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How can morning meeting and character education foster a community of respect in a second grade classroom?

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HOW CAN MORNING MEETING AND CHARACTER EDUCATION FOSTER A

COMMUNITY OF RESPECT IN A SECOND GRADE CLASSROOM?

by
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A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

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HOW CAN MORNING MEETING AND CHARACTER EDUCATION FOSTER A
COMMUNITY OF RESPECT IN A SECOND GRADE CLASSROOM?
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The purpose of this qualitative research study was to determine how Morning Meeting

and the integration of character education values in a second grade classroom can lead to

a respectful classroom community. As the United States becomes increasingly diverse,

teachers need to learn ways in which they can create a positive learning environment

where all students feel accepted and respected. Participants of this study include 13

second grade students; seven boys and six girls. Participants took part in daily Morning

Meetings for approximately 20 minutes a day for a period of six and a half weeks. Data

was analyzed and interpreted through the coding and categorizing of student surveys,

Student Response Journals, and recordings. Findings and conclusions are discussed.

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Foundations of the Study

Introduction

"Using the papers I have just distributed and markers or crayons you have at home, you are to create a map of your bedroom," instructed Ms. Mitch. The students in Ms. Mitch's second grade class were just given the long term homework assignment of creating a map of their bedroom. As Ms. Mitch reviewed the directions for the project, Carly, a new student to the school, slowly raised her hand from where she sat at the back of the classroom. She was called on by Ms. Mitch and asked, "But what if you don't have a bedroom?" Ms. Mitch looked surprised, then rolled her eyes, sighed and said, "Well then, I did not expect someone to say that. What do you mean you don't have a bedroom?" Carly replied, "Well, I live in a hotel." Ms. Mitch seemed to be searching for her words and a few moments later finally answered, "Just make a map of any room, I guess." Carly sat quietly looking down at her desk. Several other students in the class began to whisper. Jonathan, who sat in the group next to Carly asked, "Do you really live in a hotel?" Carly became uncomfortable as she wriggled around in her chair and fumbled with her papers. The other students' whispers and questions are left ignored by the classroom teacher.

Purpose Statement

Carly demonstrates that there are many aspects and experiences of a student's life that may be concealed from the classroom community. How are teachers prepared to deal

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with situations like this that may occur in the elementary classroom? What does being a prepared teacher look like? Had the students been given the opportunity to share experiences and discuss aspects of their lives that are important to them with each other, perhaps Carly's uncomfortable feelings due to her classmates' whispers and questions could have been avoided. Therefore, this study attempts to use the sharing of student experiences through Morning Meeting. Additionally, this study will use character education to foster a community of respect in a second grade classroom.

The United States is a country of many diverse people (Marulis, 2000) and it can be expected to continue to become increasingly more diverse. More likely than not, there will be students from a variety of cultural backgrounds in any given classroom in the United States. At a young age, students become aware of cultural differences (Amour, 2003). According to Holmes et al. (1995), racial intolerance and prejudice increases as children become older. According to an ethnography conducted by Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001), preschoolers used classmates' "racial identity in regulating inclusion and exclusion (Hirschfeld, 2008, p. 41)". In the early elementary and even preschool years, children are beginning to segregate and include or exclude students based on race and differences. Edmonds et al. (2008) demonstrates that relationships and friendships are established between children based on the similarities between them. It is important for educators to give students every opportunity possible to engage with one another and discover the similarities they may have with their fellow classmates. Perhaps the discovery of these similarities will allow students to understand their fellow classmates and empathize with those classmates who may be different from themselves.

According to Amour (2003), children are able to express something that is meaningful and important to them through the telling of a personal story, storytelling, and consequent discussion. Social ties among children are strengthened when they are able to share stories concerning their home life, traditions, and aspects of life that are important to them (Amour 2003). Additionally, the use of Morning Meeting in the Responsive Classroom approach has been found to build a sense of community in the elementary education classroom by allowing students to listen to and respond to their peers (Horsch, Chen, Wagner, 2002). This research demonstrates the importance of storytelling and allowing students the ability to express important and meaningful information about their lives with their teacher and fellow classmates.

Given the research and literature that supports storytelling, the use of Morning Meetings, and the consideration of race and diversity in the classroom, this study therefore attempts to use Morning Meeting and character education to foster a community of respect in a second grade classroom.

Statement of Research Problem and Question

The United States is a country of many diverse people (Marulis, 2000), therefore, it is extremely likely that there will be students from a variety of cultural backgrounds in the elementary classroom setting. At a young age, students become aware of cultural differences. Teachers need to be prepared and learn ways in which they can create a positive learning environment for all learners. A positive learning environment and classroom community can be created through the used of students' experiences in the classroom to teach respect and an understanding of others. The question of this research

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is as follows: How Can Morning Meeting and Character Education Foster a Community of Respect in a Second Grade Classroom?

Story of the Question

When I look back on my own experiences in elementary school, I tend to remember most my friends, Morning Meetings surrounded by my fellow classmates and teacher, moments shared on the play ground, special activities, such as Show and Tell and Student of the Week, and various personal stories shared by my teachers. Of course I remember learning math, social studies and science, and reading some of my favorite books, but mostly I remember those teachers who gave me the opportunity to share in their classroom and those teachers that shared stories of their own personal lives with me.

In September of 2008 I began my first internship placement as a graduate student at an elementary school in southern New Jersey. The second grade classroom of students that I was placed in was extremely well behaved and showed an enthusiasm for learning that I had never seen before. During the first few days of school the classroom teacher took the time to introduce herself and share aspects of her life with the students. Together the students and teacher developed classroom rules and the students were introduced to classroom routines and expectations. As the days progressed and September came to a close, I realized that the students were not given the opportunity to introduce themselves to the class or share information about themselves with their fellow classmates. On several occasions, and sometimes at inappropriate times, students would raise their hands or begin telling the teacher a story about their weekend or something that they had experienced that related to what they were learning. The students were almost always silenced and told, "This is not the right time to be talking about those things." Sometimes

the teacher would ask, "Do you think that I really want to hear about that right now?" I began to feel that the students were being given little, if no opportunity at all, to talk to their classmates about themselves or their life experiences. As seen in the introduction of this chapter, one particular student, Carly, was made to feel uncomfortable about her home life because the teacher was unaware of Carly's situation and experiences. It is not to say that Carly would have even shared that private information with her classmates or her teacher, but having been given the opportunity to tell her class about herself, the other students may have developed a deeper understanding of others and therefore not began to whisper and ask inappropriate questions of Carly, which in turn led her to feel uncomfortable about her home life.

In a second grade classroom I would expect to see the students to take part in some, if not all of the following activities: Morning Meeting, Show and Tell, Student of the Week, oral storytelling, and cooperative learning. I did not observe any of those activities or experiences taking place in the classroom. There were, however, several opportunities for student sharing to take place, which the classroom teacher chose not to take advantage of. In the beginning of the year the students' first writing assignment required them to write about what they did over the summer. As the students went through the writing process of creating a web, rough draft, and final draft, I was able to meet with several students and read their writing. Many of the students had fantastic stories that not only told what great fun they had had over the summer, but also told about their friends, families, and interests. I had hoped that the students would have the chance to read their stories to their classmates, however the stories were displayed on an outside

bulletin board and then later tucked into a folder, never to be seen again by their fellow classmates.

As my internship placement in this particular second grade classroom came to a close, I began to consider the limited interaction the students had with one another and the lack of opportunity the students had to share stories and experiences with the teacher and other students, which appeared to be leading to a lack of classroom community. As I once again remembered the delight I had once experienced as an elementary student taking part in Morning Meetings and Student of the Week, I began to consider other ways in which students in the early elementary grades could share personal stories and experiences with each other. What would happen if the students were given the opportunity to learn about one another and the experiences of those students who are alike and different from themselves? Would the students learn to develop respect, acceptance and a deeper understanding of other students in the classroom? Would this respect and acceptance of others lead to a more positive classroom community?

Organization of the Thesis

Chapter II examines the literature and research related to promoting respect and an understanding of others in the elementary education classroom. The topics discussed in Chapter II include personal storytelling, the Responsive Classroom approach, Morning Meetings, character education, race and student relationships, cooperative learning, and multicultural education. Chapter III discusses the context of this study, qualitative research, data collection methods, and sources of data. Chapter IV examines the various data collected during this study and the major themes that emerged. Chapter V

summarizes the findings of this study and discusses conclusions, as well as

recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

Introduction

This study strives to use Morning Meeting and character education to foster a community of respect in a second grade classroom. Chapter II examines the literature related to encouraging respect and an understanding of others in the elementary education classroom. The first section addresses the effectiveness of storytelling in allowing students to express themselves and share meaningful information with their classmates. The second section discusses the Responsive Classroom approach with a focus specifically on Morning Meeting. The second section also discusses the effectiveness of classroom meetings in enabling students to accept and appreciate differences. The third section discusses character education. The fourth section examines race, friendship, and relationships as integral aspects of teaching and learning. The fifth section focuses on cooperative learning as an effective teaching strategy to create a strong classroom community and allow students to practice social skills and interact with peers. The sixth section considers the diversity of classrooms in the United Sates, multicultural teaching, and multicultural education.

Personal Storytelling

The central focus of this study involves using sharing and student experiences to promote respect and an understanding of others in the elementary education setting. According to Amour (2003), children are able to express something that is meaningful

and important to them through the telling of a personal story, storytelling, and consequent discussion. Listening to a personal story of a child will allow the listener, whether that listener is a teacher or another student, to learn about something of importance to that particular child. Additionally, social ties among children are strengthened when they are able to share stories concerning their home life, traditions, and aspects of life that are important to them (Amour 2003). Therefore, one may conclude that storytelling and personal stories allow students to learn from, and about, one another. Students will gain insight into the lives of their fellow classmates and begin to build relationships with one another.

In a given classroom there will be students with varying cultural backgrounds, religions, ethnicities, and life experiences. According to Amour (2003), a greater appreciation of cultural differences can arise from children's storytelling and the use of multicultural literature in the classroom. Allowing children to share personal stories will expose other students in the classroom to the experiences of different cultures. Furthermore, multicultural children's stories and literature, which can be incorporated into classroom libraries or read aloud sessions, can illustrate aspects of different cultures to students in the elementary classroom. This is important to the promotion of respect and an understanding of others because students will be able to become familiar with differences among the students in their classroom.

According to Csak (2002), "The use of oral language in the classroom is not only enjoyable for children but is also necessary for establishing classroom community, developing literacy, and defining children's self (Amour, 2003, p. 50)." Not only do children enjoy the use of verbal communication in the classroom, but they also can

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become more connected to the classroom community through the use of oral language. The use of oral storytelling can be an effective tool in a classroom of diverse students, as well as in a classroom that lacks cultural and ethnic diversity (Araujo and Strasser 2003). Oral storytelling has been found to be an effective way to communicate among diverse student populations because it "is congruent with the cultures of several minority groups (Araujo and Srasser, 2003, p. 181.)." Oral storytelling and sharing allows for students to discuss aspects of life, school, and personal issues that are important to them (Amour, 2003). Storytelling and oral language is important to this study because it demonstrates to teachers the effectiveness of its use in the classroom for a variety of student populations. Teachers may use storytelling in their classrooms to facilitate discussion among students, build classroom relationships, and allow students to get to know one another and learn about issues and experiences that are important to their classmates. The use of storytelling in the classroom may be one way to use the sharing of student experiences to promote an understanding of other classmates and respect for those who are different.

Responsive Classroom Approach and Classroom Meetings

According to Horsch, Chen, and Wagner (2002), a teaching approach known as the Responsive Classroom approach has been known to build a sense of community in the elementary education classroom. The Responsive Classroom approach was developed by the Northeast Foundation for Children in an effort to "support students' social-emotional development (Horsch, Chen, Wagner, 2002, p.365)." The Responsive Classroom approach encourages students to care for one another and is based on six key components (Horsch et al., 2002). The six components of the Responsive Classroom

approach are Morning Meeting, Rules and Logical Consequences, Guided Discovery, Classroom Organization, Academic Choice, and Assessment and Reporting to Parents. The six components of the Responsive Classroom allow students to "develop the social skills of cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control and also to promote...reasoned decision making, and motivation for learning (Horsh et al., 2002. p. 367)."

One of the components of the Responsive Classroom approach that most relates to this particular study is Morning Meeting. During Morning Meeting, students are able to engage in academic and social skills through the use of "greeting, sharing, a group or game activity, and a daily letter and news from the teacher (Horsch et al. 2002, p. 368)". In the Morning Meeting students are able to work collaboratively, as well as listen and respond to their peers (Horsch et al. 2002). Horrch et al. (2002) concluded that students become more connected and unified as a result of the Morning Meeting. One can see that through the use of Morning Meeting, relationships among classmates can be built and students are able to gain a better understanding of one another. Because this study strives to use sharing and personal stories to encourage respect and an understanding of others, Morning Meeting is a specific part of the students' day where that sharing may take place. Additionally, Morning Meeting can further the sense of classroom community because students will be given a daily opportunity to get to know each other.

Similar to Morning Meetings, Powell and Caseau (2004) suggest the use of classroom meetings to foster community. The purpose of classroom meetings should be to encourage students to communicate with each other and to "accept and appreciate

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diversity (Powell and Caseau, 2004, p. 145-146)." Classroom meetings should allow the teacher and students to reflect on issues of importance and to problem solve collaboratively (Powell and Caseau, 2004). Morning Meeting in the Responsive Classroom approach and classroom meetings can both be used to create community in the elementary classroom and allow students to share what is important to them on an individual basis, as well as issues they see of importance for the classroom as a whole. Morning Meeting and classroom meetings can be used to allow students to talk in small groups or partnerships about problems they are facing, or simply to share stories about their lives.

Character Education

One aspect of building community in the elementary education classroom involves the implementation of character education practices. According to the No Child Left Behind Act, schools must work towards contributing to a child's academic success, as well as character development (Benninga, Berkowitz, Kuehn, Smith, 2006). Character education programs have been in existence in American schools since the 1980's (Pearson and Nicholson, 2000). The American public believed that it was a schools responsibility to provide both academic and moral education for students (Pearson and Nicholson, 2000). There is no clear, specific definition of character education, but rather character traits and guidelines for character education programs. Traits of character education include, but are not limited to, fairness, responsibility, honesty, justice, trustworthiness, empathy, and kindness (Pearson and Nicholson, 2000). Additionally, three main topics of self, others, and community emerge from these traits as areas of focus that relate to good character. Many character education programs

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involve concepts and focuses on self, others, and community (Pearson and Nicholson, 2000). There are several strategies that teachers can implement in their classrooms to teach character education and build and enhance classroom community. Pearson and Nicholson (2000) suggest the following strategies for the development of an effective character education program: development of classroom rules, positive language, direct instruction, learning partners, mentoring, journal writing, class meetings, and parent communication.

According to Benninga, Berkowitz, Kuehn, and Smith (2006), there is a relationship between character education and academic achievement. Many schools throughout the United States use specific character education programs that have been proven successful. However, many other schools implement specific strategies to create customized character education programs for their particular schools (Benninga et al., 2006). Character education programs that have been customized by particular schools have not yet shown a relationship to improved academic achievement for students. Benninga et al. (2000) conducted a study in 2000 involving 120 elementary schools that submitted applications to the California Department of Education for recognition as distinguished schools. The schools involved in the study represented a range of academic achievement (Benninga et al., 2000). The 120 schools, which were randomly selected from the 681 applicant schools, were required to complete an application section relating to specific character education standards. Schools were required to show evidence relating to how positive character traits were promoted in students and what specific programs and activities relating to character education were being

implemented. Benninga et al. (2006) decided on the following definition of a character education program based on six criteria:

1. This school promotes core ethical values as the basis of good character.

2. In this school, parents and other community members are active participants in the character education initiative.

3. In this school, character education entails intentional promotion of core values in all phases of school life.

4. Staff members share responsibility for and attempt to model character education.

5. This school fosters an overall caring community.

6. This school provides opportunity for most students to practice moral action.

    (p.450)

Among the sample of 120 California public schools, researchers found a positive relationship between academic achievement and the implementation of a character education program (Benninga et al., 2006). Based on the applications of the 120 California elementary schools, the researchers were able to derive four indicators of effective character education programs and high academic achievement (Benninga et al., 2006). The following two indicators relate most significantly to this particular study involving the building of community in a diverse classroom:

- Good schools promote and model fairness, equity, caring, and respect.

- Good schools promote a caring community and positive social relationships (Benninga et al., 2006, p.451)

The first indicator involved teachers and school staff actively modeling and promoting values and attitudes of the school's character education program. The students' moral

development based on character education programs in specific schools is largely due to the teachers who build strong relationships with the students (Benninga et al., 2006). The second indicator involved schools and classrooms opening their doors to the larger community and inviting community members into the classroom to volunteer. Students were able to become familiar with members of their community and those people of different cultures other than their own. Benninga's et al. (2006) study is important to building community within the classroom and school because it addresses two specific ways in which character education can lead to the enhancement of caring and respect among students and the involvement of diverse community members within the classroom. Through the implementation of character education programs, not only are students learning to respect themselves, others, and the community, but they are also achieving more academic success.

Relationships Based on Race and Culture

Schools in the United States have become increasingly diversified (Edmonds, Killen, McGlothlin, 2008). According to Holmes (1995), "the process of social comparison emerges in the early school years, at which time they [children] begin to describe themselves in reference to other individuals (Holmes, 1995, p. 40-41)." Additionally, on the specific subject of race, it has been found that racial intolerance and prejudice increase as children grow older (Holmes, 1995, p. 106). Elementary school teachers should recognize that children begin to make judgments and notice differences about the people they are surrounded by at an early age. Teachers can acknowledge that people may become more prejudice as they grow older, and

implement strategies in their classrooms early on that allow students to build

relationships with their classmates and those that may be unlike themselves.

According to Hirschfeld (2008), in an ethnography conducted by Van Ausdale

and Feagin (2001), preschoolers used classmates' "racial identity in regulating inclusion

and exclusion (Hirschfeld, 2008, p. 41)". As early as preschool age, young students are

making decisions about those they will include or exclude based on race. In Hirschfeld

(2008), Van Ausdale and Feiagin (2001) did not conclude that inclusion or exclusion

was based on prejudice or negative feelings towards a specific race, but that simply

inclusion and exclusion was occurring based on race. It has been found that by sixth

grade, students begin to have more friends of the same race, rather than cross-race

friendships (Edmonds et al., 2008). Edmonds et al. (2008) explains friendship based on

the perception of similarities among individuals:

> The perception of similarity between individuals is a relevant factor in the
> choices children make regarding personal relationships, particularly friendships.
> Similarity is important in intergroup relationships as well as intragroup
> relationships. Social psychological research on friendship has hypothesized that
> perceptions of similarity plays an important role in friendship selection and
> maintenance because it increases attraction between individuals. (Edmonds et
> al., 2008, p. 428)

Edmonds et al. (2008) clearly demonstrates that relationships and friendships are

formed between children based on the perception of similarities among them. Children

will have the opportunity to recognize similarities between themselves and other

classmates if they are given the opportunity to share information about themselves and

their life experiences with others. Prejudice has been found to be effectively minimized

when children have had the opportunity for intergroup contact, which is interaction with

a member of a group that is different from one that a child may belong to (Edmonds et

al. 2008). Allowing students to get to know one another will allow for an increased understanding of classmates that may be unlike themselves and forge friendships and relationships across cultures, religions, ethnicities, and gender.

Cooperative Learning

Research has long attempted to determine if it is best for similarities or differences to be stressed among individuals of intergroups to enhance "intergroup relations (Vogt, 1997, p. 207)". According to Vogt (1997), there is no clear answer, however there are several ways in which intergroup relations can be improved. One way is to make use of cooperative learning in the classroom. Cooperative learning involves the teacher grouping students heterogeneously according to ethnicity, or other differences, to work collaboratively on class assignments and activities (Vogt, 1997). A manner of equality is demonstrated as all group members are seen as equals and work towards a common goal (Vogt, 1997). Students are able to practice social skills, listen to their peers, and problem solve with their group members (Powell and Caseau, 2004). Furthermore, many aspects of cooperative learning form a stronger classroom community (Powell and Caseau, 2004).

Cooperative learning enables students with disabilities to not only learn more, but also form friendships with other non-disabled peers (Powell and Caseau, 2004). According to Vogt (1997), cooperative work and learning allows for respect to be taught indirectly. Cooperative learning in the educational setting has proven to be successful to improve intergroup relationships, friendships, and positive attitudes about others (Vogt, 1997). An understanding of cooperative learning is important to this study. Aspects of cooperative learning can be used to encourage respect and an

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understanding of others through the sharing of ideas among students within cooperative, heterogeneous groups. Additionally, cooperative learning will allow all students to voice their opinions and share their ideas.

Diversity and Multicultural Education

The United States is a country of many diverse people and it can be expected to continue to become increasingly more diverse (Marulis, 2000). Incorporating multicultural teaching into the classroom and curriculum will allow students to relate to one another, despite their differences (Marulis, 2000). Multicultural education addresses cultural diversity and strives to create an environment where all students feel comfortable and welcome (Marulis, 2000). When teachers incorporate multicultural teaching into their classrooms, they not only impart multicultural education into specific lessons and aspects of curriculum, but they also develop a multicultural teaching as a style and way of living within their classrooms that can carry through all lessons and aspects of the day (Marulis, 2000).

At a young age, students become aware of cultural differences (Amour, 2003). Additionally, according to Araujo and Strasser (2003), "Stereotypes, prejudices, and practices in homes, communities, and the media can negatively affect children's feelings about themselves and others (Araujo and Strasser, 2003, p. 180)." It is important for educators to give students the opportunity to experience diversity and differences, therefore expanding their views and perceptions, both inside and outside of the classroom (Amour, 2003).

This study will focus on how Morning Meeting can be used as a means to share about oneself. Students will be given the opportunity to share life experiences with their

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classmates and therefore foster a community of understanding and respect in a second grade classroom. Thus, an understanding of *respect* as it relates to this study must be understood. According to Nieto, *respect* is one of the deepest levels of multicultural education. "Respect means to admire and hold in high esteem. When diversity is respected, it is used as the basis for much of the education offered (Neito, 2004, p. 340)." Conversely, Nieto (2004) sites *tolerance* as the lowest level in the "support for diversity (Nieto, 2004, p.340)." According to Vogt (1997), "Tolerance is intentional self-restraint in the face of something one dislikes, objects to, finds threatening, or otherwise has a negative attitude toward – usually in order to maintain a social or political group or to promote harmony in a group (Vogt, 1997, p. 3)." The goal of this study is to create a positive classroom environment through the use of daily sharing in which the students learn to respect their fellow classmates, rather than simply tolerate their differences. Social ties among students should be enhanced as a result of the respect the students show towards one another. Through the use of Morning Meeting, this study hopes to encourage a greater understanding for all students in the classroom and therefore foster a more respectful classroom community.

The incorporation of multicultural education in the classroom is one way to give students the opportunity to experience and be exposed to differences and diversity. Multicultural education is difficult to define because it is so complex. According to Nieto (2000), multicultural education,

> challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society and accepts and affirms the pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic, and gender, among others) that students, their communities, and teachers reflect. Multicultural education permeates the school's curriculum and instructional strategies, as well as the interactions among teachers, students, and

families, and the very way that schools conceptualize the nature of teaching and learning (Nieto, 2000, p. 305)

As Nieto (2004) points out, multicultural education, when implemented, is present in instructional strategies and the interactions of teachers and students. Multicultural education is important for all students, not just students of certain ethnic groups, religions, cultures, etc. (Nieto, 2004). Infusing multicultural education into the curriculum, instructional strategies, and interactions of one's classroom can allow students to be exposed to differences and diversity and therefore learn to respect and understand others.

CHAPTER III

Research Context and Design

Context

This study was conducted at Cherry Tree Elementary School in Smithsboro, New Jersey. Cherry Tree Elementary school is a one-story brick building, which recently underwent construction. New construction included a new gymnasium and new main offices and entranceway. Smithsboro is part of Grant Township School District. Smithsboro has a population of 32,832 (Neighborhood Link, Inc., 2009, p 1). The ethnicity distribution of Smithsboro is 84.8% Caucasian, 10.9% African American, 3.4% Hispanic, 1.2% Asian, .04% Hawaiian, and .25% Indian. The median household income in Smithsboro is $55,831 and the estimated house value is $111,500 (Neighborhood Link, Inc., 2009, p 1). Pseudonyms have been used in the place of real names and places for the purposes of this study.

This study was conducted in a 2nd grade general education classroom at Cherry Tree Elementary school. There are 22 students in the class, however due to lack of parental response, only 13 students were authorized to participate in the study. Seven of the students that participated in the study are boys and six of the students are girls. Of the 13 students that participated in this study, 10 students are Caucasian, 1 student is Turkish, 1 student is Ghanaian, and 1 student is Puerto Rican. The Turkish student had received English Language Instruction during kindergarten, first, and second grade. Additionally, the Ghanaian student received English Language instruction during his second grade year

of school at Cherry Tree Elementary School. One student in the classroom is classified as having Attention Deficit Disorder with Hyperactivity. This particular student has a 504 plan and receives accommodations in the classroom, such as sitting close to the front of the classroom and an individualized behavior system. None of the students in this classroom are classified and none of the students receive support services other than the above mentioned students for English Language Instruction.

Research Design

"Research is a process of discovering essential questions, gathering data, and analyzing it to answer those questions (Hubbard and Power, 1999, p. 1)." Although there are various types of research, which can take a variety of shapes and forms, the ultimate goal of research is the same: to investigate and answer critical questions which have enticed one into research in the first place. The paradigm used for this particular study is qualitative research, and more specifically, qualitative teacher research.

Qualitative research is used to investigate broad, general questions which are derived from "real world observations and dilemmas (The Art of Classroom Inquiry, p. 2)." Qualitative research is subjective and biased, and advocates for change. Qualitative teacher research is "systematic, intentional inquiry by teachers about their own school and classroom (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990)." Qualitative teacher research is the most appropriate paradigm for this particular study because it allows for the teacher, who has personal insight into the classroom, to consider particular questions and issues of importance to their unique classroom experiences.

Qualitative research uses an "inductive approach (p. 159)". Therefore, qualitative research allows the researcher to arrive at a conclusion based on logical observations.

There are several ways in which data for this study was collected. The first source of data for this study involved the use of a teacher journal and field notes. Collecting and recording observations were extremely important to this study. Observations were conducted on individuals, as well as the whole class. Observations were recorded in the form of journal entries, and then elaborated on at a later time in order to acquire the full scope of the classroom situation during that particular period of time.

The second source of data involved the use of Student Response Journals. Students were asked to respond to various aspects of Morning Meeting throughout the entirety of this research. It is important to ask the students to write about their opinions and feelings in order to gain insight into their thoughts, which can not always be understood or realized through classroom observations. The use of Student Response Journals as a source of data collection allowed the teacher/researcher to hopefully build and enhance student-teacher relationships by gaining a deeper understanding of the students' thoughts.

Another source of data collection for this study involved the use of a tape recorder. Morning Meetings were tape recorded whenever possible so that they could be analyzed and transcribed as necessary. The use of a tape recorder allowed the teacher/researcher to capture moments of time in the classroom that may have otherwise gone unrecognized or dismissed. Aspects of transcriptions were used to illustrate the specific ways in which elements related to character education were applied to Morning Meetings and discussions.

Data was analyzed and interpreted through triangulation and the coding and categorizing of transcriptions from audiotapes, student surveys, and Student Response

Journals. Triangulation involves "the use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, or theories (at least three) to confirm findings (Hubbard & Power, 1999, p. 120)." Transcriptions and journal notes were examined for patterns and the existence of categories and themes.

Procedure of the Study

Each morning for approximately 20 minutes students and the teacher/researcher took part in Morning Meeting. The teacher introduced Morning Meeting to the class and explained to the students that for the next several weeks, each day will begin with a Morning Meeting. The teacher informed and discussed with the students the goals of Morning Meeting, such as getting to know one another, sharing different experiences and ideas, learning from one another, and having fun. Prior to the beginning of Morning Meeting, students were asked for their own ideas and goals and expectations for Morning Meeting. The class and the teacher developed "Morning Meeting Rules" as a class prior to the start of daily Morning Meetings to be posted in the carpet area where Morning Meeting was conducted. The teacher emphasized that Morning Meeting allows the students to assume responsibility for his or herself and have a voice in the classroom.

According to the Responsive Classroom approach, during Morning Meeting students are able to engage in academic and social skills through the use of "greeting, sharing, a group or game activity, and a daily letter and news from the teacher (Horsch et al. 2002, p. 368)". Due to time constraints and the nature of this study, greeting and group activity have been eliminated as elements of this second grade class's Morning Meeting. Additionally, there was not much need for the students to formally greet each other each day because the students have gone to school and participated in group activities for five

months prior to this study. Had this study been conducted at the beginning of the school year, a greeting and group activity would have been included in Morning Meeting so that the students would have the opportunity to get to know one another and become more comfortable in the classroom environment.

Each Morning Meeting enabled the students to read a Morning Message, answer a Question of the Day, and share and/or listen to their classmates share. For the purposes of this study, Morning Meeting consisted of two different formats. Format 1 of Morning Meeting consisted of a Morning Message written by the teacher, a Question of the Day, a Character Education Quote of the Day to be read and discussed by the class, and approximately four students sharing about anything they wished to tell the class. During Format 1 of Morning Meeting, students were able to ask questions of both the teacher/researcher and their fellow classmates as necessary. Students were also required to respond to the Character Education Quote of the Day provided by the teacher on the blackboard of the Morning Meeting area in their Student Response Journals.

Format 2 of Morning Meeting is very similar to Format 1, however there are some slight changes. Instead of a Character Education Quote of the Day, the students were asked to read and respond to a Character Education Scenario, which was also provided by the teacher/researcher. Additionally, the students were no longer able to share about anything, but instead they were asked to share about a specific topic related to character education selected by the teacher/researcher. During Format 2 of Morning Meeting, students were still asked to continue to respond to scenarios in their Student Response Journals.

Prior to discussing the data that was collected during this study, I feel that it is necessary to discuss and describe the specific elements of Morning Meeting that were implemented in the second grade classroom. As mentioned earlier, Morning Meeting during both Format 1 and Format 2 consisted of a Morning Message and Question of the Day. Each morning prior to the entrance of the students into the class, the teacher wrote a Morning Message on the blackboard near the Morning Meeting area. The Morning Message written by the teacher usually included information about daily activities, holidays or special events, brief questions about character education, and general reminders.

A Question of the Day was also written on the blackboard near the Morning Meeting area. Each morning students were required to read the Question of the Day and mark an answer, "yes" or "no," with a tally mark. The Question of the Day was usually academic in nature and included questions about the subjects of science, language arts and math. Occasionally the Question of the Day related to more non-academic topics such as, siblings, pets, weekend plans, etc. The non-academic Question of the Day was used so that the students and the teacher may get to know one another to discover likes, dislikes, preferences, and personal information. Additionally, tally counts for the Question of the Day allowed the teacher to ask the students math related questions and reinforce addition and subtraction skills. All aspects of Morning Meeting have been designed so that the students and the teacher become more comfortable within the classroom environment and therefore build a strong, respectful classroom community.

In addition to the implementation of Morning Meeting on a regular basis, in order to begin a discussion on character education values and positive character traits, the

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teacher will changed the five group names in the classroom to the character trait names of "perseverance," "citizenship," responsibility," honesty," and "respect." Following the group name changes, the teacher and students will engage in a discussion about the meaning of each of the character traits so that the students have a basic understanding of each of the traits.

CHAPTER IV

Findings and Results

Introduction

Chapter IV discusses the findings of the study to answer the research question: How can Morning Meeting and character education foster a community of respect in a second grade classroom? This chapter will evaluate, analyze, and discuss the data findings through the use of student surveys, Student Response Journals, teacher journal, and recordings of Morning Meetings.

Student Survey Results

Prior to beginning daily Morning Meetings, the 13 students who participated in the study were given a survey with seven statements relating to the topics of honesty, respect, caring, and differences. The students were required to read the seven statements and check "yes" or "no" indicating his/her answer. I was interested in examining the students' attitudes towards other students in the class, as well as determine a general sense of community that already existed in the classroom prior to the beginning of my research. According to the survey results, 100% of the students responded that students in the class treat other students with respect (Table 1). 77% of the students said that they play with students who are different from themselves, while 23% of the students surveyed said that they do not play with students who are different from themselves. 100% of the students responded that they can talk to the classroom teacher if they are having a problem. This indicates that there is a high level of student-teacher

communication. In response to the statement "Students in our class pick on other students," 92% of the students surveyed said that students in the class do not pick on other students, while 8%, which is equal to one student, answered that students in the class pick on other students. In response to the statement "Students in our class work well together," 92% of the students surveyed answered "yes" and 8% answered 8% answered "no". Similarly, 92% of the students answered that students in the class help one another, while 8% answered that students in the class do not help one another. The last statement of the survey read, "Students in our class are honest." Again, 92% of the students responded that students in the class are honest, while 8% felt that students in the class are not honest.

Table 1: Data from Student Surveys

	YES	NO
Students in our class treat others with respect.	100% (13 students)	
I play with classmates who are different from me.	77% (10 students)	23% (3 students)
I can talk to my teacher if I am having a problem.	100% (13 students)	
Students in our class pick on other students.	8% (1 student)	92% (12 students)
Students in our class work well together.	92% (12 students)	8% (1 student)
Students in our class help each other.	92% (12 students)	8% (1 student)
Students in our class are honest.	92% (12 students)	8% (1 student)

After evaluating the percentages and the number of students who answered the statements positively, I concluded that the entire class felt that students in the classroom are treated with respect and a student can talk to the teacher if they are having a problem. Additionally, most of the participating students said that they play with students who are different from themselves, however three students responded "no" to the statement, which can mean several things. It is possible that the students responded "no" because they do not play with other students of a different gender, race, or with someone that has different interests than themselves. Mike, a particular student that answered "no," was asked why he responded "no" to the statement "I play with classmates who are different from me." Mike answered, "Well I like to do lots of sports and play hockey and stuff, so I play with the kids that do that too." This demonstrates that one of the possible reasons for not playing with students who are different from oneself is interests.

Three individual students answered negatively to the last four statements relating to students picking on other students, students working well collaboratively, helping each other, and being honest (Table 1). Clearly this demonstrates that there are not a significant number of students who feel that teasing or bullying, working together collaboratively, helping one another, and honesty are major negative issues in the classroom. Student responses to the survey pointed to their ability to recognize specific aspects of the community based on character. These responses pointed to the students' existing, as well as growing understandings of both character and community within the classroom. In analyzing the data I concluded that if even one student in the classroom feels as though another student in the classroom community is not honest, not willing to help, or picks on others, it is necessary to build a stronger and more respectful

community of learners. While the data acquired from the initial survey did not overwhelmingly suggest that a respectful classroom community was not already in place, I felt that the students could benefit from the implementation of a regular Morning Meeting, as well as discussions around the topic of character education and positive character traits.

Making Meaning: An Understanding of Positive Character Traits

Pearson and Nicholson (2000) suggest the following strategies for the development of an effective character education program: development of classroom rules, positive language, direct instruction, learning partners, mentoring, journal writing, class meetings, and parent communication. Therefore, Morning Meetings and Student Response Journals were used in this study as a way to discuss and understand the meaning of particular positive character traits. Traits of character education include, but are not limited to, fairness, responsibility, honesty, justice, trustworthiness, empathy, and kindness (Pearson and Nicholson, 2000). For the purpose of this study, the traits of character education that were focused on to the greatest extent were honesty, responsibility, kindness and friendship, acceptance, perseverance, citizenship, and respect.

In order to introduce positive character traits, a Character Education Quote of the Day was often placed on the blackboard in the Morning Meeting area. The very first quote that was introduced to the students at Morning Meeting was a quote by Benjamin Franklin that related to the trait of honesty and read, "Honesty is the best policy." A discussion about honesty ensued:

Teacher: "What is honesty?"

Anna: "Telling the truth."

Rachael: "Being truthful."

Alison: "Not Lying."

Teacher: "What are some ways we can be honest?"

Lester: "Do not lie."

Emily: "Tell the truth."

Hannah: "Tell if you break something."

Teacher: "Excellent ideas! What else?"

Will: "You should be honest so that people trust you."

The students were able to demonstrate a correct definition for the trait of honesty, as well as give effective examples of how to be an honest person. Several students became involved and offered ideas and examples, however other students sat quietly during the discussion. It is my hope that the other students who sat quietly were able to make meaning from the quote from the words of the other students who participated in the discussion. Following a discussion about the character trait of honesty, the students were asked to write in their Student Response Journals what they felt the quote meant to them in order to further demonstrate their understanding of honesty. Words listed in parentheses are provided by the teacher/researcher and used to clarify misspellings. The students' journal responses are as follows:

Alison: "I think honestly (honesty) means to tell the truth. You can be honest and truthful."

Mike: "Honesty is telling the truth. I can be honest by not fibbing."

Emily: "Being honest is telling the truth. I can be a honest person by not lying and always telling the truth."

According to the No Child Left Behind Act, schools must work towards contributing to a child's academic success, as well as character development (Benninga, Berkowitz, Kuehn, Smith, 2006). The above student responses indicate that the second grade students in this classroom acquired a deeper understanding of positive character traits. The students were able to make meaning from the given Character Education Quote of the Day and respond to and demonstrate an understanding for the presented character traits.

Importance of Talk

During this study, students were given the opportunity to talk with their fellow classmates and teacher on a daily basis during Morning Meeting. According to Csak (2002), "The use of oral language in the classroom is not only enjoyable for children but is also necessary for establishing classroom community, developing literacy, and defining children's self (Amour, 2003, p. 50)." On several occasions throughout this study students were also able to participate in cooperative learning groups in which they were given the opportunity to talk and share ideas with their peers. According to Powell and Caseau (2004), students are able to practice social skills, listen to their peers, and problem solve with their group members during cooperative learning. Additionally, cooperative learning allows for a stronger classroom community (Powell and Caseau, 2004).

Not only were students given the opportunity to share what was important to them, as well as ask questions of their classmates, but they were also able to engage in

conversations about different character traits and topics of character education throughout the entirety of this study. During Format 1 of Morning Meeting, students were given the quote by Mother Teresa, "Kind words are short and easy to speak, but their echoes are endless." The following conversation followed:

Teacher: "What does it mean to be kind?"

Rachael: "Be nice"

Nick: "Do nice things for your family and friends."

Evan: "Help other people"

Teacher: "What does the word echo mean?"

Emily: "Like if you yell and then you hear it again."

Teacher: "Yes, like if you are in a large hall or in a cave and you yell something, your voice bounces off the walls and repeats. So who can put what we have talked about so far together and tell us what they think this quote means?

Rachael: "It means that if you say something nice to someone it is an easy thing to do and they will think you are nice."

Teacher: "What about the part of the quote with the word echoes? What is that part telling us?"

Kevin: "That the nice things we say, the person remembers them all the time."

The teacher then asked the students how they might be kind to others. The students suggested giving compliments to their classmates and saying nice things to others, as well as being nice to friends.

Morning Meeting allowed for the second grade students to become involved in a conversation with their classmates and teacher about a quote related to the subject of

character education. Due to the dialogue that developed surrounding the quote, the students that participated in the conversation, as well as the students that listened along during Morning Meeting, were able to gain a deeper understanding of kindness and friendship.

Another situation in which student talk became important and meaningful during Morning Meeting occurred when several students were asked to share about a time they treated someone fairly. What is means to be fair had been discussed prior to student sharing on a previous day. Rachael was the second student of the day to share about the topic of fairness. The following conversation took place during and following Rachael's sharing time:

Rachael: "When my friends come over I let them play with whatever they want at my house and I don't say, 'No you can't play with that.'"

Teacher: "Great example, Rachael!"

Emily: "Do your friends treat you fairly too?"

Teacher: "That was a great question, Emily. Do your friends do the same thing when you go to their house? Sometimes it's hard to be fair."

Rachael: "Yeah, like my one friend, it's hard for her to be fair."

Teacher: "But does she try her best and do you tell her thank you when she does? Because that's good that she knows that you appreciate it when she tries to be fair."

Will: I'm fair to my one neighbor who is 7, but he's not fair to me. Like if he's playing a game he says, 'No, you can't play,' and I say everyone can play."

Teacher: "Does anyone have any ideas for what Will could say?"

Mike: "That happens to me too!"

Teacher: "So what do you do, Mike?"

Mike: "I tell him if you want to do something you have to include all of our friends also."

Teacher: "That's a great way of saying that you need to be fair and treat everyone with respect."

Emily: "It's kind of like Will and Mike are showing they care for someone."

Rachael's sharing concerning the topic of fairness allowed for other students in the class to listen to her story and ask questions of their fellow classmates. Additionally, students were able to become familiar with the meaning of fairness through the example that Rachael gave, as well as the question posed by Will. From the above situation, one can see that Will was genuinely in need of advice from his classmates and teacher. Had the topic of fairness not been brought up during Morning Meeting, Will may not have otherwise had the opportunity to ask others what he should do when his friend does not include everyone in play. As the teacher/researcher, rather than give Will an answer, I chose to allow other students in the class the opportunity to give Will advice. Will was able to get advice from a peer, Mike, who expressed that he had been in a similar situation. The exchange of thoughts, advice, and ideas among classmates allowed for the development of a stronger classroom community. During this particular Morning Meeting students were able to show respect for their peers by offering advice and adding to a discussion about topics that were of concern to their classmates. Additionally, instances of student talk demonstrate the students' openness and willingness to share and give advice to their peers.

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Importance of Sharing

For the purposes of this study, Morning Meeting took on two formats. Initially, during Format 1, the students were able to share about anything they chose to share with the class. Later, during Format 2, the students were asked to share about a topic related to character education, which was selected by the teacher. Format 1 and Format 2 of Morning Meeting allowed for both unstructured and structured sharing time. I initially wanted to the students to have the opportunity to share what was important to them or news that they wanted their classmates to know. According to Amour 2(2003), social ties among children are strengthened when they are able to share stories concerning their home life, traditions, and aspects of life that are important to them. During unstructured student sharing during Morning Meeting, students would often share stories of occasions with family and friends, such as play dates, weekend outings, and sporting events. On one particular day a student named Will shared about his weekend visit with his grandmother. To paraphrase notes from my teacher journal, Will told the students that he went to visit his "Grammy" in Boston with his mom, dad, and younger sister. He told the students that he did not get to see his Grammy very often and they all had a really great time eating dinner together and playing games. The students seemed interested to learn that Will's grandmother lived far away. One student asked how often he got to see his grandmother. Another student told Will that his grandmother lived far away too. Yet another student asked Will how old his sister was. Will's sharing and the students' questioning clearly demonstrates that the listening students were engaged in the story that Will told. The students were able to learn more about Will and his family due to the unstructured sharing time that Will was given. I feel that it was important to allow for all of the

students to share about what they chose at least twice each prior to beginning Morning Meeting Format 2. As demonstrated with Will's sharing, the students were able to learn more about Will and his family and make connections with one another.

Later, however, I felt that it was necessary to make the sharing more structured. Students were given topics related to character education, which were selected by the teacher. On one occasion, selected students were asked to share about a time they forgave someone. Following a brief discussion about the meaning of forgiveness, a student shared the following story:

Nick: "This weekend on Easter me and my uncle were playing hockey in the backyard and by accident he pushed me into the grill and I got cut. And then I went inside to go get an ice pack."

The student was able to give an example of a time an accident occurred, however some of the students during Morning Meeting looked a bit confused. As the teacher researcher, I interjected and prompted the following conversation:

Teacher: "And then what happened? Did he say he was sorry?"

Nick: "Yeah, and then I said it was okay because it was an accident."

Nick was able to share an appropriate story with the class to demonstrate a time he forgave someone. Other students listening to Nick's sharing were able to listen to an example of a time a fellow classmate forgave someone, as well as an appropriate reaction to an accident, as Nick demonstrated with his story.

Horsch et al. (2002) concluded that students become more connected and unified as a result of Morning Meeting. To determine the students' attitudes and feelings towards

Morning Meeting, the students were asked to write in their journals about their favorite part of Morning Meeting. The students wrote the following responses in their journals:

Lester: "My favorite part of Morning Meeting is when you share your days!"

Anna: "The best part of Morning Meeting is when I get to know about people more."

Nick: "I like when they share because it teaches more about them."

Will: "My favorite part of morning meeting is when we share because you get to learn more about people."

It is clear that many of the students that participated in the study felt that sharing was their favorite part of Morning Meeting. Students expressed not only that they enjoyed being able to share, but also that they enjoyed learning about the other students in the class. Due to both unstructured and structured student sharing, the students were given the opportunity to tell the teacher and fellow classmates more about themselves, as well as learn more about one another.

Student-Teacher Communication

Nick, a particular second grade student, had been involved and engaged in Morning Meetings throughout the entirety of this study. Nick would often verbally participate in Morning Meetings by reading the Morning Message, sharing, asking questions of his peers, and responding with written responses to quotes and scenarios in his Student Response Journal. Prior to the beginning of this study, as the teacher/researcher, I did not know very much about Nick, as he was often more reserved in class than many of the other students. Due to this study, Morning Meeting, sharing,

and an instance of cheating, an increased level of communication between myself as the teacher/researcher and Nick was attained.

In order to clearly identify the person that shares and have only one student talk at a time, I chose to have to students hold a "Sharing Rock" in their hand as they talked during Morning Meeting. The Sharing Rock is a large rock in the shape of a heart. The students were told that only the person holding the Sharing Rock is able to speak during sharing time at Morning Meeting. To paraphrase from my teacher journal, one morning following the first week of Morning Meeting, Nick came into class eager and excited to talk to me. While the other students went about their morning routine, I called Nick over to my desk. Nick shared with me that he had found a heart shaped sharing rock just like the one used in Morning Meeting. Later that morning Nick was able to share with his classmates that he had found another heart shaped sharing rock just like the one used in our class. Morning Meeting and our Sharing Rock allowed Nick the opportunity to communicate with me, the teacher/researcher, which he had not previously done prior to the beginning of Morning Meeting.

One day several weeks later Nick was caught cheating on timed math problems. When confronted about the cheating by me, Nick outright admitted that he had continued to complete math problems following the allowed time limit. Regular Morning Meetings had been in place for approximately two weeks during the time of the incident. Additionally, the topic of honesty had been discussed during a previous Morning Meeting. I talked with Nick about the importance of being honest with his school work following the cheating incident. Although cheating is not the right thing to do, Nick was able to admit that he was not honest, rather than lie about the cheating. In analyzing the

situations that occurred with Nick I have concluded that as a result of Morning Meeting, discussions about honesty, and the opportunity to share, an increased level of communication was achieved between Nick and myself as the teacher/researcher.

Established Understanding of Character Education

When analyzing and evaluating Student Response Journals and recordings, there were several instances where students demonstrated an understanding of previously discussed character traits in order to make sense of a new Character Education Quote of the Day, discussion about character education, or character education scenario. During a Morning Meeting in Format 2, the teacher gave the students the following scenario: How does this show respect? Your mom is tired, but your brother is crying and wants her to read a story. You want to go out and play with your friends. Instead you read to you brother.

The teacher and students had engaged in previous discussions about the meaning of respect. The students were asked to respond to the story in their journals and tell how the story showed respect. Two students wrote the following responses:

> Emily: "I think the girl was showing good respect by not going outside to play with her friends so she can read her little brother. I think that little girl was also showing a good citizen by helping out her mom."

> Natalie: "It shows caring by that you should read to your young brother because he can't. You can play with your friends after you read to your brother. A way to show caring is like when you show citizenship. And like when you help and be honest."

This Morning Meeting in Format 2 occurred on April 14, 2009, approximately one month after the start of regular Morning Meetings. The student responses by Emily and Natalie demonstrate their consideration of other positive character traits that had been previously discussed during Morning Meetings when making sense of and responding to a character education scenario presented by the teacher. Emily addressed the character trait of citizenship when describing how the girl was respectful. Similarly, Natalie addressed the character trait of citizenship, as well as honesty in her response. These particular student responses demonstrate that students were able to retain the meaning of character traits, which were discussed in previous Morning Meetings, and apply that understanding to make sense of a character education scenario presented by the teacher.

CHAPTER V

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Summary

This qualitative research study was designed to answer the question: How can Morning Meeting and character education foster a community of respect in a second grade classroom? As a student teacher and researcher I was interested to find out what would happen if the students were given the opportunity to learn about one another through sharing during Morning Meeting. It was my hope that myself and the students would begin to build a respectful classroom environment in which all learners felt comfortable, respected, and accepted through daily Morning Meetings and discussion, as well as learning about character education values. A goal of this study was for students to build strong, respectful relationships based on the discovery of differences and similarities shared during Morning Meeting.

Morning Meetings took place for approximately 20 minutes a day for a period of six and a half weeks. Morning Meetings took the form of two formats for the purposes of this study. Format 1 consisted of a Morning Message, Question of the Day, Character Education Quote of the Day, and sharing. Format 2 consisted of a Morning Message, Question of the Day, Character Education Scenario, and sharing. Each Morning Meeting included sharing and the incorporation of character education values.

Data was collected through student surveys, Student Response Journals, recordings of Morning Meetings, and a teacher journal. The major themes that emerged

from the collected data include the following: Making Meaning: An Understanding of Positive Character Traits, Importance of Talk, Importance of Sharing, Student/Teacher Communication, and Established Understanding of Character Education.

Conclusions

After a thorough review of the literature related to Morning Meeting, character education, and building community in the elementary school classroom, as well as an analysis of data collected through Student Response Journals, recordings, and teacher journal entries, I have arrived at several conclusions in relation to this study. The implementation of regular Morning Meetings and the integration of character education in a second grade classroom affected students in a variety of positive ways, including the ability to effectively understand character education values, engage in meaningful talk and sharing, and express an openness to sharing with the teacher/researcher and peers within the classroom community.

In analyzing the data in reference to the student surveys on attitudes about character and classroom community, I found that most students felt that a respectful classroom community was already in place prior to the implementation of regular Morning Meetings. However, because not all students felt this way, I concluded that it was necessary to build a stronger and more respectful community of learners through the integration of character education and Morning Meeting.

Through the use of a Character Education Quote of the Day, students were given the opportunity to respond to and make meaning from a given quote. Students were able to demonstrate a deeper understanding for the positive character traits of focus through discussions with the teacher and other students at Morning Meeting and written responses

in Student Response Journals. Additionally, students were able to express a meaningful

retention of aspects of character education through written responses in their Student

Response Journals. Students were then able to apply and understanding of positive

character traits to make sense of character education scenarios presented by the

teacher/researcher.

Not only were students able to demonstrate an understanding of character traits

and retain their meaning, but they were also able to engage in discussions with their peers

and teacher about a quote related to the subject of character education during Morning

Meeting. Due to conversations that developed surrounding the daily quote, students that

participated in a dialogue about the presented quote, as well as the students that listened

along during Morning Meeting discussions, were able to gain a deeper understanding of

aspects of character education, as well as the lives of their fellow classmates.

Furthermore, observed occasions of student talk during Morning Meeting

demonstrated students' openness and willingness to give advice to their classmates, as

well as share information about themselves. Both unstructured sharing during Morning

Meeting Format 1 and structured sharing during Morning Meeting Format 2 proved

beneficial to the students. Students were able to openly share information about

themselves with their teacher and peers that they felt was important, as well as learn more

about one another. In relation to student-teacher communication, I have concluded that as

a result of Morning Meeting, class discussions about topics related to character education,

and the opportunity to share about oneself, an increased level of communication was

achieved between the students and teacher/researcher.

As the teacher/researcher, throughout this research I have observed students become engaged and participate in Morning Meeting, open up to their peers, and begin to learn more about one another. Students engaged in discussion, questioning, and sharing, and began to interpret and make sense of quotes and new words related to character education they may not have understood previously within the context of their classroom community. Students were given the opportunity to engage in a daily dialogue with their teacher and peers, and become more comfortable within their classroom community. Hopefully, while opening up to one another and learning from one another, students were able to gain a deeper respect for their fellow classmates, and in turn allow for a stronger and more respectful community of learners to be established.

Recommendations and Implications for Future Research

The United States of America is a country of many diverse people (Marulis, 2000). It is more than likely that as a teacher in the United States, there will be students of varying backgrounds and cultures in a given classroom setting. This study attempted to use Morning Meeting as a means to give students the opportunity to learn about one another, share about themselves, and therefore build a respectful classroom community.

In this study I attempted to create a positive learning environment for all of the students in the classroom. I believe that a student's learning is not simply academic in nature. Students need to be given the opportunity to learn from their peers and about character education values. I feel that as a teacher it is extremely important to develop relationships of respect and acceptance with your students by taking the time to get to know you students and understand the experiences that shape their lives.

In order to more fully understand individual student experiences and develop a respectful classroom community, I recommend that Morning Meeting and character education values be implemented throughout the entire school year. This study spanned a six and a half week period. During that time, Morning Meeting was conducted on a regular basis, however due to schedule changes and circumstances out of my control, Morning Meeting was not conducted every day during the six and a half weeks. Additionally, I was not able to teach full time in the classroom where the study took place during the second half of the study because I was required to student teach in a different classroom for part of the semester. If conducting this study again, I recommend that the teacher/researcher be the full time teacher in the classroom for the entirety of the study. It was often difficult to make sure the students were writing in their Student Response Journals as often as they were asked. Furthermore, I was unable to observe student interactions once I left the classroom, which could have allowed me further insight into the classroom community, peer interactions and relationships, and the development of student/teacher relationships and communication.

According to Nieto (2004), multicultural education is important for all students, not just students of certain religions and cultures. In order for students to gain a deeper understanding of differences among their classmates, as well as learn about diversity, I recommend that elements of multicultural education, such as multicultural literature, be incorporated into daily Morning Meetings. Character education values and traits allowed for beginning discussions and the transmittance of ideas and opinions among students, however I feel that the addition of multicultural literature would allow for the students to

discuss diversity and lead to a general acceptance of those that may be different from themselves.

Ideally, Morning Meeting would be conducted on a daily basis in each and every classroom. As a student teacher and researcher I have seen firsthand the benefits of Morning Meeting in the elementary setting. I believe that with daily Morning Meetings, a classroom community will become increasingly unified and respectful and allow students to build strong, lasting relationships with their classmates.

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