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Will Building a Healthy Community in the Elementary Classroom Reduce Disruptive Behaviors?

by

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A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master's of Teaching.

Hamline University

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

A healthy community in the school is the best way to get to know your students and for students to get to know their teacher. But what does it mean to build community within a classroom? I know that learning occurs when students feel safe and supported. In this chapter, I will discuss the experiences that lead to my interest in building relationships as an important part of classroom management. The reader will be informed of the definitions of a community and active teaching in the classroom. More learning occurs when students feel safe and have their learning needs met in the classroom. Will building a healthy community in an elementary classroom reduce disruptive behaviors?

My Journey

Every year I am excited to meet and build relationships with new students in my classroom. I look forward to understanding them and using that information to motivate eager learners. I chose this career because I find the growth that students make in a year in a class rewarding. Not to mention, the lessons I learn from my students year after year. We are both filling each other's bucket. Since I was a child, I sought relationships with people, silently taking in social cues to support a healthy relationship. While others loathed the icebreaker activities during the first week of school, I relished the opportunity to get to know my peers and teachers. Most of the games included simple goals for students to share information with their peers and teachers. The outcome was to get to know each other, but that should not stop after the first day of school. Building a community in the classroom can take an entire school year.

As a first year teacher, starting with a new class I had little training or knowledge of classroom management. But I knew the basics, for example, reward good behavior and redirect disruptive behavior. It couldn't be that bad and why were teachers always complaining? Also, I wanted every student in my classroom to have access to quality education. My students and I set up a sticker chart to reward good behavior. We discussed that every time they were on task, kind, or safe a sticker went on the chart. Different goals were set for different amounts of stickers collected. The rewards for desired behavior were a classroom pajama day or a field trip walk to a nearby park. It was brilliant, the kids were excited and I was excited. Together the class earned stickers consistently and there were few behavior disruptions. In my mind, I had cracked the code of behavior. It was simple.

I did not crack the behavior code, not even close. After my stickers positive behavior success I was getting a new group of students in the fall for my second year of teaching. This group had a reputation for really disruptive behaviors. I was not afraid because I had the stickers jar. This group of students were not motivated by stickers in a jar. I noticed the disruptive behavior was not decreasing because the students earned stickers for good behavior. Instead the class was not able to earn stickers for desired behavior and have the benefit of rewards for stickers goals. It made me feel like a failure. But, the disruptive behavior made learning difficult and I was not able to teach. I was frustrated and the kids were too. I added a layer of choice of consequences (instead of warnings) for undesired behavior and built relationships with these kids. I sought out opportunities, recess to have fun activities, and get to know my class. After a couple games of tag I started to enjoy the individual students. Our class was not perfect but after a couple of months we had built trust, student to student and teacher to student. Some

students in this class had experienced trauma and had a few undiagnosed cognitive delays. My stickers positive behavior reward was not as successful with this group. First, I had to start building relationships and then I could introduce rewards. I had to take a step back and think about building a healthy community in our classroom.

I learned from this so-called difficult group of students the importance of building relationships that leads to trust. Over the years I have been more humble and more interested in building a healthy relationship with my students. Since then I have realized it is not a simple reward and redirect class management that maximizes learning for all students. I wanted to research a topic that I would be able to teach others in the classroom and learn too.

Overview of Community and Purpose of this Project

Watson, Daly, Smith, and Rabin (2019) stated that when a community is correctly implemented in an elementary classroom that punitive punishment and reward will diminish (pp. 11-12). This type of punitive behavior system leads to distrust from both students and teachers. However, when a community is established, students learn empathy and become risk-takers as stated by Watson, Daly, Smith Rabin (2019). Similar to teaching literacy and math, teachers can model or teach Social-Emotional Skills (SEL) in their classroom. Social-Emotional Skills can include knowledge of social/moral values, concern for others, and conflict resolution skills. At the school, the distrust a student has for a teacher can exhibit in different behaviors (Watson, Daly et al., 2019). For instance, clingy and dependent or aggressive and difficult behaviors can result from mistrust in the classroom. Teachers can become discouraged by these behaviors and approach them with punitive discipline. During the school day, I focus on the instruction of subjects such as literacy, math, social studies, and science. When I release the students for

activities and some don't follow expectations, it can be hard on everyone in the classroom when expectations are not clearly stated. I become mad when my students do not listen to my instructions and become disruptive or clingy.

According to Watson, Daly, and Rabin (2019), if students are given high expectations, direct modeling, opportunities for socializing, and relationships, undesired behaviors will decrease (pp. 21–23). Students learn to distrust school and their teachers as soon as they start elementary school. This attitude can linger throughout a students' educational career. Watson, Daly, Smith, and Rabin define communication in two definitions, first is a collective approach to classroom management that focuses on learning to work together in fair, caring, and responsible practices (p. 11). Blimes (2012) explains that students learn best in a classroom where they like their teacher and students feel the teacher likes them (p. 33). The teacher has a two-part task to build relationships with students whose behavior is problematic and show their students value (p.32).

Teachers should remember that students have different ideas of what a task should look like; consistency and modeling are essential when learning a routine, stated Sarah McCloud (2015, p. 46). For example, for an elementary teacher transitions like lining up quietly can look different for every student. Some students may think that lining up quietly can be done by talking with their friends. As the teacher creates routines and expectations of times throughout the day students can do what they are asked successfully. There will be less time for misbehavior and less frustration on the part of the teacher.

As I researched the definition of community, I wanted to define what teaching is teaching in an elementary classroom. Building a healthy community in an elementary classroom is

related to teaching closely. Teaching is more than transferring information from teacher to student but creating a meaningful experience during the learning activity. According to Gage, Terrance, Hirn, and MacSuga-Gage (2017), education is "the teacher engaging in behaviors that include explaining a concept, demonstrating a principle, or modeling a skill/activity associated with an academic topic while furthering the lesson/objective of the class" (p. 303). The more teachers become engaged in a learning activity, the more it will engage students. A lesson plan will require some creative activities that are more engaging than sitting for a lecture on a topic. Anderson (2011) states that students need a variety of learning activities: quiet, focused, independent, hands-on lessons, as well as breaks for movement throughout the day.

Personal Education Beliefs and Philosophy

Since I have stepped into a classroom, I have sought a classroom environment with students based on including their voices. In the classroom, teachers can ask students for their input on decisions based on the group and individual preferences. My goal was to give students independent skills so that I can spend more time teaching. I found this relationship rewarding between student and teacher or student and student. I wanted to give my students the skills to be independent and decide what they need to succeed. Therefore, in my classroom, it is a collaborative space where everyone shares supplies and materials.

Rationale

In my classroom, I want to create more teaching and learning time. I want students to feel comfortable and excited to take risks in a learning environment. Therefore, students will be on task, engaged, and independent in the classroom. My research question is going to answer: Will building a healthy community in an elementary classroom reduce disruptive behaviors? My

rationale in exploring this question is to be able to create a classroom where students feel supported. Research for the project suggests that students will succeed in an environment that is caring (Smith & Bondy, 2012, p. 152).

As difficult as it might be building a relationship with the student that is misbehaving. There are many opportunities to get to know students more during the day. I try to ask questions about a student's hobby or interest to get to know them. Since a relationship with our students can be the most important part of creating a community it is essential we make them feel respected. From personal experience I enjoy attending professional or social gatherings when I feel that people like me or are happy to see me. Students deserve this same feeling when they walk into school. If I switch my perspective from that student is so naughty and can't learn anything instead they must feel that nobody at school likes them. When I am building community in my classroom students should feel supported and safe when they walk into the classroom everyday. Building a community in the classroom will ask teachers to forget that behavior can be fixed with punishment or reward. Instead trust that students will want to behave when they feel included. I am not suggesting that students will never misbehave or disappoint you. That is impossible, but, by building "a relationship that is individual with all students can motivate students to behave better in class."

As stated before, I want to create a classroom based on collaborative values where students feel ownership in the classroom space. Building a healthy community in the classroom will allow teachers to build relationships with their class and understand individual needs. My exploration of this topic is to build a more productive classroom where students have ownership in their behavior and classroom. Student behavior relates to a teacher being clear about their

expectations for students as well. If the teacher is not honest about behaviors, expectations, or routines, they can not meet them.

The research and project will help create strategies that will help build a healthy community within a classroom to develop stronger relationships and students. Creating opportunities for students to work collaboratively while developing and empathy for each other. Teachers teach core subjects like math and science, and we need to teach how to be a kind peer and student. Furthermore, building a healthy community will create and make a connection with the teacher, as well. Students that misbehave may not have trusted the school system. When a student believes a teacher wants to support them, is someone they can trust, they can succeed in school. Teachers have to be the ones to create relationships and ask questions.

Conclusion

In chapter two, I will explore research that supports building relationships with students to create a healthy community. I will explain topics, such as direct modeling of specific behaviors, using behavior-specific praise, and applying the Facilitate, Model, and Engage shared classroom learning practices. This project's review of literature will define community and teaching in practice to build community and create a thriving learning environment. The next chapter will review literature that discusses positive classroom management practices.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Chapter Overview

For the purpose of this project, I intend to provide research that answers the question: Will building a healthy community in an elementary classroom reduce disruptive behaviors? I hope to conclude that when teachers work to have a relationship with every student that academic achievement increases. If a teacher succeeds at creating a healthy classroom community students have reported they enjoyed school, trusted their teachers, and cared about academic learning (Watson & et al, 2019).

As teachers, when we teach students social-emotional skills they can learn more easily. When social-emotional learning is introduced it can include, coming to school and knowing that their classmates, and teacher cares for them. I plan to build an argument that when students have their social-emotional needs met they are able to concentrate on their schoolwork. A teacher can achieve this by providing activities that allow students to get to know each other and practice social-emotional skills, use specific praise, and maintain consistent-high expectations for every student.

Definition of Community

Bafomo defines a community in the classroom as an environment where students feel safe and in a stimulating, motivating classroom. There are some aspects teachers can create in this classroom that are built on community. Building a healthy community in an elementary classroom starts on the first day of school and continues to build throughout the school year (Bafomo, 2006, p. 12). The community cannot be built in a day but instead is addressed every

day of the school year. A healthy community is a set of systems and guidelines that are followed by all students (Bafamo, 2006). Teachers will accomplish the feeling of community in the classroom by presenting activities that are allowing input from students and practice social-emotional skills. In order to witness these skills students will have reduced disruptive behaviors and higher academics (Bafumo 2006). Practicing routines and consistent expectations, students will begin to learn how to be successful in the classroom. The goal of creating a community in the classroom is to achieve a setting where learning thrives and students want to attend every day (Bafumo, 2006).

Modeling and Activities

Introducing modeling and activities that students can practice using social skills is a huge component for creating a community within the class. Social skills can be defined as behaviors in a group that are helpful and responsive to other peer's needs (Henricsson & Rydell, 2004). Teachers and students will create and adhere to conditions that have agreed to and practiced in the safety of their classroom. In the classroom, a proactive and thoughtful approach to a behavior management plan should be taught just as core subjects (McCloud, 2006). Students misbehave when they do not understand what the expectations are or when a skill is not developed. For instance, if a teacher asks her new class to grab their materials for math the task may look different to each student. Based on their individual experiences every teacher requires this simple activity to look different. Modeling and practicing lining up will allow students to meet expectations.

Behavior Specific Praise

After modeling and practicing routines in the classroom, teachers can add Behavior Specific Praise. According to Skipper and Douglas (2015), students need to know when they are doing the correct thing after a direction has been given. This type of praise can differ from general, “Good Job!” examples of praise. It is allowing students to become aware of their specific actions meeting the classroom expectations. After you have modeled to your brand new students different procedures for lining up for functioning in the classroom that has consistent expectations. Instead try a more specific type of praise, noticing comment, of their ability to meet expectations. For instance, you can mention “Wow! I noticed how quietly and safely everyone lined up for specialists. Nice work!” This practice should continue throughout the school year. In order to keep consistent expectations and routines everybody will continue to practice those routines. Students will have a better understanding to meet the teacher’s expectations and feel part of the classroom community.

Consistency and Routines

The previously mentioned positive specific praise will ensure your classroom has been set up to create a strong community. The final part of building a community is creating consistent routines and high expectations in the classroom. As we know, our classroom runs efficiently when students are shown our expectations and receive specific behavior for those directions. It is crucial that teachers maintain those same routines and expectations that were discussed on the first day of school. A community in the classroom includes understanding what is expected of us. Students will be able to succeed and want to come to school if they know what is going to happen every day. Teachers will set the routines and expect students to follow as the year goes on.

Definition of Teaching

As teachers, there are many ways that we discuss the best way to reach and guide students to academic knowledge. In the documentary *Waiting for Superman*, teaching is shown to be more immersive for students than originally thought. The diagram of teachers' filling students' brains with information. In this diagram if you not are not familiar, the teacher is opening students' brains like a hinge or door.



The information the teacher is pouring into the student's brain is like filling a pitcher. Once the liquid is in the pitcher the job is done or the information has been transferred. After the information students have mastered the skill that the teacher transferred. This thought of teaching was taught in a type that students need skills to memorize instead of manipulating and experiencing (01:21:08).

Active Teaching

For the purpose of this capstone project, I am going to define teaching as active teaching. Teaching behaviors are both verbal and physical interactions with students to increase student learning (Gage et al., 2017). Gage (2017) goes on to explain, that when a teacher is participating in active teaching with students, the teacher is engaging in behaviors that are: explaining a concept, demonstrating a principle, or modeling a skill/activity associated with atopic while

furthering the objective of the lesson (p. 302). For example, the above concept details that are several parts of every lesson or objective.

Teachers spend time throughout the day redirecting unwanted behavior from their students (Gage et al., 2017). This can take away from lessons. Learning time is taken away from everyone in the classroom. The student that is misbehaving, the other students, and the teacher are all affected by disruptive behaviors (p. 303). I know when I am teaching, even if I am able to ignore behaviors, it can be difficult for students to ignore. The misbehaving student has missed the lesson and is at risk of falling behind in school. I am hoping to create a community in the classroom that reduces disruptive behavior, fosters a learning environment, and teaches social and emotional skills (p. 303).

Keeping Students in the Classroom

All teachers want to spend more time on learning activities than behavior redirection in the classroom. It is my hope to keep students in the classroom for the duration of the day. The research suggests that students that can stay in the classroom and have decreased disruptive behaviors in class will have higher academic success (Gage et al., 2017). This makes sense that more time teaching the classroom will give students a greater chance of learning during the year.

Challenges

In the literature it discusses a challenge of getting other teachers onboard for a community-building strategy in the classroom. Since creating a community is dependent on routine and consistent expectations it can be difficult if staff members do not want to participate in a new positive behavior system (McCloud, 2005). McCloud recommends continuing through a plan to create consistency because students will respond to boundaries and teachers that do not

follow a community-building strategy will have a classroom that does not have a strong community (p. 49).

As part of this project, the research suggests teachers have to be consistent and fair with students. Many times behavior problems have occurred because of teachers exhaustion or laziness (Henricsson et al., 2004). Creating a strong community in my classroom will have to take energy from me that is going to benefit my students. I will have to recognize that this is a long term goal instead of a short term fix.

Building a Strong Community in an Elementary Classroom

Teachers are familiar with the different types of students they will encounter in a classroom. There are the students that come into school with a smile, immediately read the morning message, eagerly complete the tasks from the message, hear the bell to signal to put items away, and come to the carpet ready to start the day (McCloud 2005). On the other hand, every teacher has had a student in their classroom that enters school with a scowl on their face, ignores the teacher's greetings, ignores the morning message, and refuses to come to the carpet for the day to start. I have both types of students in my classrooms over the years. As we know, both types need support and the opportunity to succeed (Henricsson et al., 2004). The research will discuss the importance of building relationships with students to have a strong community in the classroom. Students tend to behave better for teachers they like and who like them (Bilmes 2012).

Once teachers can change their perspective of students that are naughty or disruptive instead they need improvement for social emotional skills. Children display their emotional needs through different behaviors (Henricsson et al., 2004). For instance, students that mistrust

their teachers may display behaviors as clingy, demanding, or aggressive (Watson, Daly, Smith, & Rabin, 2019). Instead, “by building a strong community in your classroom the teacher can let go of rewards and punishments for behavior” (Henricsson et al., 2004). Research proves that rewards or punishments are short-lived to change behavior. Students pick up that punishments do not have lasting effects. For example, if a student has to sit out for recess after they misbehave they have learned they can misbehave and they only have to miss recess. The consequence does not improve or resolve the misbehavior (Higgins et al., 2009). The students that are disrupting the classroom will continue to disrupt the classroom. For the teacher, it can be more difficult to want to build a relationship with the misbehaving student (Henricsson et al., 2004). Other students in the classroom may not be able to form a relationship with a child that is misbehaving when they are missing out on social times like recess or lunch.

Modeling and Practicing Behaviors

The importance of building a community in the elementary classroom to reduce disruptive behaviors will support a harmonized classroom. From the research, three areas within building a community that are the strongest: modeling & practicing expected behaviors, building relationships in the classroom (i.e. student to teacher & student to student), and offering behavior-specific praise. These activities will allow students to feel safe and supported in their classroom environments. Once, students feel safe and supported socially and emotionally they can focus on learning in school. If teachers have spent the majority of my day redirecting disruptive behaviors nobody is learning what they have the potential to learn. Not only the students that are disrupting the classroom but every student in the classroom decreases their learning time if one child is disruptive. It was noted that when students can predict what time

learning or socializing will happen there is reduced anxiety. Students will fall into a rhythm of productive learning in the classroom with predictable patterns and focus their energy on learning (Anderson 2011).

As an educator, behavior expectations should be taught similarly as math or literacy. We model the expectations and have our students practice the skills we are teaching. Many times directions are given from the teacher for what we believe are simple tasks that students do incorrectly. Anderson (2011) describes a scenario people in education are familiar with, before it is time to dismiss our new class for lunch we ask them to line up quietly. Well I have a different idea of the expectation than others may have. In the example, Anderson (2011) describes the teacher in the story yells at her new classroom “that they are 4th graders now and should line up as a 4th grader does (p 33).” The issue with the teacher’s feedback in this real-life situation we have heard before. I ask myself if any of the students know the expectations from the teacher explaining how a fourth grader should line up. If I were yelled at for doing something wrong my first response would be “how can I do it better for next time” but our students don’t have those skills and we need to spend time on teaching behavior just as we do common core subjects.

Interactive modeling is a great way to teach our students the classroom routines (Anderson 2011). The strategy gives opportunities to observe, discuss, and practice routines. After a teacher has given instruction will interactive modeling students can practice the task on their own. We can ask students to carefully put their whiteboards away after a math lesson. However, the instructions of putting an object away safely can be vague to a child. I will have to reflect on what that will look like for my classroom before I have interactively modeled the expectation. This will have to be taught will every part of the school day if teachers spend the

majority of the day practicing routines and procedures in the first couple of weeks in the school learning can be the focus as the year progresses.

Consider the culture I want for my classroom. Do I want to support a culture of chaos or culture of calm and learning? McCloud (2005) describes a school that was in a culture of chaos. Every day was different or new expectations for their principal and teachers. The principal spent the majority of his day reprimanding students for inappropriate behavior. Any given day different teachers monitored breakfast or lunch duties with different rules varying the time and day. Students spent their time frustrated and in verbal or physical altercations with other students or staff. Everyone was stressed in the school.

Behavior Specific Praise

As mentioned, teaching expected behaviors in the classroom is as important as teaching math and literacy to students. But how can building a community in an elementary classroom decrease disruptive behaviors? Before the research discussed the importance of modeling and practicing routines. In addition to modeling and practicing teachers need to give feedback to their student's behaviors. The research discusses Behavior Specific Praise (BSP) and the difference of Initiate Respond Evaluate (IRE) in the classroom. Types of praise are defined to share the importance of classroom discourse.

What is classroom discourse? According to Van de Walle, Karp, Lovin, and Bay-Williams (2014) "classroom discourse includes the interactions between all the participants that occur throughout a lesson" (Lloyd, Kolodeziej, and Brashears, 2016, p. 293). Interactions can include student-student and importantly teacher-student interactions. Classroom discourse is a crucial part of building a classroom community since it relates to the sharing of ideas. It allows

students and teachers to have brave discussions related to lessons. Students need to feel secure to agree or disagree with concepts that are taught.

Providing Feedback

As mentioned, ‘teachers will provide feedback that addresses students’ behaviors. I am directing teachers to tell students what they notice about behavior instead of generic praise. First, modeling and practicing are crucial when developing a community set of routines and expectations; students require feedback for the tasks they are doing. For example, if a group of students are asked to grab their math materials from a lesson. A teacher can comment that a student walked safely and quickly back with all of their materials. The student is aware of the expectations the class has set. Students can practice the expected behaviors after a teacher or students have modeled the behavior. The research recommends discussing it as a class with everyone who notices the example that was presented to the class after modeling. After students have had an opportunity to watch and discuss expected behaviors they are ready to try.

When providing praise that is specific instead of general, “good job” they recognize how they are performing in the classroom. Teachers want their students to know exactly what the expectations are. If a teacher is giving out compliments, like “Good Job!” or “I like what you’re doing!” Teachers haven’t taught their class the routines and expectations instead they know what we may like or dislike. The goal of providing feedback that is individual is to create a classroom where students know what to expect. If a teacher’s compliments only regard what they like about a student’s behavior, the other students are unsure what is expected, but another student’s heard that they like that student. It can be hard to come back from a culture that is built on

favoritism and inconsistency. Students can act up, disrespectful, or clingy coming from a culture or environment that is not predictable.

After a classroom routine and expectations are clearly established students can focus on learning. One of my goals for creating a strong classroom environment is for students to feel like a risk-taker during learning times. For instance, I want students to disagree and ask hard questions without fear of being laughed at by their peers.

Facilitate Listen Engage Model

The research from, *Teacher Education Quarterly*, reaffirms that Building a classroom community has many benefits including decreasing disruptive behaviors in the classroom (2012). When students feel supported and safe to learn and make mistakes in the classroom the learning can begin. My goal is to create a classroom that fosters critical learning at a young age. My dream is for my students to feel brave enough to ask tough questions of their teacher and their peers. The goal of teaching is to learn and for me that includes teacher to student learning, student to student learning, and student to teacher learning. As an educator, I learn from my students every day and they blow me away with their perspectives. The model I am going to discuss is the facilitate-listen-engage (FLE) model.

A classroom that has a focus on community building can follow the FLE which allows the learning to be student centered (Brashears et al., 2016). In this scenario, there is discussion promoted among peers instead of quietly listening to a teacher lecture. There is a balance between teacher talk and student talk in an FLE model. This can mean there is more time in learning to have discussions either teacher to student or student to student. The most important

aspect of this model is students share in academic conversations and consider themselves valuable members of their learning community.

This strategy is promoting discourse in the classroom that establishes the role of the teacher as the facilitator and there is a peer to peer communication (Hoskins Lloyd, Kolodziej, and Brashears p. 298). The teacher will skillfully incorporate teaching and learning in lessons and guide students to develop strong relationships with each other. Educators will need to acknowledge differences among students to create strong relationships in the classroom. There are three community-building activities that are recommended to establish this relationship but first I would like to discuss different parts of the FLE model.

Facilitate

Facilitate is the foundation of the FLE model and the teacher assumes the role of a community builder in the classroom (Hoskins Lloyd, Kolodziej, and Brashears p. 300). The teacher is no longer the only possessor of knowledge and information in the classroom. Instead, they are asking questions and strategies with the intention of engaging students in discourse. This will create a strong sense of community in the classroom. In this model, teachers create groups of learners in the classroom that are nonexclusive. Back to modeling, teachers will model the expectations of conversations in lessons. Think of a teacher in this model as more of a tour guide leading students through an interactive learning process. When the teacher acts as the facilitator of the classroom for academic discussions they will have an opportunity for reflection, careful planning of instructions, and planned lessons that encourage conversation.

Listen

In this phase of the FLE model Hoskins Lloyd, Kolodziej, and Brashears, teachers and students are committed to listen to everyone's comments. In order to build a strong community in the classroom, teachers must commit to creating an expectation of active listening. This can include teaching what respect looks like or how to be an active listener. As mentioned, modeling to build a strong community for a classroom is so important but giving students examples for what a good listener looks like is crucial. Everyone may have a different idea of what a great listener looks like. Teachers will have to create those expectations in the classroom and thoughtful reflection for this is necessary.

Engage

The last and third phase of this model is Engage and occurs simultaneously with listening. Engaging is a way for students to share what they have learned. According to Hoskins Lloyd, Kolodziej, and Brashears: "engaging in dialogue provides students with opportunities to communicate, giving voice to their thought processes and showing respect for the opinion of others (p. 298)". Students can assess their thinking with other students when engaged in dialogue instead of internally processing new information. Teachers can support students' engagement in authentic tasks like listening and talking which is similar to how people interact as they move into a professional setting.

Community Building Activity Examples

Three community-building activity examples for students to participate in are: inner-outer circle, numbered heads together, and discussion webs. Inner-outer circle discussions can occur by students counting off "one, two, one, two, and so," 1's would represent the inner circle and 2's would represent the outer circle. The 1s are instructed to create a circle with everyone facing

outward, next direct the two group to create a second circle outside the circle created by the 1's. Students are expected to face each other in the inner-outer circles for discussions. These guided discussions can be related to instruction but I suggest introducing this model with a topic that is relatable, for example, a favorite season or favorite dessert.

The second community building activity to encourage discussion is numbered heads together. The activity allows every student in a group of four to participate in discussions. This is an example of the student to student interaction. Researchers determined that an average of 98% of students responded to questions asked in a small group than 15% of students that participated in a large group setting (Hoskins Lloyd, Kolodziej, and Brashears 300). To start this type of activity group students together in 4's. Each student will be assigned a number, 1-4. The teacher will present a question to the entire class and after give the groups enough time to discuss the question. It will be obvious when students are done discussing, the room may get louder and the conversation sillier. After the discussion time the teacher will call out a number, those students will represent their group to present the information they discussed prior.

The last example is a discussion web. They are perfect for leading opinion centered discussion. Students can use a graphic organizer to plan out their thoughts. During this activity students will work with partners. They have a chance to discuss what each other is thinking. The teacher can pose a question, "Is it a good idea to get a pet?" Each pair can put their ideas in a graphic organizer for a pro or con argument. This community-building activity will support critical thinking and discussion with peers.

Conclusion

Building a strong community in an elementary classroom can be important to decrease disruptive behaviors. Students can meet a teacher's expectations with modeling and consistent routines. When students know what to expect in the classroom they can relax and enjoy stability. Students need to clearly understand what to expect to enjoy or feel comfortable learning in a classroom. Later I discussed the importance of behavior-specific praise which can inform students what they need to be doing. It provides explicit feedback that is not related to liking or disliking a behavior. Lastly, examples were provided of activities that can be done to support a strong community in an elementary classroom. I believe all three will build a strong community in an elementary classroom and decrease disruptive behaviors. This will allow for more time for teaching and learning either from teacher to student, student to student, or student to teacher.

The first time I had a student removed from the classroom by a behavior dean, "the student was out of the room for an entire math lesson." By the time the student came back from the behavior office, the class was working independently on their math work. I was meeting with a small group of students that require additional support for learning. Now, "I have a calm and ready to learn student that has corrected their behavior but can not do the math work on their own." I did not have the opportunity to reteach a mini-lesson to the student that missed thirty minutes of instruction. If this pattern continues after leaving class to receive behavior redirection the student will miss important instruction time. Eventually, that student will fall behind in academic areas. My goal, as their teacher, is to keep the students in the classroom and keep the learning. Not only has the academic part been affected, but, socializing with classmates as well. During learning time, students are sharing ideas with each other. Every time a student leaves for behavior they are missing that connection with another student. The class understands the

student that keeps leaving the classroom is not going to be able to work in a group because they are gone during learning times. My goal in my classroom is to create an attainable set of expectations for everyone to succeed.

Chapter Three

Project Description

Introduction

In this project, I plan to explore the answer to my research question: Will building a strong community in an elementary classroom reduce disruptive behaviors? In chapter two, I described ways to build a strong community based on research. I started with the importance of modeling behaviors and creating routines in the classroom, according to Andrea M. Babkie (2006 p. 184). It is essential for students to feel safe and know what to expect in the classroom every day (p. 187). Students need specific positive feedback to understand their expectations, relationships with teachers and students, consistent routines and high expectations. The research states above three subtopics will build a strong community in an elementary classroom that will have decreased disruptive behaviors.

Overview of Project

As stated in the previous chapter, I provided research that explained the importance of building a healthy community in the classroom. This can correlate to more learning during a school day. I am creating a professional development training for teachers to learn strategies for community building. In this training, I plan to teach 3 key strategies: building relationships with students, rewarding desired behaviors and creating high expectations and consistent routines. The training will be a combination of large group discussions, small group discussions, and

active engagement. The intended audience for this training includes elementary school teachers that seek to build community and reduce disruptive behaviors.

Community Building Training

This project will create a professional development for elementary teachers to learn strategies to build a healthy classroom community that reduces disruptive behavior. The training will be set up as two hours meetings over three days. I will be using Google Slideshow for a visual aid and outline for teachers to follow the training. As part of the training, a script will be developed to guide the trainer on strategies for building a community.

The professional development training will teach three ways to build community: creating relationships with students, positive reinforcement for desired behaviors, and creating routines and high expectations. During the training there will be different large and small group discussions. Teachers will be able to discuss different scenarios and explore strategies that can be implemented in the classroom. In addition reflect on their strengths in the classroom and new strategies to introduce.

I chose to use a training for teachers because it will be a learning space to explore and implement different community building strategies. The training will discuss research that supports a healthy community and more learning in the classroom and allow teachers to reflect on their own classroom experiences.

Intended Audience & Setting

For the purpose of this project, my audiences are students and teachers. I believe that these two groups will most be affected by building a healthy community in the classroom. Students and teachers will work closely together but have different perspectives of the benefit of

having a healthy community in the classroom. I will explain how this project will provide different benefits for the audience. The project will be in an elementary classroom setting in an urban school environment. Students that participate in this community-building project will be in grades kindergarten through fifth grade. I believe that elementary school teachers will be most interested in the project's results.

The professional development training that I am creating will help teachers build a healthy community in the classroom. The training will discuss how to build relationships with students, positively reinforce desired behaviors, and create consistent routines with high expectations. These three parts will be important for teachers to learn because they will be able to teach more and spend less time redirecting disruptive behaviors.

Students are the audience too, for this project because they spend time in the classroom with a teacher. I believe that when students understand a classroom routine and the expectations they can focus on learning instead of potentially worrying about the unknowns of the school day. They will have an opportunity to practice routines and expectations with positive reinforcement. I believe this is important because students will understand and practice a teacher's expectations. The goal of building a healthy community in the classroom is to increase learning. Students will be able to focus on their learning because they have already learned how to be a citizen in the classroom.

Timeline

This training will be conducted in three parts in two hour increments during the school year. Initial explanation or installment of building a healthy community in the classroom will occur in August before students return for the fall school year. The other two installments will

be in October on the school training days. The next section is this chapter which will present my methodology for professional development training.

Adult Learning Theory

To better understand, how to teach my professional development training, ideas from *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species* influenced the process. Adult learners take in information differently than child student learners. Teachers or the adult learners come with a wealth of knowledge and experience in the classroom and my training will use that to build on new discoveries about classroom management.

This training will be conducted in an urban elementary school that is made up of 72.8% students on free and reduced lunch programs. Also the school has a population of 35.4% English learners enrolled. As mentioned previously, the project will focus on strategies teachers can use to build a healthy community in an elementary classroom by building relationships with students, rewarding desired behaviors, and creating consistent routines with high expectations.

Teachers are bringing experience to this professional development with experience using Positive Behavior Incentive System (PBIS). It is a school wide positive reward system that reinforces the school's values that are taught. The project will build from the experience and introduce positively building relationships with students in the classroom. Teachers have an understanding of rewarding desired behavior but I want to challenge them to teach those behaviors to students. For example, taking the time to teach skills necessary for functioning in the classroom. An important part of this training will ask teachers to plan for consistent routines during the school day. Students can learn better when they know what to expect at school.

Teachers will learn strategies to build positive relationships with students, teacher to student and student to student. In the professional development training there will be an opportunity to learn and practice different 'ice breakers' to use in the classroom. It will focus on activities that allow students to socialize with their peers and teachers. This will be important when it is brought back to the classroom, students will be able to make connections with others.

Research Support

Throughout the research process, I am approaching building a healthy community in the elementary classroom to decrease disruptive behaviors in three main points: how to build relationships with students, positively reinforce desired behaviors, and create consistent routines with high expectations. If a teacher succeeds at creating a healthy classroom community, students have reported they enjoyed school, trusted their teachers, and cared about academic learning (Watson et al., 2019). As stated in the definition, building a community is crucial for students to enjoy and succeed in school (p. 11). I plan to implement the main points of community building at the start of the school year but continue it for the school year's duration.

Conclusion

I plan to intend to implement community-building activities in the classroom to decrease disruptive behaviors. From the research I have read, students will feel more supported and want to spend more time in the classroom(Watson et al., 2019). By modeling behaviors that are expected, providing behavior-specific praise, and implementing facilitate-listen-engage models to improve learning in classroom activities.

Chapter Four

Project Description

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to revisit the research question, “Will Building a Healthy Community in the Elementary Classroom Reduce Disruptive Behaviors?” First, First, I will review the literature that was beneficial to the project design. Different studies and programs found positive results by building community to reduce behavior redirection. Then, I will discuss the two-part professional development training for elementary educators to develop their classrooms’ relationships. Professional development training will be divided into three sections: participating in community building activities, using behavior-specific praise, and setting consistent routines with high expectations. Next, I will address the implications and limitations of the research. Building a community will not eliminate but reduce disruptive behaviors. Last ‘a-ha’ moments or findings from along the project are shared in this chapter.

Literature Review

For the project, three main ideas to build a community were used, participating in community building activities, behavior-specific praise, and creating consistent routines with high expectations. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs suggests feeling comfortable or ready to learn basic physiological needs have been met. For example, hunger or safety need to meet for students before they can understand. Second, participating in community-building activities can help build relationships among students and teachers. Also, students will feel more confident. Finally, creating a classroom with consistent routines will allow students to understand when expectations are happening and focus on learning.

Teaching Education Quarterly (2019) created the Child Development Project in California. The purpose of the project was to reduce punitive punishments or rewards and teach empathy in learning activities. Students participated in a variety of literature-based activities to build relationships. After a year of this project, students were more intrinsically motivated to succeed, and reading scores improved. The success of this project was foundational for this capstone project. The research found that students achieved when they felt supported and trusted by their peers and teachers. Finally, teachers that were part of this project spent time leading community-building activities to reduce disruptive behaviors.

The next section of the project discusses strategies for feedback to students. Behavior Specific Praise is a strategy that rewards appropriate and desired behaviors (Clair et al., 2018). Classrooms that let students know what they needed to do to receive praise from a teacher found more time spent on-task behavior. This type of feedback is different than telling a student “Good Job!” or a general compliment. Instead, teachers provide feedback that discusses the on-task behavior. An example is, “I noticed Samantha is sitting quietly with her math notebook and pencil. I can tell she is ready for math!” Students know what the routine is and reward students for meeting expectations.

Educational Leadership (2011) found that students will have reduced anxiety when there is a consistent routine in the classroom. The journal uses the example of reading quietly after recess. Students learned to have a book ready after recess to be prepared to participate in learning again. A consistent routine allows students to focus on learning instead of what comes next (p. 33). Routines and expectations don’t stop outside of the classroom; they continue throughout the school. McCloud (2005) writes about the importance of everyone educator in the

school building on board for a behavior plan. The example used is for cafeteria policies and what expectations students should follow. Disruptive behaviors can increase if there different expectations from every adult a child encounters. The purpose of the project is to learn strategies to reduce anxiety and increase learning time.

Project Design

The project is completed in a two-part professional development training for elementary teachers. The objectives for the training are for teachers to gain an understanding of strategies to build a healthy community in the classroom. Building a healthy community in the classroom has been proven to reduce disruptive behavior during the school day (Daly et al., 2019). The professional training is divided into three learning sections. Participants will be able to learn, practice, reflect and implement different community-building strategies for the classroom.

The three main parts participants will learn about are: activities that build community, behavior-specific praise, and implementing consistent routines and expectations. At the end of the training day one, the main objectives are to practice community-building activities, learn the benefits of community, and plan ways to create a community. Participants are invited to submit a survey beforehand for the training facilitator to understand better their knowledge of ways to build relationships better. During the session, there is time to understand the benefits of relationships with students from different experts. Then, the participants will practice various community-building activities in the classroom. It is designed to get teachers to act and engage in activities that can be modified for their classroom.

The second session is designed to explain the importance of behavior-specific praise and creating consistent routines and high expectations. Similar to the first session, participants will

take a survey to gauge their knowledge of the topics. This professional development will be more reflective. Participants will think and share their approaches to providing feedback to their students. McCloud (2005) supported the connection between expected behavior and the feedback students can reinforce the classroom behavior skills they are practicing. Teachers will have guidance from research that supports giving students behavior-specific praise to encourage meeting behavior expectations. In addition, to praise the training will discuss the routines and expectations in the school day. There will be time to reflect on the school day and times that may be chaotic. The routines will have to be practiced throughout the school year but will reduce disruptive behavior in the classroom.

Learnings

While completing the professional development for teachers, there were three personal discoveries in the process. For this chapter learning discoveries are called ‘learnings’ that occurred when completing the project. First, in training, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs introduces the importance of building a healthy community in the classroom. The second teachable moment was planning team-building activities that are COVID-19 safe or completed online in a virtual classroom. Finally, the last learning moment was to slow down and be intentional in the classroom and teaching routines and expectations.

First, educators need to meet the needs of physical safety, for example, hunger or fatigue. As the needs are met, students can learn and participate in activities that ask for critical thinking. The idea of building the foundation of community and getting students excited about school will support learning. Also, creating consistent routines and expectations that students know and when activities happen will reduce anxiety.

Many different team-building activities included in the training for educators were designed before COVID-19 restrictions. Students were required to be in close proximity to others and move freely in the classroom, or for in-person instruction. Educators will have to be intentional with these new restrictions in the classroom. It is essential to build community and have opportunities for students to build relationships with their peers and adults in the classroom. COVID-19 restrictions for schools are changing rapidly, and educators will have to adapt to these expectations.

The last learning during this experience was to be intentional about expectations and routines. Specifically, slow down and take time to teach classroom management to students. This way, everyone can practice or explore what the routines are. Intentionality is related to planning the routines and expectations. Since students can learn more and have less disruptive behavior when they have a healthy community, it is essential to teach this math or literature. Three learnings were discovered and findings that support the belief in building a healthy community in the classroom.

Implications

For the purpose of this project, I was hoping to discover that building a healthy community in an elementary classroom will reduce disruptive behavior. Throughout the research process, different articles pointed out the frustration and time educators spend addressing student behavior. It was mentioned that this takes away from learning in the classroom. Students are removed from the classroom, or teachers are disrupted during teaching time. During the research phase of this capstone, I was unsure what topics would best relate to my research topic, “will building a healthy community in the elementary classroom reduce disruptive behaviors?”

At the beginning of the research process, I struggled to find research related to building a healthy community. My topic was related to classroom management strategies instead of creating a community. The method for classroom management relates to having students feel they ‘belong.’ Behavior management can be a struggle for educators. From the research building, a healthy community can reduce disruptive behavior. After discussing different ideas with the campus librarian, I discovered that my project would focus on strategies to reduce disruptive behavior.

The purpose of the research is to discover community-building strategies that could reduce disruptive behavior in an elementary classroom. *Teacher Education Quarterly* (2019) focused on a reading program that uses less extrinsic rewards and punishments instead of building relationships to learn empathy. Students and teachers spent time getting to know each other by incorporating community building into learning activities. As a result, researchers found that reading scores had improved, and teachers were spending less time redirecting behavior. If this model was successful in different urban classrooms, it could enhance educational experiences for students.

Limitations

The purpose of this capstone is to answer, “will building a healthy community in the elementary classroom reduce disruptive behavior?” It is asking educators to rethink behavior management strategies. Instead of using punitive rewards or punishments to redirect undesired or unsafe behavior, focus on building positive relationships. The limitations of this capstone are teachers that relay or punitive practices for behaviors. Teachers may not feel confident building a community in the classroom. Instead, create rules with inconsistent consequences. Another

limitation of the project is schools that do not implement a school-wide set of expectations. In “Chaos to Consistency” (2005), the author wrote about his experience for breakfast or lunch duty that was chaotic. Chaos stemmed from students not understanding the expectations and teachers having different expectations during meal times. Students were suspended or removed from mealtimes as a consequence of bad behavior. It was a cycle that continued until the adults agreed on consistent routines and expectations.

Conclusion

“Will Building a Healthy Community Reduce Disruptive Behavior?” was the research question for this project. Many different researchers found that when students have a relationship with their classmates and teachers, they enjoy school. However, building a community is not limited to relationships includes routines and expectations. For example, every teacher wants more time to teach in the classroom and for their students to succeed. Taking time to build a community in your classroom and school can reduce disruptive behaviors.

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