where some students will need practice to obtain these dispositions. For some students, their home lives may not promote co-operative dispositions and learning to trust and work with others in school is done in steps over many years of practice. (Johnson and Johnson 1990)

Children who have positive feelings about themselves tend to be more likely to see other positively. Self-esteem and confidence are linked hand and hand with achievement. In order to build self-esteem, children need to learn to recognize and affirm the strength of others. Interestingly enough, a body of research states that children with higher self-esteem are less self-centered; higher self-esteem is associated with less egocentricity, more altruistic behavior sharing and generosity. (Fountain, 1990)

Responsive Teaching Approach

Marylann K Clayton, Ruth Sidney Charney, Jay Lord, and Chip Wood of the Northeast Foundation for Children created the Responsive Classroom in 1981. Since then, many other theories and educators have taken up this teaching approach and added to the movement and beliefs. It was created to incorporate academics and social skills throughout the entire school day/ There are seven beliefs that underlie this approach. These seven beliefs guide the thought process for this approach to learning. These beliefs help determine not only what is taught, but also how it is taught. In order to truly be successful, these principals must be believed.

- The social curriculum is as important as the academic curriculum
- How children learn is as important as what they learn: Process and content go hand in hand
- The greatest cognitive growth occurs through social interaction
- To be successful academically and socially, children need a set of social skills: cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control
- Knowing the children we teach - individually, culturally, and developmentally - is as important as knowing the content we teach
- Knowing the families of the children we teach and encourage their participation is as important as knowing the children we teach
- How we, the adults at school, work together to accomplish our shared mission is as important as our individual competence: lasting change begins with the adult community. (Correa-Connolly 2004)

Responsive Classroom contains six components that teachers incorporate into their daily routine. These include Morning Meeting, Rules and Logical Consequences, Guided Discoveries, Academic Choice, Classroom Organization, and Family Communication Strategies. (Northeast Foundation for Children, 1996) Each of these six components are then broken into specific portions with goals and desired outcomes for each portion. I will go into depth about the Morning Meeting component later in this chapter along with in Chapter 3.

Rules and Logical Consequences. Through the Responsive Classroom approach, teachers learn a variety of strategies to use when responding to misbehavior. Most of the consequences are based off of logical consequences, depending on the child's situation and misbehavior. The teacher may also be able to use multiple strategies for the same consequence for misbehavior. Responsive Classroom recommends that teachers use three types of logical consequences

1. "You break it, you fix it"
 - a. This logical consequence is used in situations where something has been broken or a mess has been made - whether accidental or intentional. This consequence is that whoever was responsible for the problem, must take responsibility for fixing it. Teachers use this consequence when they see an opportunity for the student to solve the problem they caused by themselves.
2. Loss of Privilege

- a. This logical consequence is used when student behavior does not meet pre established expectations. The consequence is that the student loses the privilege of participating in the activity or using the material for a brief time. When using this consequence, the teacher must make sure the loss of privilege is related to the misbehavior, and that the students fully understands the expectations. Teachers use this consequence when children defy, test, or simply forget the rules.

3. Positive Time-Out

- a. This logical consequence is used when the teacher believes that the student needs to calm down and recover self-control. The student would move to a pre established place within the classroom, take time to regroup, and then rejoins the class once they have calmed down. This consequence is used to help the students learn how to gain self-control and is used to as a self check-in before the student becomes more disruptive or escalated (“Three Types of Logical Consequences”, 2011)

Guided Discoveries. Guided Discovery is a teacher strategy used to introduce new materials in the classroom. The primary goal is to generate interest and excitement about classroom resources and to help children explore their possible uses. The teacher can also use Guided Discovery for introduction of vocabulary, to assess student’s prior knowledge, and to teach responsible use and care of materials. Often only lasting fifteen

or twenty minutes, however the interest and excitement that was generated helps support student's practice and academic learning throughout the day. This form of student centered learning is used solely in Montessori classrooms and curriculum. This approach to teaching is student centered and leads to student's ultimate connect to their learning ("Guided Discovery in Action", 2004)

Academic Choice. Academic Choice is a way to structure a lesson and activity, and is a key Responsive Classroom strategy. When used, teachers decide on the goal of the lesson or activity, then give students a list of options for what to learn and/or how to go about their learning in order to reach the goal. Using this strategy, students are able to put a purpose into their learning. They have a choice in their learning, and they become engaged and productive. They are more likely to think deeper and more creatively. They are also able to use a wider range of academic skills and strategies ("Academic Choice," 2017). Research has found that children also have fewer behavior problems when they have regular opportunities to make choices in their learning (Denton, 2018).

Classroom Organization. Students spend more time in the classroom than in any other part of the school. Because of this, the classroom needs to look, feel, and function smoothly. Through the Responsive Classroom approach, classrooms should welcome students. Furniture should fit students' bodies. Materials should suit their developmental capabilities. They should be uncluttered where students can both work alone and with classmates. Classrooms should be student-centered and should entice students to: ("Is your classroom organized for learning," 2016)

- Develop a sense of individual and group ownership

- Engage and enjoy their learning
- Work cooperatively
- Move responsibility and independently
- Value and care for materials and equipment

Family Communication Strategies. Communication with parents and families is key to a smooth school year. Parents can support their student’s learning at home when they know what is being done during school hours. Family engagement helps children build academic and social skills and it reinforces the importance of what students are doing at school. Caring, positive school-home communication can take multiple forms, depending on what educators are comfortable with. According to Responsive Classroom, whichever strategy is used, is should keep in mind these key ideas (“School-Home Communication Strategies,” 2016)

- Starting early, before the school year even begins
- Communication is done frequently through a consistent format (email, blog, phone call, or notes in folders)
- Everyday communication should be brief, focused, and positive
- Responses should be invited in order to make a conversation so both sides listen and talk
- Empathize, reminding yourself that all parents want what’s best for their child

Educators have been incorporating each of these components into their teaching in order to change how children learn. It is believed that incorporating these components

into your teaching will help children learn how to make appropriate choices, both in their education and in their social lives.

Researchers have found that implementing the Responsive Classroom approach can drastically change the behavior and academics of children. Studies have shown that discipline reports start to decrease once Responsive Classroom has been implemented. Academic progress has also started to increase the longer Responsive Classroom is implemented. This teaching approach is beneficial both socially and academically for the growth of students. (Northeast Foundation for Children, 1996)

Morning Meeting

Today, any children in kindergarten, elementary, and middle schools around the country begin their days with Morning Meeting. During the meeting, all classroom members gather in a circle, greet one another, and listen and respond to each others' news.

Morning Meeting is made up of four sequential components and usually lasts around thirty minutes each day. Each component has its own purpose and structure and are intentionally planned to provide opportunities for children to practice skills of greeting, listening and responding, group problem solving, and noticing and anticipating. The daily practice of these four components gradually weave a web that binds the class together, creating the classroom community. (Kriete, 2002)

The four components of the Morning Meeting include:

1. *Greeting*: children greet each other by name, often by a handshake, singing, or other activity.

2. *Sharing*: students share news to the class about something that happened in their life or about a given topic for the week. Students respond to each other, articulating their thoughts, feelings, and ideas in a positive manner.
3. *Group Activity*: the whole class participates in a short activity together, building class morale through active participation.
4. *News and Announcements*: students develop language skills and learn about the schedule of the day by reading and discussing a daily message that is posted for them when they arrive in the morning.

The time that is invested in creating a successful Morning Meeting is repaid with the sense of belonging, the skills of attention, listening, expression, and cooperation it develops. They also become the foundation for every lesson, transition, conflict and resolution, all year long. The Morning Meeting is a glimpse into how we wish our schools to be - communities full of learning, safe and respectful, and challenging for all.

Morning Meetings make contributions to the tone and content of the classroom.

There are many purposes of the Morning Meeting (Kriete, 2002).

- It sets the tone for respectful learning and establishes a climate of trust
- The tone and climate extends beyond the Meeting
- It motivates children by addressing the need of feeling a sense of significance and belonging
- The repetition of respectful moments and interactions enable extraordinary moments
- It merges social, emotional, and intellectual learning

The way we begin each school day sets the tone for how the learning the rest of the day will occur. Children start learning the moment they walk into the classroom doors. They notice if they are greeted warmly. They notice if the classroom is calm or chaotic. So when we start the day with everyone together, welcoming each other, sharing news, listening and responding, we set the tone that we say that every person matters. We say that this is a place where courtesy and warmth and safety are important and this is a place where we respect all.

Adler (1930) believed that “a sense of belonging motivates children to develop their skills and contribute to the welfare of all. Research indicates that educators who establish firm boundaries, foster warm personal relationships in the classroom, and enable students to have an impact on their environment strengthen students’ attachment to their school, their interest in learning, their ability to refrain from self-destructive behaviors, and their positive behaviors.” As mentioned above, there are specific purposes for each component of the Morning Meeting: Greeting, Sharing, Group Activity, and New and Announcement.

Morning Meeting Success Story

The following vignette is a success story from the Responsive Classroom website (June 27, 2019) that demonstrates just how much impact incorporating Responsive Classroom and Morning Meeting can be. The story comes from Mrs. Ferch at Sherwood Elementary School in Melbourne, Florida.

Learning is alive and well in Sue French’s sixth grade classroom at Sherwood Elementary School in Melbourne, Florida. Sue attributes the vibrant academic

picture in her classroom to the positive learning community that the Responsive Classroom and Morning Meeting approach helps her create.

Sue recognizes that building a safe and welcoming community is especially important at her grade level (6th grade) when students are going through rapid physical and emotional changes. She notes,

“It’s a turbulent age. Students this age often are self-conscious and feel unsafe with peers. If these children are going to learn, it’s really important that they have a safe environment. They need to feel it’s okay to ask questions, to speak up and articulate their thoughts, to take risks in learning.”

And building a positive community requires thoughtful and effective teacher management. Sue emphasizes the interdependency:

“It’s all connected—positive community, classroom management, academic engagement. To have academic engagement and buy-in, you need a safe, positive community; to have a positive community, you need effective management.”

Since she began using the Responsive Classroom and Morning Meeting approach, Sue has observed a significant increase in students’ engagement in learning—and recent test scores reflect this. In the 2011–2012 school year, principal Cindy Wilson reports that Sue’s value-added measure was the highest in the school that year: 32/35 compared to the school score of 29/35.

Summary

Morning Meeting clears time. The beginning of the school day is so often a jumble, kids are coming in, students are doing student work, teacher is getting kids and taking attendance, etc. Morning Meeting makes time for the teacher and the students to be focused with each other on important things and to come together in unity. Morning Meeting helps clear away barriers of social statues and other inequities. Everyone is on the floor, on the same level, in a circle, looking at each other. Suzanne Goldsmith summed it up perfectly in her book *Teaching Tolerance*. “Communities are not built of friends, or of groups of people with similar styles and tastes, or even people who like and understand each other. They are built of people who feel they are part of something that is bigger than themselves.” (Goldsmith 1998)

Evidence that community building is necessary with the classroom is clear from the research. These different theories come together to show that creating time for student centered collaboration and cooperation through the use of Responsive Classroom and Morning Meeting help create a community of learners. They help to create a community that has a sense of belonging, a feeling of mutual respect within a group, and tradition and ritual. Based on this research and these theories, I have decided that an important part of community building should be the inclusion of a student led Morning Meeting. Chapter Three will explain the methodology of implementing community building through Morning meeting during the first ten days of school. It will also discuss the different components of what creates a Morning Meeting.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

This chapter focuses on how I plan to address my research question: *How to build a classroom community of caring, self-directed learners through the use of morning meeting in the first ten days of school and beyond.* Specifics of the lesson plans are described including the design framework, standards, and objectives. This chapter also describes the school setting and students for which the curriculum will be implemented. This chapter concludes with a description of the classroom assessment and a detailed implementation plan. This chapter explains why the addition of creating a child centered and self-directed Morning Meeting is so important, instead of it just being teacher led. Building up a framework of how the Meeting should look and run first by the teacher, helps build the foundation so the students can use that when they start to lead the Meeting later in the school year.

Design Framework

As described briefly in Chapter Two, the Responsive Classroom Morning Meeting is an engaging way to start each day. It is used to build a strong sense of community and to set students up for success both socially and academically. Every morning, students and teachers gather in a circle for twenty or thirty minutes and interact with each other while completing four purposeful components:

1. Greeting: Students and teachers greet one another by name
2. Sharing: Students share information given a specific weekly topic.

Listeners offer comments and questions once the sharer is finished.

3. Group activity: Students and teachers participate in a short activity that creates class cohesion and helps students practice social and academic skills.
4. News and Announcements: Students read and interact with a short message that their teacher wrote before they entered the classroom. They will also discuss classroom news related to that day.

Each component will be described in length in the following paragraphs.

Greeting Component

Morning Meet begins with the Greeting. Some mornings, the greeting is simple and straightforward - a handshake and a hello - other days the greeting is more elaborate - a friendly game of *Hello Neighbor*. No matter how simple or extravagant, each greeting share four common purposes (Kriete, 2002):

- Set a positive tone
- Provide a sense of recognition and belonging
- Helps children learn names
- Gives practice in offering hospitality

Greetings help create a welcoming, friendly, and respectful classroom community. Everyone should be welcomed equally. It is not a privilege that only a selected few have. When we make time to greet everyone, by name, we make the statement as teachers that we expect respect and equity and that we will do everything we can to make sure that it happens.

In many classrooms, there are students who often seem to go unnoticed or to fall into the shadows. Even though they are physically present, these students may feel as if they are unseen or unacknowledged. Morning Meetings are a great place where every student can be seen and heard. We want everyone, especially students, to feel important and relevant. We want them to be more than physically here. During the Greeting time, educators must make sure that students are sitting next to different students and greeting different students daily, not always their best friends. This will allow everyone to know everyone in the community's name. It will also allow new friendships to form.

Much of students learning happens through social interactions. Knowing names is the foundation for these interactions. Our name is our identity. Hearing our name reminds us of our identity and our importance in the community. Welcoming each other into our community each day is an act of hospitality. It affirms that each of us are caretakers in this community. It also builds and strengthens each student's ownership and investment in this community (Palmer, 1998).

Sharing Component

Sharing immediately follows the Greeting each Morning Meeting. It is structured so that students can share news or objects that they wish to share, usually about a specific topic for that week. The other students listen while the presentation is happening and come up with questions or comments concerning that student's share.

There are many purposes to the Sharing component (Kriete, 2002):

- Helps develop the skills of caring communication and involvement with one another

- Extends the knowing and being known that is essential for the development of community and for individuals' sense of significance
- Encourages habits of inquiry and thought important for cognitive growth
- Provides practice in speaking to a group in a strong and individual voice
- Strengthens vocabulary development and reading success

While Greeting helps students know the names of everyone in the community, Sharing build upon that knowledge by helping the students know the person attached to those names. It also helps students make connections and create common ground between each other. This relationship is carried beyond the Morning Meeting into other lessons and activities throughout the day and year.

Just like the Greeting, Sharing also allows for everyone in the community be heard and to demand the engagement from the others which stretches our understanding and rewards everyone. Not every student will be able to share every day, but each student will be able to share throughout the week. Most teachers have a rotating schedule of which students get to share which day, or create a signup list so that students can choose. However, just like every component of the Morning Meeting, Sharing is mandatory for every student.

One reason Sharing is mandatory is because it encourages the habitats in which inquiry based learning is developed (Rogoff, 1990). These skills include;

- Stating one's thoughts with clarity
- Listening actively and forming questions that help clarify
- Seeing things from another's perspective

Sharing also helps students with public speaking and stating their own thoughts. As students continue through their education, they will be asked to form their opinion and clearly express what those thoughts and opinions are. Morning Meetings are a great way to start this young, and to get students comfortable with sharing personal news and thoughts in front of the class with no judgment being cast alone them. Sharing is also a great opportunity for teachers to get to know their student's interests. This is a way to start to bring those interests into the daily lessons, allowing students to absorb more of the information.

If your community has students from different cultures or that are English learners, Sharing is another opportunity to talk about the different cultures that are a part of your community. Educators could use this time to learn about each culture that their students bring into the classroom. Sharing is also an opportunity for vocabulary enrichment for your English learners. As students work at expressing themselves and understanding others through conversation, the process is filled with vocabulary that not everyone may understand. Teachers have the opportunity to use this time as a learning tool to help students understand words or expressions they may not know already.

Group Activity Component

Group Activities are short, fast-paced activities involving everyone in the class. Some activities may have an academic purpose to them, some may be tied to the weekly topics, some may be "just for fun." All activities offer more practice with listening, following directions, and self-control skills.

The purpose of the Group Activities are (Kriete, 2002):

- Contributes to the sense of community culture by building a class repertoire of common material-songs, games, chants, and poems
- Fosters active and engaged participation
- Heightens the class's sense of group identity
- Encourages cooperation and inclusion

These songs, games, and activities become a common and crucial resource in the classroom community. They become a shared contribution from which each student can use when their in a much needed brain break, during field trips, at recess, or even outside of school. Students feel a sense of belonging, comfort, and acceptance when they recognize a familiar melody or when they are invited to play a game they know the rules to. They become at home within that place and with those people.

Group Activities are also a great way to begin each day because they are used as a “wake-up call” because they require students to pay attention and to contribute as a group. Participating in The Group Activity helps students find a productive pace for the rest of the day. Every student starts their day off differently, but once they all come together and start moving in unison, they find a common and comfortable stride to help settle them down and get ready to start their day.

The main purpose of the Group Activity is to have the students learn how to work and collaborate together in a non threatening way. Once students start to feel comfortable participating in Group Activities the more comfortable and likely they will participate in academic discussions

Successful activities often challenge and stretch the community. They are chosen to include every student, making sure that not just a few students will succeed, but that the whole class will succeed. These activities are meant to be cooperative not competitive.

News and Announcements Component

News and Announcements provides information and group academic work through a message written by the teacher on a chart or screen each day. When the students enter the room they read the message and follow any instructions the message may include. This same message is then used during Morning Meeting each day. Some days the chart may ask the students to find all the nouns or prefixes within the message. Some days the message may have the students solve a riddle. Other days it may just give students information about the schedule for the day.

The purpose of News and Announcements include (Kriete, 2002):

- Easing the transition into the classroom day and makes children feel excited about what they'll be learning
- Developing and reinforcing language, math, and other skills in a meaningful way
- Building community through shared written information

When students walk into the classroom and see a familiar chart waiting for them and giving them instructions, allow for a sense of comfort to the students. They know that they have something to work on and they know their teacher is ready for them: Preparing them for the day ahead. This chart may tell the students about something they may be learning about for the day, which will make them excited about what is ahead. It could

include notes about specialists or anything out of the ordinary that may be happening that day (visitors, assemblies, field trips, etc). It will also tell the students what will happen directly after the Morning Meeting. News and Announcements help prepare students not only from the beginning of the day but also for the transition from Meeting to the rest of the day.

Standards

A curriculum must have two or three different broad standards that it accomplishes. These represent the big ideas of the curriculum. Even though Morning Meeting is not a specific curriculum with assessments or used for grading students, it does accomplish many standards that help students throughout the rest of the learning day. Morning Meeting strives to create social and academic dynamic students so most standards revolve around social skills.

In order to be successful in and out of school, students need to learn a set of social and emotional competencies which include cooperation, assertiveness, responsibility, empathy, and self-control. They also need to learn a set of academic competencies including academic mindset, perseverance, learning strategies, and academic behaviors (Principles and Practices, n.d). According to the Responsive Classroom website, there are six guiding principles that Morning Meeting accomplishes, the include:

1. Teaching social and emotional skills are as important as academic content.
2. How educators teach is as important as what they teach.
3. Cognitive growth occurs through social interaction.

4. How adults work together to create a safe, joyful, and inclusive environment is as important as their individual contribution.
5. What we know and believe about our students inform our expectations, reactions, and attitudes about those students.
6. Partnering with families is as important as knowing each child we teach.

Based on these guiding principles I found standards that are achieved through Morning Meeting. The standards for this curriculum came from the Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards. (October 17, 2019) The broad-based standards that were chosen were based off of the social skills that students can gain through the implementation of Morning Meeting. They include:

1. Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions and carry out assigned roles (Core Standard CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.1.B)
2. Pose and respond to specific questions by making comments that contribute to the discussion and elaborate on the remarks of others (Core Standard CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.1.C)
3. Report on a topic or text or present an opinion, sequencing ideas logically and using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace (Core Standard CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.4)

While there are more social and emotional skills that are accomplished through the use of Morning Meeting, these three specific standards from the Common Core Speaking and Listening are hit upon the most throughout.

This section identified the three broad-based standards for the curricular unit of Morning Meeting in the first ten days and beyond. The three main standards of this curriculum targeted speaking and listening skills. In the following section, outcomes for the unit are described.

Outcomes/Objectives

As stated above, Morning Meeting is not used as a summative assessment for students, but more for general and formative assessments, based off of observations of the teacher. Due to this formal “*students should be able to...*” objectives are not created or written for students to see. However, they can still be used by the educator to make sure that they are having a successful meeting. Some of these objectives that could be achieved and assessed include:

1. Follow and agree upon rules and expectations set by the teacher and students
2. Form cohesive responses to classmates by asking questions related to their topic
3. Hold a logical and cohesive discussion with classmates on a given topic
4. Participate as a group to complete a given task
5. Greet each student by name

In this section I discussed objectives that the educator may use to assess the success of their Morning Meeting based off the broad-based standards stated above. In the following section, the school where the curricular unit was implemented is described.

School Setting

This curriculum was written for an inner city elementary school in Minnesota. The school offered both academic and extra-curricular opportunities for their students. The school was a K-5th grade school that also offered free half-day pre kindergarten. Of the 378 students enrolled at the school, 29.9% were African American, 34.9% were Asian, 5.3% were white, 22.5% were Hispanic or Latino, 1.1% were American Indian, and 6.3% were of two or more races. The school was also a Title 1 school with 37.8% of students English Language Learners, 15.6% were special education, 78.3% qualified for free or reduced lunch, and 1.3% were homeless (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019).

The school followed a block schedule. Each grade level (Kst – 5th) has a 90-120 minute literacy block, and a 60-90 minute math block, a 30 minute speciality (physical education or music) block, and a 45-60 minute social studies/science/art block. The variation of the literacy and math block was due to the classroom teachers of each grade level choosing which subject their students need the most concentration on for testing purposes. This time was used as a “FLEX” time where students were grouped by ability level and were taught by teachers based on their level.

The Students arrived to school between 9:15-9:30 every day and packed up at 4:00. Students have the choice to either eat breakfast between 9:15-9:30 or go to their classroom to work on morning work. Due to this, the Morning Meeting work flow of News and Announcements has been changed slightly to fit with the parameters of the time constraints. Each day was assigned a theme and student’s morning work was based off these themes. Students also read the message upon arriving into the classroom. Their

work and the message was discussed during the News and Announcement component of Morning Meeting. Afterwards, students participated in a morning meeting that included a greeting of the day and a group activity. This was followed by a 10-15 minute daily geography review. Following, students had a 60 minute math block, that incorporated a whole group lesson, partner work, individual work, and the implementation of work spaces. An hour block of time proceeded that which included a bathroom break, recess, and lunch. Following lunch, the students had a 120 minute literacy block which included reading, writing, and skills (phonics), both as a whole class, partners, and individual work. After the literacy block, students rotated between music and physical education for a 30 minute block. After specialists students had a 60 minute block where they wrote their daily objectives in their planner and had a rotating schedule of science/social studies/art. The remaining ten minutes of the day allowed for cleaning and packing up.

This section described the school setting for which the curricular unit was implemented. In addition, the number of students in the school was identified including the breakdown by ethnicity, ELL, free and reduced lunch, and special education students. The next section identifies the students at the school who experienced this curricular unit.

Participants

This curricular unit was implemented in one fifth grade classrooms totalling 23 students and one licensed staff in an inner-city school in Minnesota. Out of the 23 students, 8 are African American (35%), 9 are Asian (40%), 2 are white (8%), 3 are Latino/Latina (13%), and 1 are more than one ethnicity (4%). In regards to English Language Learners and special education, 7 (30%) are ELL and 2 (8%) are special

education. Not only were these students culturally diverse, but they were academically diverse as well. Overall, 7 (30%) were below grade level, 10 (43%) were at grade level, and 6 (26%) were above grade level.

This section described the students who experienced this curricular unit. The total number of students was identified as well as the number of licensed staff. The breakdown of ethnicity and academic diversity was also described. The final section of this chapter describes the strategies, materials, and assessments of the curricular unit.

Project Overview

This curricular unit takes place in the first ten days of the school year. The format of the Morning Meeting however, will continue for the entire school year. The meeting occurred at the beginning of each day, after the morning work time and once the official bell for the day had rung. The meeting lasted between 20 and 30 minutes each day, but was longer the first two or three days. During the first week, students learned the procedures of how the Morning Meeting is conducted, what are the different components, why we do each component, and what their responsibilities are for each component of the meeting. They also participated in each component every day from the first day of school. The first ten days are the foundation for the rest of the school year. They were introduced to every component and almost every activity within those ten days. After the completion of those ten days, the format continued for the remainder of the school year.

Strategies, Materials, and Assessment of Project

Throughout this curricular unit, several key strategies, materials, and assessments were utilized on a daily basis. The biggest material that this curricular unit utilized were

group activity lesson plans (Appendix C) found in multiple activity books based on Morning Meetings and Responsive Classroom around the country. Greetings (Appendix A) were also taken from pre written lesson plans based off of Morning Meeting and Responsive Classroom activity books.

The Sharing component was designed based off of an “All About Me” (Appendix B) pennant that helped students become comfortable with the idea of sharing and speaking in front of their classmates in a low stakes format. Because the share was based on them and not academics, students felt more comfortable sharing and presenting information to the class.

The morning work and News and Announcement plans (Appendix D) were created on my own through different resources based off the daily theme (Riddles, Would You Rather, Math questions, etc). The idea behind them being academic in nature came from the Morning Meeting Book by Roxanne Kriete.

As for assessment, Morning Meeting is not used as a summative assessment for students, but more for general and formative assessments, based off of observations of the teacher. Due to this, formal “*students should be able to...*” objectives were not created or written for students to see. However, they can still be used by the educator to make sure that they are having a successful meeting. So no formal assessment are conducted.

However, at the beginning of the unit, the teacher and students both filled out a questionnaire about *how they feel about their classroom community*. The teachers and the students had different questionnaires (Appendix E), but both had similar questions.

Questions revolved around ideas of relationships with others, friendships within the classroom, relationship with the teacher, if the classroom feels welcoming, etc. At the beginning of the year, most students should state that they do not feel as if their classroom had an established community, because it is only the first day of school. However after the first ten days of school, they will both complete the same questionnaire to see if results have changed. This questionnaire can be used multiple times throughout the school year to check in with teachers and students to see how they are feeling about their classroom community.

Timeline

To help facilitate the creation of this curricular unit, a timeline was created that helped keep track of what was completed using Wiggins and McTighe design framework of backwards planning. To begin the process, I looked through state standards to find which ones could be achieved through the use of Morning Meeting, even though standards do not need to be met through this implementation. Once the broad based standards were chosen and from those, I created the objectives and assessment. After, I analyzed different Greetings and Group Activities from Kreite's *The Morning Meeting Book* and the Responsive Classroom website to find ones that best fit the beginning of the school year and to start creating a classroom community of self-directed learners. Lastly, daily instructional activities were identified and organized in a unit overview calendar.

Summary

This chapter detailed the specifics behind this curricular unit, including the design frame, broad based standards, objectives, and strategies. The design framework

used was a backward mapping design created by Wiggins and McTighe (1998). The broad-based standards were organized around the speaking and listening skills and were pulled from the Common Core Literacy Standards. The unit objectives focused on the daily learning throughout the unit. The strategies used within the unit were chosen from both the research in chapter two and personal experience. A brief overview of the unit was described as well as the implementation plan for creating the curricular unit. The final chapter is a reflection on the process of creating the unit and concludes with a discussion of recommendations for future related research projects.

CHAPTER FOUR

Reflection

Introduction

The goal of my capstone project was to answer the question: *How to build a classroom community of caring, self-directed learners through the use of morning meeting in the first ten days of school and beyond.* In this chapter, I will reflect on the process of undertaking and bringing this capstone project to a conclusion, including highlighting my learning as a researcher, writer, and learner. I will revisit my literature review, including those parts most essential to the successful completion of this capstone project. I will also discuss my Project implications and limitations. In addition, I will highlight project communication, and the benefits of the project to the profession. Finally, I will also share my concluding thoughts.

The Author as a Reviewer, Writer, and Learner

Learning is inherent in the capstone process. As a teacher, we never stop learning. We are always trying to better ourselves and keep our practices up to date and fresh for our students. In order to do this, we always need to be learning and growing as a professional. I would not be at this point if I did not have a desire to learn about my chosen profession, my capstone topic, and myself. Completing this capstone project has been the most in-depth project of my academic career. Throughout this process I have learned that I have what it takes to write a significant paper along with developing a comprehensive curriculum that is guided by research.

Reviewer. Before I even started my Capstone journey, I had fellow graduate students and colleagues who have already undergone the Capstone journey themselves. All would say that the literature review was “mountain to climb.” After countless trips to the public libraries and college libraries, I spent what felt like a lifetime thumbing through past capstones, theses, and decades of research. It was often hard and straining for me to know how I was going to add value to an already heavily researched topic. However, at the end of it all, I learned that even with all the research already out there, I found all of it valuable and beneficial for not only my project, but also for my own teaching practice. I also learned that that wasn’t an actual curriculum to follow when setting up a purposeful Morning Meeting that would help create a student led classroom full of self-efficent students.

Writer. I have never thought of myself as a writer. Usually, I consider myself as a terrible writer, avoiding it at all cost. To a point, where I actually never planned on obtaining my masters degree because I didn’t think I had what it took to write a Capstone. Until this project, I had never done any meaningful amount of academic writing. As I kept reading and reviewing other capstones and literature, it continued to daunt me. I felt intimidated. I continued to think, “could I complete this?” Can I do this topic justice? Even with these thoughts, I had a goal in mind and passion in my heart. As I come to the completion of this process, I can confidently say that this is the most ambitious project I have ever undertaken, and I couldn’t be prouder of myself and the results. It is proven that if you put anything in your mind, you can accomplish it, with a little sweat and tears.

Learner. I have always enjoyed learning. My family and friends have always said that I will be a forever student. They don't know who I am without school and always learning new things. It runs in my blood. Now that I can see the end of my academic career, it saddens me. Will I still continue to push myself to learn new things without the deadlines and prompts from professors? This thought haunts me, but I know that my passion for this profession has only continued to grow since starting this program.

Literature Review

While I was often disheartened by the literature review process itself, it was by far the most valuable portion of this process. There were a few resources in particular that I found beneficial. The work of Kriete (2017), Bridges-Bird (1995), and Slavin (1985) were my greatest resources. Their work around Morning Meeting and co-operative learning helped inform my project and reaffirm my beliefs that students need the aspect of choice and yearn for a classroom community where they can shine and take their learning into their own hands.

Kriete (2017) was able to give my valuable research on the process and implementation of Morning Meeting in a traditional classroom. Informing me on how to successfully introduce each component of the meeting to my students and what each component should include in order to be successful. She also included resources on each component as examples to use within the classroom based on age and grade level. This book was my main resource throughout this process.

Slavin (1985) was another main influence for my project because his research on co-operative learning and why it is beneficial to students. Establishing the co-operative

learning approach within your classroom has been proven to be more effective and efficient when compared to working independently. Overall, Slavin taught me that co-operative learning experiences tend to promote higher motivation to learn, especially with intrinsic motivation. It also leads to more positive interactions with teachers and peers, higher academic achievement, and positive attitudes towards learning.

Lastly, Bridges-Bird's (1995) research continued to solidify my belief that learners thrive in safe, supportive environments. Students must be confident that they are safe from negative repercussions. And that as educators we must begin with our children's strengths, celebrating all that they can do, encouraging them to build from there. She also believes that as educators our main prerogative should be building connections with our students, because without that relationship, they will not learn from us.

Project Limitations and Implications

Implications. By creating a successful Morning Meeting, both students and teachers will reap the benefits throughout the entire school day and year. It becomes the foundation for every lesson, transition, conflict and resolution, all year long. It creates a sense of belonging, the skills of attention, listening, expression, and cooperation it develops. Teachers will benefit from this project by being able to share most of the leading of Morning Meeting with their students. Passing along the leading of it to their students, so that as educators, they can enjoy the meeting just like any other participant. Students will benefit from this project because they will be able to take their learning into their hands along with learning the valuable skills of presenting, choosing, and using

higher level thinking in order to lead their classmates in a structured lesson, without them even realizing that they are learning at the same time. They will also benefit from this project because it is predictable and is creating a structure that is familiar and never changing. This will help create a welcoming and calm environment. This consistency will help students know what to expect so there is less confusion about what is expected of them.

Limitations. One of the limitations to this project was finding enough time in our day to fully implement a full Morning Meeting. The morning time is usually the time of day when assemblies, fire drills, lockdowns, announcements, breakfast, etc happen. It the time of day when students are pulled for interventions or other services. With all of the unpredictability that comes with the morning, making sure that we have an uninterrupted twenty to thirty minutes where all students are present, tends to be impossible. Due to this, I have had to make sure that when those students do arrive or come back to the meeting, they will be able to jump right in without feeling like they have missed anything. This is another reason why creating a structured meeting is so important. After the first ten days, students will know the expectations and will know the routine. The idea is that this is the time of day where students will know exactly what happens next, with no change. I have also made it imperent that even when we do have our morning time shortened or taken away, that I find time to still do Morning Meeting at some other point throughout the day. Students need that time to connect with other students and to have the structure that they need so desperately. Students look forward to meeting each morning.

Next Steps

Some interesting questions have come into my mind as I have thought more about this project and where I could take it from here. How do I implement this more into other parts of the day? How do I make my Daily 5 and Daily 3 rotations more like my Morning Meetings? This is where I see other researchers or even myself, later down the road, continuing this research. I have also begun to think about how I can help other teachers within my school use this curriculum within their classroom.

Benefits to the Profession

As mentioned in the literature review, establishing a Morning Meeting is vital for creating a classroom community that is welcoming and predictable. Also creating a classroom of self directed learning helps both the teacher and the students. Teachers will be able to share most of the workload with their students themselves. The students will be able to take learning into their own hands and will be able to use higher level thinking while truly understanding the benefits of learning.

Since our school in starting the whole school morning meeting initiative, where all classrooms will use the same set up and curriculum for Morning Meeting, I have already spoken to my school's principal about how we can work together to implement this curriculum or at least use it as a starting point.

Summary

The question being explored in this capstone project is: *How to build a classroom community of caring, self-directed learners through the use of morning meeting in the first ten days of school and beyond.* In this chapter, I critically reflected upon the process of undertaking and bringing this capstone project to a conclusion, including highlighting

my learning as a researcher, writer, and learner. I revisited my literature review, and noted those parts most essential to the successful completion of this capstone project. Project implications and limitations were discussed, and future research or projects were explored. Finally, I highlighted the communication of the project, and the benefit of the project to the profession.

Conclusion

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, learning is vital in the capstone process and in the teaching profession. I would not be at this point if I did not have the desire to learn. To desire to learn is what keeps me young and going in this profession. Learning new techniques to try is important to me.

I started this project during the summer months, when I was going through major life changes. From planning a wedding, moving to a new town, starting at a new school, and starting my Master's degree. It only seemed fitting that planning a beginning of the year curriculum was just like planning for all of these life changes. How do I keep my life structured. How do I keep my life predictable in this chaotic stage of my life. Just like my students, every day is full of twists and turns, where they are out of control. They yearn for the structure and predictability. A moment in their life where they know life won't change, but also a time where they feel welcomed and in charge of their life. They need it, just as much we as adults need it, if not more.

Because of the work done during my capstone this fall, I have resolved to be a better educator. I hold my students to higher expectations, and demand their best foot

forward. I look forward to work everyday. This capstone has created a springboard for the rest of my teaching career.

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