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SENSE OF BELONGING AS PERCEIVED BY
TWO THIRD GRADE STUDENTS

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of Education

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

Laura Foix

August, 1998

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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College,
University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree Master of Arts
University of Nebraska at Omaha.

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SENSE OF BELONGING AS PERCEIVED BY TWO THIRD GRADE STUDENTS

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University of Nebraska at Omaha, 1998.

Advisor: Dr. Jarene Fluckiger

This study investigated the sense of belonging as perceived by two third grade students. Two informants in a small midwestern public school were used in this qualitative study. Data was collected through interviews, observations, informant journals, and a researcher reflection journal. It was discovered that these informants believe that a sense of humor, class participation, compliments, and non-verbal facial expressions contribute to a child feeling a sense of belonging in the classroom. Further research needs to be completed to determine other factors that contribute to a child's sense of belonging in the classroom, as well as other settings within the school. Research also needs to be completed regarding compliments as a component of a child's sense of belonging.

Dedicated to my parents, whose
love and support has carried me through life.

Dedicated to Maeve, my inspiration.

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Chapter One: Introduction

“I think they [classroom meetings] are pretty good because we discuss problems from a third grader’s point of view” (S-JN, p. 22). A statement written by Steve, an informant in this study, when he was asked to write his feelings concerning class meetings.

Background

When I began my search for a topic worthy of study, I already had an interest in classroom meetings, one of the subjects of a behavior management class in which I first learned of the reasons for classroom meetings. Classroom meetings are whole-group meetings held three times a week to focus on and solve problems. Topics of meetings, either academic or social in nature are identified by individual students through the use of an agenda (Nelson, Lott, & Glenn, 1993). Although class meetings have many formats, I used the techniques and sequence outlined in the book, Positive Discipline in the Classroom (Nelson, et al 1993). As an elementary classroom teacher, I saw meetings as an innovative way to create a sense of community among the children in my classroom, to solve behavior problems, and foster personal responsibility and problem-solving skills. As I researched the topic, I found classroom meetings were described as being created as a means to develop *social interest* in children. According to Alfred Adler, social interest is a desire to contribute to the functioning of a community (1970).

Social interest comes from Alfred Adler’s philosophy concerning human beings within society (1931). According to Rudolph Dreikurs, man is a social being whose primary goal in life is to belong (1971). Based on this assertion, he has developed a framework of three categories or ties that make up a person’s existence. These ties are

love, work, and social. Adler believes every action of an individual is done to fulfill a need in one of these three ties.

The social tie of life is an attempt by Adler to explain that, when a person feels he or she belongs, this means they feel they can function, participate and contribute to society (Dreikurs, 1971). Therefore, the social tie describes how a person feels he or she belongs. Adler and Dreikurs believe that belonging to a group can help not only to maintain a way of life, but can actually improve the quality of life. At the heart of the social tie of life is the concept of *Social Interest*. At the core of social interest is a person's sense of belonging. Adler believes an individual has an innate potentiality for social interest, but it must be cultivated, if it is to exist internally in a person. A high level of social interest means a person has a feeling of belonging. Because of this, the terms, social interest and sense of belonging, will be used interchangeably throughout this study.

When socially unacceptable behavior occurs, it provides evidence that a person is in conflict with his or her environment (Dreikurs, 1971). For one reason or another, individuals in such circumstances do not feel they belong, they lack social interest. A person in conflict develops a private meaning for personal actions in an attempt to rationalize inappropriate behavior. At this point, it is important to discover the unmet need of individuals in conflict so they can be made to feel they belong. Once a need is identified, the next step is to take action and allow the child to feel more secure by developing his or her social tie or, more specifically, his or her level of social interest.

Statement of the Problem

Classroom discipline has long been a concern to educators (American Federation of Teachers, 1995; Wolfgang & Kelsay, 1995; Harris, 1995; Abernathy et al. 1985). Difficulty handling classroom discipline has been a source of stress (Abernathy et al.) and a cause of burnout (Hock, 1988) for many teachers. It would be helpful to both teachers and students to come to a better understanding of why students misbehave and what could be done to better handle the problem.

As stated earlier, Adler (1970) and Dreikurs (1971) believe that misbehavior stems from a child feeling that he or she does not belong. There have been several studies in which the researchers attempted to measure the sense of belonging felt by students (Goodenow, 1992; Arhar & Kromrey, 1993; Zeichner, 1978; Goodenow, 1991; Goodenow, 1993). Unfortunately, this body of research has focused on factors adults assume to contribute to a child's sense of belonging rather than the perceptions *children* have of what contributes to their sense of belonging. This body of research has also focused on Jr. High and High school students. Elementary students have not yet been examined on this matter. The present study examined the perceptions two third grade students held concerning their sense of belonging. This study will be unique from those previously cited because it will examine the sense of belonging of elementary level students, from their perspective. Because a description of a child's perceptions of belonging has not yet been developed, an inductive process was utilized. A qualitative, descriptive study enabled all aspects to be explored, so that a complete picture of a child's sense of belonging could be taken. This study, in turn, is a springboard for further

research that can focus on methods, such as class meetings, that will foster particular constructs that make up a child's sense of belonging.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to describe *sense of belonging* from the point of view of two third-grade students, using a qualitative, in-depth, descriptive design. The findings of this study will enable future researchers to examine better the effects of procedures on a child's sense of belonging.

Grand Tour Question

In a classroom that conducts class meetings, what are two third grade students' perceptions of their own sense of belonging within the classroom community?

Definitions

Qualitative. "An inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting" (Creswell, 1994, p. 1-2). To observe and record data, I participated with and observed the participants in their natural setting. Through an inductive process, I looked for regularities in the data. Information will develop throughout the study until a clear picture of the participants' perceptions and experiences emerge.

"Thick" Description. "The qualitative approach demands that the world be approached with the assumption that nothing is trivial, that everything has the potential of being a clue which might unlock a more comprehensive understanding of what is being studied" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 28). In this study, every observed detail was written in narrative descriptive form. Words rather than numbers were used to collect,

analyze and report data. Merriam calls the end result a rich, "thick" description of the phenomenon (1988).

Classroom Meetings. Whole group meetings held three times a week for 20 minutes. Meetings were used to solve problems and engage in discussions. Topics of meetings can be academic or social in nature and are identified by individual students through the use of an agenda. Techniques and sequence are based directly on the program outlined in the book, Positive Discipline in the Classroom (Nelson et al., 1993).

Delimitations

This research was confined to two third-grade subjects in a midwestern public school. The study was conducted through the use of interviews, observations, participant journals, and researcher reflections.

Limitations

Participants were selected by purposive sampling, which provides results generalized to the particular setting and would provide insight to readers in a similar setting.

In a qualitative study, the researcher is the instrument through which all data are interpreted. This study may be open to alternate interpretation. In an effort to offset this, in addition to myself, a person not involved with the students' being studied took observational notes to ensure the thorough documentation of information.

Significance of the Study

Research regarding a child's sense of belonging should interest anyone who would like to research the effectiveness of procedures or programs on a child's sense of belonging, or those who wish to develop more children who can contribute to their

communities. Children who can establish themselves within a group in a positive manner are successful and capable. Because a child who feels he or she belongs will cause fewer disturbances in the classroom, this study should also interest adults who spend a great deal of their time solving disputes for children. Classroom discipline has long been a concern to educators. Many teachers, principals, and counselors would like to work more proactively with regard to discipline rather than retroactively, but are unsure how this can be done.

There has been encouraging research on the topic of classroom meetings that would provide support for their use. By allowing children the opportunity to find their own solutions to difficulties, teachers and administrators can be freed to do their crucial job of educating children. Research has measured behaviors that are assumed to occur due to a lack of a sense of belonging. Based on this assumption, researchers have tried to use class meeting to create contributing members of the group, but have skipped whether children have been made to feel that they belong. The missing element is a descriptive inquiry into what contributes to a child's sense of belonging in the classroom. Once this link has been provided, it should be much easier for future researchers to examine the effectiveness of class meetings on improving a child's sense of belonging.

Another problem is that within the current body of research concerning class meetings, none of the studies have been an exploratory search of the phenomenon (Sanche & Sorsdahl, 1985; Cubberly & Omizo, 1983; Imber & Marandola, 1979). This may have narrowed our view of the impact of class meetings simply because only certain aspects were examined. Also a problem is that these studies were carried out by counselors or teachers who have spent time and/or money on training to conduct

classroom meetings (Cubberly & Omizo; Sorsdahl & Sanche; Imber & Marandola; Hinman, 1996). Many districts and teachers lack the time or funds for training in these methods

This study will provide an in-depth, qualitative look at sense of belonging as perceived by third graders in a class that is conducting classroom meetings. Human thoughts, feelings, and perceptions are truly difficult to measure. Quantitative research, although mildly supportive of class meetings, has left many questions to be answered and contradictions to be examined. Only a qualitative study can begin to explain the perceptions children hold about their own sense of belonging.

Chapter Two: Review of Related Literature

A child's sense of belonging is a complex structure which stems from a theory called social interest. Classroom meetings were developed as a means to cultivate social interest, or sense of belonging in children. Therefore, the review of the literature cannot begin without tracing and describing the philosophical roots of social interest. From there, the literature can be divided into four categories. First, literature that clarifies and builds upon the importance of Adler's social interest theory. Second, studies that have tested various aspects of social interest. Third, studies that have been completed on the use of classroom meetings. And fourth, research available regarding sense of belonging. Each of these categories relates to the topic of social interest, or a sense of belonging and classroom meetings. The literature review contains a representative sample of the knowledge available on the topics of social interest, class meetings, and sense of belonging.

Philosophical Base

The theory of social interest lays the foundation for the need to develop a sense of belonging in children. Because the theory of social interest acts as a guide to human behavior and provides a perspective through which behavior can be viewed, it is important to understand the basic ideas, which form the practices and methods of researchers and teachers. For these reasons, a comprehensive outline of the philosophical base of belonging will be discussed.

Two concepts must be understood before the idea of social interest can be fully grasped. The first is that Adler (1931) believed that humans live in a "realm of

meanings." This means we experience reality through the way we perceive it. Each person displays through his actions, his personal meaning of life.

All his postures, attitudes, movements, expressions, mannerisms, ambitions, habits and character traits accord with this meaning. He behaves as if he could rely upon a certain interpretation of life. In all his actions there is an implicit reckoning up of the world and of himself; a verdict, "I am like this and the universe is like that"; a meaning given to himself and a meaning given to life (Adler, 1931, p. 4).

Second, Adler believed that each person has three main ties, under which every aspect of living can be grouped. These ties are work, love, and social. The manner in which people behave in response to these aspects of life gives us insight into their personal meaning of life (Adler, 1931). Because meanings of life are built upon perceptions, some people turn faulty perceptions into mistaken meanings. Those who attach private meanings to their lives and have no interest beyond themselves become failures. A failure is someone who does not feel valued by himself or others and who is unable to contribute to the functioning of society. Adler believes that all failures are so because they have not developed the social tie of life. According to Adler (1931) the only true meanings of life are ones that can be shared. This is where the concept of social interest is derived.

Social Interest Theory. Dreikurs (1971) summarized Adler's social interest theory by saying, "Man is a social being. His basic desire is to belong. Only if one feels one belongs can one function, participate, contribute" (p. ix). Adler (1970) points out that human history supports his theory of the social needs of humans by the fact that we have

always lived in groups. Those who are naturally able to defend themselves have always lived alone, and those who by nature do not have that ability have always lived in groups. Man was forced by nature to live interdependently. Being a member of a group can not only maintain the quality of life, but also improve it.

Because living in groups is so important to our way of life, it is important to understand the social interest theory. According to the social interest theory, the goal of human beings should be to contribute to the functioning of a community or society. Unfortunately, there are some, who, in maneuvering for social status see only their own needs, at the expense of those around them. Children, who do not set cooperation as a goal, hold mistaken goals, which could only disrupt the social atmosphere. Based on Adler's theories and his own time spent observing children, Dreikurs (1968) has developed four mistaken goals of misbehavior.

These goals are:

- a. To gain undue attention
- b. To seek power over others
- c. To seek revenge and
- d. To display inadequacy (real or imagined).

These goals are called mistaken goals because they inhibit belongingness. The reason children resort to mistaken goals is a result of how adults treat children in our society. Dreikurs, Grunwald, and Pepper (1982) believe that it is common in our culture to deny children the opportunity to establish themselves through useful methods. When things need to be done in the family (or classroom), adults usually do it. This provides some rationale for why children seek attention in other ways, such as misbehaving.

When a person misbehaves, he or she is not at conflict with himself or herself, but with his or her environment. For one reason or another, he or she feels displaced and unimportant. When a person perceives that he or she is not getting his needs fulfilled, the person will resort to socially unacceptable ways to meet his or her needs have those needs met for him or her (Dreikurs & Grey, 1968). As pointed out by Dreikurs (1950) people can respond differently to the same sets of circumstances due to the private meaning they have attached to their lives. The variety of responses to an occurrence makes it important to examine why children behave as they do. When considering the misbehavior of a child, it is important to remember the main idea of Adler's theory that states, "every individual's personality is a unified whole, and that it always expresses itself in accordance with the behavior pattern which he has gradually built up" (Adler, p.50).

When misbehavior occurs, it becomes the job of the adult to recognize what needs the child perceives are not being met, and to help resolve the conflict, rather than become a part of it. In this manner, the child can be made to feel a sense of belonging and connectedness. One simple method Dreikurs et al. (1982) suggests teachers use to discover a child's unmet need, is to look at how the child's misbehavior makes the teacher feel. This table was provided:

Table 1

The Four Mistaken Goals and Teacher's Reactions to the Child's Behavior

Goal	Child's Actions/Attitudes	Teacher's reaction
Attention	Is a nuisance in class	Gives undue service
	May show off	Reminds often
	May be lazy	Coaxes
	Puts others in his service	Feels annoyed
	Keeps teacher busy	Shows pity
	Thinks: "I have a place only when people pay attention to me."	May think: "Child occupies too much of my time."
	May cry	May feel resentment
	May use charm	
	May be overly eager to please	
	May be overly sensitive	
Power	May be stubborn	May feel defeated
	Often argues	Feels threatened in her leadership
	Must win	Concerned with what the others will think of her

	Must be the boss	Feels she must force the child to obey
	Often lies	Gets angry
	Is disobedient	Must show the child that she is running the class
	Does the opposite of what is asked of him	May be determined not to let him get away with his behavior
	May refuse to do any work	
	May think, "I count only if others do what I want."	
	Must be in control of every situation	
Revenge	May steal	Feels hurt
	Is vicious	Gets mad
	Hurts children and animals	Wants to hurt back
	Is destructive	May dislike child
	May lie	Considers child ungrateful
	Often pouts and accuses others of their unfairness	Wants to teach the child a lesson for his mean behavior

	May believe that nobody likes him	May ask the other children to avoid this child
	May want to get even for the hurts he believes others have inflicted upon him	May report the child to his parents in the hope that they will punish him
Inadequacy	Feels helpless	May try various approaches to reach the child and become discouraged if she meets with failure. She may then give up trying
	May feel stupid in comparison to others	
	Gives up and does not participate in any activities	
	Feels best when left alone and when no demands are made of him	

May set too high goals for
himself and not touch
anything that does not
measure up to his high
self-expectations

Note from *Maintaining Sanity in the Classroom* (p. 15-16), by Dreikurs, et al, 1982, New York: Sage Publishing. Copyright 1982 by Sage Publication

This table shows how teachers might identify the goals of a child. Once the teacher believes the child's goal has been identified, he or she needs to discuss the mistaken goal with the student. Dreikurs et al. (1982) explains how a teacher would inform the child of his mistaken goals, or "private logic". The teacher should approach the child in a non-accusatory way, and ask questions in the form of "Could it be that...?" When questioning, the teacher should look for the child's recognition reflex to give him or herself away. A smile and a twinkle in the eye, laughter, or embarrassment usually display this. The next step is to take action to make the child feel secure with his social tie.

Using Class Meetings to Develop Social Interest. Adler used group therapy to change behavior (Adler, 1970), and Dreikurs, et al suggests the use of group or classroom meetings to guide children to more socially acceptable behavior (1982). They see group discussions as a means for children to establish themselves in the group and to develop their interpersonal relationships. These discussions can also enable children to tackle tough topics with greater ease, give practice solving problems, raise morale, allow children to listen to each other, and to understand themselves and others better.

Dreikurs, et al (1982) recommends several guidelines for setting up and conducting classroom meetings. The group should come up with some guidelines that involve the following:

- a. Help each other; do not hurt one another.
- b. Establish how to take turns and listen to everyone.
- c. Establish trust and mutual respect.
- d. Cooperate with each other.

As well as these general guidelines, Dreikurs, et al. (1980) states that the teacher also needs to be accepting and actively involved in the discussions. The teacher should never use group time to lecture or reprimand. The group atmosphere needs to be mutually sympathetic and non-accusatory.

Class meetings may start at the beginning of the year, and should not exceed 20-30 minutes for second to fifth grade students. At the outset, meetings may be used to develop procedures, jobs that should be done, or even how the room should be decorated. After a short time, these meetings may be used to discuss problems that children may be experiencing. Because children need to be taught how to participate in class meetings, the teacher should start as the leader of discussions. Eventually leaders may be assigned or elected. However, the teacher should monitor and direct the leader or intervene if the discussion turns harmful. The leader may make a list of persons who wish to discuss something, or an agenda can be posted in the room, on which children can sign their names. The decision-making process of the group is a continual process. When children decide on solutions, they should be non-punitive and should always be re-evaluated at a later date. If progress is not being made, another meeting should be held and another solution agreed upon.

Adler came up with ideas about children and their education that were radically ahead of his time. He and years later, Dreikurs sought to change how people perceived misbehavior, and to improve children's success in school and in life. Adler thought no child should be considered hopeless, and that educators needed to take more responsibility for students' success. He was one of the first to assert that punishment may stop a misbehavior temporarily, but that lasting change could only come about through

caring analysis of the underlying problems. Adler was an advocate for treating children with respect and encouraging them. Dreikurs expanded on Adler's theories, creating class meetings and making Adler's theories more useful to the general public and to educators.

Literature Related to Social Interest

A great deal of thought and writing has been done concerning the theory of social interest. The fact that many experts find Adler's theory useful in dealing with children lends credibility to its soundness. This section provides examples of the various ways in which Adler's ideas have been supported by related literature. First, I will give examples of others' theories that contain many of Adler's ideas. Second, I will show how later researchers have agreed with and expanded on Adler's ideas. Third, I will provide evidence on the expansion of some of Dreikurs' ideas. Fourth, since schools are similar to the workplace in many ways, an example is given in which Adler's methods for solving problems have been used successfully in a place of business. Fifth, I will show how some authors believe that Adler's philosophies can be applied to improve the functioning of schools as they relate to the children. And last, I will provide four models that have been developed to encourage social interest in children.

Ideas Similar to Adler. Support for Adler's theories, and particularly his theory of social interest, permeates the literature today. It is interesting and unfortunate that much of the literature does not mention Adler's contributions. This is due in part to the fact that Adler's ideas have become so deeply rooted in philosophy that they are no longer distinguished. In an article by Krauss and Mozdierz (1996) this phenomenon is clearly

pointed out. Krauss and Mozdierz discuss a 1994 article by Guinsinger and Blatt in which the importance of people having a sense of individuality and a sense of inter-relatedness was stressed. Although they do not give credit to Adler, Guinsinger and Blatt believe that people have a built-in need for social relationships that can be developed throughout life. They also believe that people need to work toward the goal of building a sense of community. Guinsinger and Blatt recommend that if we were to approach large problems such as poverty with a policy that reflected this social interest in others, we might be more successful.

Krauss and Mozdierz go on to mention other noted thinkers whose ideas are similar to Adler's. For example, R.W. Sperry (1993), who said the world today needs "A higher overarching perspective including ultimate goals and values" (p. 233). Sperry also said that our world is not only run by emotionless physical forces, but also by subjective human values. As discussed in the philosophical base of social interest, people function in a unitary, goal-directed manner. If individuals' actions are goal-directed, that means individuals are making choices, or value judgments as to what would be appropriate means for achieving their goal. Krauss and Mozdierz believe Sperry's subjective human values refer to Adler's social interest. In support of their opinion, they quote Holdstock who said in 1994 that Sperry's acknowledgment of the holistic attributes in human nature was espoused by Adler years before.

To further support the idea that Adler has been overlooked by some, Krauss and Mozdierz cite Abraham Maslow who said of Adler's contributions in 1970, "For me, Alfred Adler becomes more and more correct year by year. As the facts come in, they give stronger and stronger support to his image of man. I should say that in one respect

especially the times have not yet caught up with him” (p. 234). Even though Adlerian theories are not given as much credit as they deserve, many notable thinkers have written and elaborated on the importance of his ideas.

Expansion of Adler’s Theories. In his study, Ansbacher (1991) broke social interest into two parts and analyzed the term social interest through a three-step developmental model. Ansbacher sees *interest* as a psychological process and *social* as external objects at which the interest is aimed. Therefore, social is referred to as the object dimension, and interest as the process dimension. Ansbacher mentions that in a previous paper, he differentiated the process dimension into three developmental phases. Step one is when we have the innate potentiality for social interest. In step two, the innate potentiality has been developed into objective skills of cooperating, aiding, and empathizing with others. In step three, social interest is internalized, and value judgments are made accordingly. Also in the paper, Ansbacher (1991) explores the object dimension of social interest.

He sees *social* as a "general connectedness" (p. 31) with all things in the world. It sets up the idea that an outlook on life that creates unity with all things, living and non-living, can connect a person. Being interested in the interests of others is one of the most obvious ways of connecting with non-living objects. This could be art, food, poetry, etc. In order to be connected with all living things and enter into the process dimension, one must be able to empathize and identify with others, and have common sense or the ability to act reasonably and in a socially productive manner.

The process dimension requires a person not only to be interested in the interests of others, but also to take action to show that interest. Ansbacher (1991) calls this action

the practice of cooperating and contributing to others. Because Individual Psychology, the type of psychology espoused by Adler, is based on perceptions and choices people make based on those perceptions, Ansbacher sees a component of social interest as one of making value judgments. Because value judgments are made based on what is best for others, social interest also has a future orientation as well. By this, he means what we do today is influenced by the goals we have set for the future. Ansbacher's article clarified exactly what he meant by social interest, that it refers to actions as well as feelings. He also made the point that the object interest of a person points to the level that his or her social interest has developed. Ansbacher compared Adler's idea of social interest to Maslow's theory of self-actualization. Maslow's theory illustrates a developmental process of a person moving away from self-centeredness toward an other-centeredness (Ansbacher, 1991).

Expansion of Dreikurs' Theories. Dreikurs' ideas have also been expanded upon. For example, Bitter, (1991) although careful to point out that Dreikurs' goals are most often seen in children, has added three conscious behaviors to Dreikurs' goals of misbehavior. Bitter's three conscious goals are getting, self-elevation, and avoidance.

"Getting" occurs most often in very young children who do not have a concept of misbehavior, and think they should get things that they want. It can also occur in children who have been pampered or been used to getting what they want. These types of children see a toy or something else they want, and will take it. The action taken is a conscious decision.

"Self-elevation" occurs most frequently in children who are in extreme competition with siblings. They are motivated by a desire to be the best. Most who are

fighting for the number one position usually do so at the expense of others who also have a desire to be the best.

The third behavior, "avoidance", is seen most often in children attempting to avoid punishment. Procrastination is also a form of avoiding something children do not want to face. In addition to identifying these goals, Bitter also addressed the issue of goal disclosure with children.

Bitter thought that Dreikurs' methods for goal disclosure, in which the child is asked about his or her possible motives behind misbehavior, would work with conscious goals as well. However, Bitter believed that conscious goals could be identified in a more straightforward manner. For example, for children who act on conscious *getting desires*, "redirection can often be concrete, immediate, and direct" (p. 219). Redirection means telling the child one time, that what he or she did was wrong, then showing the child an appropriate behavior.

Children whose goal is *self-elevation* are generally discouraged because they feel inadequate compared to others. It is interesting that he recommends parents conduct family councils (similar to class meetings) at home, as one way to counter this goal. *Avoidance* behaviors are also a sign that children need to be encouraged or trained how to do things by themselves. This relates to the assertion of Dreikurs et al (1982) that said our society usually prevents children from contributing to the group in acceptable forms. Bitter (1991) recommends allowing for natural and logical consequences for *avoidance* and *self-elevation* goals.

Application of Social Interest in the Workplace. Because school is often compared to work, it is encouraging that there have been research articles written which

positively link social interest to a healthy workplace (Dinkmeyer, 1991; Ferguson, 1996). This is an important observation because of the vast numbers of people in the workforce and those being educated so they may enter the workforce. Dinkmeyer (1991) has developed a systematic approach to leadership called "Leadership by Encouragement" (p. 504). An integral part of his program deals with the use of encouragement circles, which are very similar to Adler's group therapy, and Dreikurs' class meetings. A major tenet of the philosophies' of Adler and Dreikurs has been the use of encouragement to stimulate social interest.

In 1996 Ferguson analyzed a contemporary Adlerian method used to solve problems in the workforce. Ferguson compared the problems in the workplace to those in the classroom. Because Adlerian principles work well in the school setting with a teacher and the students, Ferguson believed that it translated well to the workplace setting with the supervisor and the workers.

Ferguson (1996) discussed the use of *open-center counseling*, which was developed by Adler and his colleagues in Vienna to counsel families. In this particular example the counseling session was completed at a summer school founded by Dreikurs. In this counseling session, a director of a chain of childcare facilities was counseled, and the entire conversation was transcribed and included in the article. The company was attempting to change its programs and management to reflect an Adlerian concept. The problem was that some of the local directors were resisting change. It was decided that the changes were mandated from the top down with little input from individual directors. A plan was formulated to make the local directors feel more involved in the changes, and then to let them decide the direction of the chain of daycares. By completing a follow-up

session a month later, it was clear that the plan had worked. It was reported that over 90 percent of the staff supported the changing direction of the company's philosophy, and 93 percent agreed to continue the changes that previously had met with resistance. Again, one of the methods used in the process was small group discussion. This use of Adlerian principles in the workplace lends further support to the concept of social interest.

Application of Adler's Theories to Improve School. Some of the available articles support the teaching of social interest in the school setting (Nicoll, 1996; Ostrovsky, Parr, & Gradel 1992). Nicoll describes two changes that can be made in a school. First order change, which is the most frequently attempted method, includes surface issues such as new curriculum, testing programs, and graduation requirements. Second order change relates to Adler's life-style theory and is recommended on the part of schools by Nicoll: "Second order change...involves a fundamental or morphogenic change in the underlying rule structures upon which the system functions" (p. 131). Just as goal disclosure and encouragement are used by Adler to enable children to function, Nicoll recommends their use with schools.

Schools, as clients, need to be confronted with data about their present condition...The change process requires the providing of support and encouragement in the process. It is when school personnel have addressed the mistaken beliefs and assumptions governing school practices that they can then move on to learning and implementing new, more constructive skills and techniques of education and classroom management (p. 134).

Nicoll recommends two techniques for identifying the life style of a school. The first which includes informal sharing of information which asks, does the staff believe

they can make a difference? Is there cooperation between parents and teachers? Do teachers seek to control the behavior of the students? Is the general attitude of staff positive or negative? Another technique is to look at the rituals and traditions within the system by asking questions such as: Are students grouped by ability, or separated based on a handicap? Are extrinsic rewards relied upon for control of behavior? Schools, because they were created and are run by people, are subject to mistaken goals in the same manner as people. Nicoll proports that a negative school life style can affect the performance of the teachers, just as it can the students. Nicoll states, if educators want students become productive, employed, and successful members of the community, schools need to adopt a philosophy similar to Adler's social interest theory. Nicoll goes further to explain that social interest skills can be taught in the same manner that classroom teachers would teach any subject. Nicoll is an advocate of developing social interest in the school setting and his article strongly supports the philosophies of Adler and Dreikurs.

In a similar manner, Evans and Meredith (1990) also express their opinion on how to use Adlerian principals to improve schools. Evans and Meredith explain that both behaviorism, or First-Force Psychology and a medical/psychodynamic model, or Second-Force Psychology, which have been used by schools in an attempt to control the behavior of students, have done nothing to improve the quality of children's lives.

When presented with the problem of abuse and school failure, the best solution educators, psychologists, and parents can find to replace hitting, neglect, and obedience training, is to continue the search for the one incentive that will make children behave and give adults absolute control. Consequently, we have developed highly sophisticated

ways for humiliating children, and our children have developed highly sophisticated ways of getting even.

These authors recommend that educators and psychologists revisit the ideas of Adlerian psychology in order to effect change. Adler concentrates his efforts on how to handle problems in a constructive manner that is not concerned with assigning blame, and is more concerned with finding methods to resolve difficulties.

Methods Recommended to Develop Social Interest in Children. Ostrovsky, Parr, and Gradel (1992) also support the use of Adler's social interest theory. However, they suggest a way to use it in combination with Kohlberg's moral development theory, to create a plan for fostering moral development through the constructs of social interest. It is a very intriguing article that looks at each of Kohlberg's stages and uses recommended social interest methods to foster moral development. Although the article discusses all of Kohlberg's levels, only the Pre-conventional Level will be examined here, as it covers children in the age range of five to thirteen years old.

Children in stage one of the Pre-conventional Level are "perception-bound, egocentric thinkers and trial-and-error problem solvers" (p. 221). It is hard for them to see others' side of things or predict the outcomes of their behavior. They rely on physical consequences to determine right from wrong. Ostrovsky, et al. (1992) recommended the use of stories to teach moral development to these children. This supports Dreikurs et al. (1982) who stated that stories with a moral dilemma would foster social interest in young children. Ostrovsky et al. also recommended questioning techniques that cause children to think about components of social interest such as, reciprocity, empathy, and fairness.

A child in stage two of the Pre conventional Level is between the ages of eight and thirteen. These children have not developed the value of loyalty and justice. Although they are still somewhat concrete in their thinking, they have begun to be able to see things from another person's perspective. For this age group, evidence of social interest is displayed by allowing children to participate. They can tell a story with a teacher, or use class discussions to solve problems or create procedure. Children also complete work in dyads, which develop cooperation, and are encouraged to participate in the community. Community activities might include collecting cans, donating to the poor, and participating in school pride programs. Similar to social interest theory, the child begins to turn outward, and develop a sense of those around them. This article is another example of the recognition and support given to social interest.

According to Lewis (1991), social interest can start even earlier, and can be fostered through a child's play. Children should be allowed to play with toys in which they are interested in playing, to enable children to experience cooperation. Also, children should also be provided with toys appropriate for them to use independently. Heavy toys or toys with numerous pieces would be difficult for very young children to manage on their own. Children who play with different toys can develop a background knowledge that could be useful in school. A child who has felt confident in his or her social dealings as a young child is more apt to develop better social skills when older.

In an article by Carns and Carns (1994), the use of Adlerian theory to train counselors is examined. Before interns begin learning about how to counsel families, they examine their own lifestyles and beliefs. This is done so that the counselor is more in tune with how his or her perceptions affect how situations will be analyzed. The

emphasis that Adler placed on mutual respect and equality makes the relationship between counselor and client very comfortable. The goals of misbehavior are then analyzed. Interns learn that the goal(s) of a client can effect the relationship between the counselor and the client. Just as teachers can better understand their students by examining how the child's behavior makes them feel, a counselor can look at how he or she feels about a client, in order to identify the problem. The fact that this strategy has been effectively used in the counselor-patient relationship lends credibility to its use in the teacher-student relationship.

Nystul (1995) looked at a counseling approach that combined the use of Glasser's Reality Therapy and Adlerian psychology. Of particular interest, Nystul refers to a previous researcher who believes that Glasser based some of his theories on the philosophical foundation laid out by Adler. The fact that Adler has affected other theorists, who have come along since his time, gives credit to the soundness of his philosophies.

Step one of Nystul's (1995) approach requires the students to identify their behavior in a manner that allows them to see that they are responsible for their actions. Although this is credited to Glasser because of the exact process used, Adlerian methods also focus on identifying the behavior of a student. Step two seeks to ascertain the private logic used by children to make their particular behavior seem acceptable. In step three, a method from Adler and a method from Glasser are both recommended. The main concern of this step is to allow students to see that their behavior is counter-productive to the goals they are attempting to attain. This provides them with motivation to change. Step four seeks to find an alternative, more acceptable method for

accomplishing goals. The counselor needs to provide children with opportunity to practice the new behavior, so they will see how it is beneficial. Group therapy and role-playing can also be components of this step. All along the children are treated with empathy and provided encouragement which are major tenets of Adlerian psychology.

This literature provides an idea of how widely accepted Adler and Dreikurs' ideas have become. Those familiar with the work of Adler and Dreikurs have found many uses for their strategies. Many also see schools as an ideal place to cultivate social interest in children.

Research Studies-Social Interest

Several studies have been done to substantiate the validity of Adler's social interest theory, and develop ways in which social interest could be measured. If Adler were correct in his assertions of social interest as an indication of belongingness and psychological well being, then it would be expected that a high level of social interest would correlate with positive qualities in people. These studies show that social interest has been positively associated with many attributes that our society holds as desirable. These attributes are goal attainment ability, cooperation, internal locus of control, and self-actualization.

La Fountain (1996) discusses two studies regarding goal attainment in which she was involved. The first study done by LaFountain used a pretest-posttest control group design to compare 177 students who had received solution-focused therapy to 134 students who had not. In solution-focused therapy, the client examines and changes their perceptions of a problem and then works to solve problems in a more productive manner.

This method is similar to Adler's idea of determining the private logic and faulty perceptions people hold that impede successful goal attainment.

The participants ranged in grades from elementary to high school, and included male and female subjects. In the previous study, researchers examined what percentage of students who participated in solution-focused groups attained their goals, and to what level the goals were attained. It was determined that 81 percent of the subjects achieved a moderate level of goal attainment, and 14 percent achieved a high level of goal attainment.

In analyzing the data from the first study, LaFountain began to see a relationship between the level of goal attainment and the level of social interest present in the goal people had set. To examine this possible correlation, another study was completed. In the second study, a post-hoc analysis was completed by two master's level counselors. They examined the goals set by the participants in the first study to determine if each goal contained social interest. Only 151 cases in which they agreed on the level of social interest in the goal were used to tabulate results.

It was confirmed that persons whose goals contained a higher degree of social interest had greater success in achieving their goals than did persons whose goals were more self-oriented. LaFountain (1996) sees social interest as a broad idea for attaining success, but asserts that solution-focused therapy through its criteria for setting goals can provide a prescriptive method to follow to achieve success. When combined, these two studies can provide people with a highly effective method for solving problems and attaining goals.

In another pair of studies, Crandall and Harris (1991) attempted to provide support for the newly developed Social Interest Survey (SIS), which was designed to test the level of social interest held by a respondent. In completing two studies, one on cooperation and one on altruism, they not only validated the use of the SIS, but also provided further data to support the concept of social interest.

The cooperation study used as subjects 30 male and 55 female volunteer psychology students. The subjects completed the SIS and participated in a game. The game was set up in a manner in which a subject competed against one of the experimenters and was more rewarded for competitive responses than for cooperative responses. The study showed a high correlation between the SIS and cooperative responses. They also found that "high social interest (in a person) apparently leads to cooperation that is more resistant to change in the face of conflicting requirements of self-interest" (p. 117).

The second study (Crandall & Harris, 1991) examined the relationship of SIS scores to participants' willingness to donate time to help others. Eight to ten weeks after the first study, the same subjects were asked by phone if they would like to volunteer for a local agency. Only 24 of the subjects could be contacted. After contact was made, a third party sorted the information into two categories. The categories were, those who were readily willing to volunteer and those who were not interested or unsure.

It was found that persons who scored highly on the SIS were also willing to volunteer time. This study provides significant testament to the importance of social interest. This testament provides support for programs designed to promote social interest.

Hjelle (1991) used 72 female, psychology undergraduate students to determine the relationship of social interest, locus of control, and self-actualization. To measure this relationship, three different tests were administered. These tests were the Social Interest Index, the Nowicki-Strickland Internal-External scale, and the Personal Orientation Survey.

Through an analysis of variance model, it was found that young women who have an internal locus of control and a high self-actualization score also have a high level of Social Interest. This is important to know since, as Hjelle points out, persons who have an internal locus of control tend to be more involved socially and politically. They also show good adjustment and seem in control of their lives. It is not a surprise that Social Interest, which was compared to Kohlberg's moral reasoning, is also compared to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. They all deal with the concept of a person moving from a self-centeredness to an others-centeredness.

These examples portray a need to develop Social Interest in children. Students could benefit for a lifetime from a program such as class meetings that develop persons who have higher levels of goal attainment, cooperation, self-actualization, and who have an internal locus of control. Teachers who work with a group of children every school day would be ideal persons to conduct programs that develop social interest.

Research Studies-Class Meetings

To locate research and information related to class meetings, I conducted a thorough search of the following databases: ERIC 1966-1998, Psychlit 1974-1998, First Search, Dissertation Abstracts and Genisys, which is the library card catalog. I found research on class meetings to be sparse.

Only four of six examined sources of information were actual research studies on class meetings (Sorsdahl & Sanche, 1985; Omizo & Cubberly, 1893; Marandola & Imber, 1979; Hinman, 1996). While generally positive in regards to the use of class meetings, individual results varied. The other two sources (Russo et al 1996; Zeaman and Martucci, 1976) were merely descriptive inquiries with no scholarly base, designed to provide knowledge to teachers regarding uses of class meetings.

Sorsdahl and Sanche (1990) researched the effects of classroom meetings on the self-concept and behavior of students in a regular classroom. The main focus was to determine "the efficacy of providing preventive group counseling to entire classes of children through class meetings" (p. 50). In addition to this, they also sought to discover if class meetings would improve children's self-concept.

The participants involved 91 students from four schools of comparable size and socioeconomic status. One class of fourth grade students from each school was selected to participate. Two of the classes were used as experimental groups, and two were used as control groups.

The Pupil Behavior Rating Scale and the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale were used to measure behavior and self-concept for all participants. They also developed two rating scales to measure interpersonal behavior during classroom meetings. The tests were called the Classroom Meeting Behavior Rating Scale and the Classroom Meeting Self-Concept Rating Scale and were completed by the teachers as a pre- and post-test measure of the children participating in class meetings.

This study found that the behavior of the children in the experimental group improved significantly over the control group in both the PBRS and the CMB. The PH

scores did not change, but there was improvement on the CMSC test. Further study would be needed to tell if class meetings improved the self-concept of children. These researchers found class meetings to be a useful technique to treat and prevent misbehavior. The study suggests that teachers are needed to aid in transferring what is learned in class meetings to the regular school day. These researchers also believe that class meetings can provide preventative counseling for intact classes of children by the regular classroom teacher.

Another study by Omizo and Cubberly (1983) studied the effects of Reality Therapy classroom meetings on the self-concept and locus of control in learning disabled children. This quantitative study randomly assigned 60 LD children from four classes into two control groups and two experimental groups. Certified Reality Therapy therapists trained teachers to conduct the meetings. All participants were given a pre- and post-test of both the Dimensions of Self-concept (DOSC) and the Nowicki-Strickland Locus of Control Scale. The DOSC is broken down into five sub-scales, which are: a. Level of Aspiration; b. Anxiety; c. Academic Interest and Satisfaction; d. Leadership and Initiative; and e. Identification vs. Alienation. This study found that students in the experimental group improved on the sub-tests for Level of Aspiration, Anxiety, and Academic Interest and Satisfaction. There was no improvement in the Leadership and Initiative and the Identification vs. Alienation sub-tests. In addition, there was also no improvement on the locus of control test.

The results pointed to improved academics for the students in the experimental groups. Cubberly and Omizo assert that this study is important because regular classroom teachers in any curriculum area can carry out class meetings. They

recommend that future studies examine the use of class meetings with other populations of children.

A study by Marandola and Imber (1979) was done to study the effects of class meetings on the argumentative behavior of eleven and twelve year old, learning disabled boys. The model used for classroom meetings was based on Glasser's Reality Therapy meetings. Ten boys in a classroom for learning disabled students were used for the study. All subjects were from low socioeconomic homes and lived in urban areas. They performed below grade level academically and exhibited behavior problems. The students participated in class meetings for eight days. In order to measure changes, baseline data was recorded for two weeks prior to the study. They recorded the number of times students were involved in verbal arguments between two classmates (VA) or verbal arguments between two or more classmates (VA+) and physical confrontations between two classmates (PC).

The results of this study were quite dramatic. Total argumentative behaviors decreased anywhere from 69 percent to 100 percent. Decreases were seen in all three types of confrontations. This study is limited in a few ways. First, the teacher recorded the data. They suggest that an independent observer could have supplemented the teacher's data by collecting data as well. Also, nine of the ten children had been with the teacher for two years, which allowed for a positive relationship to develop, as well as affect the teacher's ability to notice some behavior. Due to the fact that this study was completed twenty years ago at a time when special education was radically different than it is today, the results of the study should be approached with caution.

It would be useful to conduct a replication study for a greater length of time to determine if the effects found in this study would be lasting. Future research could be done with students in a regular classroom to find out if class meetings would have the same effect in that environment. This study provides support to the idea that class meetings can be used to change behavioral aspects of children in addition to effecting academic change.

A study by Hinman (1996) was the most comprehensive to date. She asserted the following six hypotheses which follow:

- a. Students participating in open meetings will rate the psychological and classroom climate more favorably than students participating in domain specific meetings.
- b. Students participating in open meetings will rate the psychological environment during meetings more favorably than students in domain-specific meetings.
- c. Gifted students participating in open meetings will rate the psychological environment during the meetings more favorably than gifted students participating in domain-specific meetings.
- d. Female and male students participating in open meetings will rate the psychological environment during the meetings more favorably than female and male students in domain-specific meetings.
- e. Gifted students participating in open meetings will rate the learning community more favorably than gifted students in domain- specific meetings.

f. Female and male students participating in open meetings will rate the learning community more favorably than female and male students participating in domain-specific meetings (p. 51-55).

The participants in this study were from four elementary schools and were all in the fourth grade. Although never stated explicitly, it appears that seven classrooms were placed in the treatment group and seven classrooms were placed in the control group. All the teachers received four hours of training. The treatment group teachers received training in class meeting implementation, while the control group received training in instructional strategies of creativity. All teachers met in circles twice a week for twelve weeks for twenty minutes each session.

Because of the number of aspects being studied, several measurement tools were used. The *My Class Inventory* was given to measure the classroom climate. It asked for “yes” or “no” responses on the levels of friction, cohesiveness, difficulty, satisfaction, and competitiveness that existed in the classroom. The *Psychological Safety Index* was developed by Hinman (1996) and given to assess the level of psychological safety felt by students. Also given as part of this study was the *Community of Learners Index*, which was also developed and piloted for this study by Hinman. It was designed to measure the sense of community in the classroom.

In addition to these tests, both the teachers and the students completed questionnaires. Teacher questionnaires were designed to compare teacher variables, and the philosophy and perceptions of class meetings. The student questionnaire was designed to assess the students' perception of class meetings. To ensure that meetings

were being held as required, observations by Hinman were also completed every three weeks.

Due to the past research and the level of agreement by theorists on the topic of social interest, the results of Hinman's study were somewhat surprising. For all of the groups examined, no significant differences were found between the treatment and control groups in their mean scores on the PSI, MCI, and CLI. Because the tests did not reveal any enlightening information, Hinman examined her observational notes.

After analyzing the data from her observations, Hinman (1996) changed the focus of her study. Instead of examining the effects of class meetings as they related to students' perceived psychological safety, classroom climate, and sense of community, she decided to attempt to determine the effects of the degree of teacher pleasantness to the variables previously mentioned. She did this because she observed examples of outright physical and verbal abuse by teachers in some treatment classrooms and loving, caring teachers in control classrooms.

After further observations of teachers she developed a definition of an unpleasant teacher. The teachers were then ranked according to their level of pleasantness. This ranking was positively correlated with the PSI, MCI, and CLI. Teacher pleasantness had no effect on the PSI, but did have a positive, strong correlation with both the MCI and CLI.

The teacher questionnaire revealed that teachers value class meetings and provided numerous examples of the benefits of class meetings. The student questionnaire revealed that students enjoyed class meetings as well. They also provided numerous examples of the benefits of class meetings. Students enjoying class meetings

for many reasons. They provided time just to talk, they got to express their feelings and listen to others' feelings. They thought class meetings were fun and enjoyed the topics discussed during meetings. Students also said the meetings helped them learn about appropriate ways to treat others. This study recommends that future research involving classroom meetings examine teacher characteristics. This study differed from earlier studies in that it looked at how students felt about class meetings. Due to the newness of the instrumentation used, it would be useful for future studies to look at particular student perceptions in depth.

The two remaining sources of "research" information available on class meetings differed in the amount of description each provided. The first article by Russo, et al. (1996) employed some methodology and analysis of findings, but it lacked a research base. Their purpose was to "extend the theory, research and practice of the open classroom meeting to the everyday life of the elementary classroom" (p. 85). In doing this, they selected four areas to examine. Russo et al. examined how class meetings affected social interest, what students thought of class meetings, developmental differences that occur between grade levels using class meetings, and some effective methods that can be used to hold class meetings. Class meetings were examined over a seven-month period and run by four teachers trained in Reality Therapy meeting methods. Meetings were held weekly or biweekly for twenty to thirty-five minutes each. These meetings were videotaped and then analyzed by university faculty members, and graduate education students. The analysts checked the tape and listed, through group discussion, every student remark related to the definition of social interest. They also performed a content analysis of selected meetings. Through this process they summarized

15 themes of social interest which they categorized into the three headings called sharing, caring, and solving.

Four suggestions were made at the end of the project. First, Russo et al. advise taking into account that social interest is linked to developmental level. Second, predictable sequence in meeting format fulfills a child's need for the familiar, yet challenging questions will provide for some necessary disequilibrium. Third, schools should institute class meetings in successive grade levels, and involve students in the decision making process of the meetings. Fourth, teachers who run class meetings should expect the unexpected and be willing to tackle controversial topics.

As stated earlier, the reasons for this study as well as the presentation of their findings were vague. The only attempt made to consult the children on their views of class meetings was at the last meeting. Had the researchers consulted the students on their view of class meetings more regularly, a truer picture could have emerged.

The last piece of information, regarding the effects of classroom meetings, seems to be a description of one teacher's experiences with the implementation of class meetings in a special education classroom. In this descriptive analysis, Zeaman and Martucci (1976) conducted Reality Therapy meetings twice a week, from September to June, with nine learning disabled students who were 10 and 11 years of age. Zeaman and Martucci claimed that verbal participation increased, and impulsive, hyperactive behavior decreased because of the children's participation in classroom meetings.

No attempt to was made to record, triangulate or analyze data. Assertions were based solely on the opinions of teachers and staff members. Examples such as individual students joining a bowling team, or developing a new friendship were cited. Although I

place value in teachers' ability to assess the changes taking place in their classroom, this article has little validity due to its lack of research methods.

Research regarding class meetings has produced a variety of encouraging results. The effects class meetings had on students included improved classroom and class meeting behavior, as well as improvement on a sub-test of self-esteem on the part of the participants (Sorsdahl & Sanche, 1985). Class meetings seemed to improve the academic achievement, level of aspiration, and anxiety level of learning disabled students (Omizo & Cubberly, 1993). Also, reduced argumentative behaviors were noted (Marandola & Imber, 1979). These findings suggest that using class meetings is a worthy method to create acceptable behaviors and positive self-perceptions in students in the classroom.

Research Studies-Sense of Belonging

Because this study seeks to understand the perceptions students have regarding their sense of belonging, an overview of studies completed on the topic of belongingness is necessary. Different researchers use different terms when referring to the term I have called "sense of belonging". The studies highlighted in this review of the literature used the terms, *psychological sense of school membership* (Goodenow, 1992), *bonding* (Arhar & Kromrey, 1993), *quality of group membership* (Zeichner, 1978), and *sense of belonging* (Goodenow, 1991).

Despite these different terms, there is some common ground with which to start from. Sense of belonging is more than just technical enrollment in school. It includes the development of a social bond with other students, adults, and the norms of the school (Goodenow, 1993). These bonds or relationships are reciprocal in nature and involve

individuals feeling accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school (Goodenow, 1991). Also a part of the knowledge available on sense of belonging is that if kids feel like they belong, they will be more apt to commit to the goals of the group, and initiate action towards that goal (Finn, 1989). The research also shows that the sense of belonging felt by students is related to the relationships they have with both other students as well as other adults in the school building.

A study conducted by Goodenow (1992) investigated the relationship between the psychological sense of school membership on the motivation and achievement of 301 junior high school students. “In particular, the study investigated the hypotheses that students’ sense of belonging in school would be significantly associated with measures of school satisfaction, expectations of academic success, valuing of academic work, and persistence in difficult tasks” (p. 6). The students were of African American, White, and Hispanic American descent and attended two of six public schools located in a northeastern city.

To measure the subjective sense of belonging felt by students, the *Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale* was used. This measurement tool used a Likert format in which students rated statements that dealt with perceived liking, personal acceptance, inclusion, respect and encouragement for participation, and the perceived response of other students. Some questions related to the sense of belonging as it related to the general school.

To measure the peer group influence on students’ motivation, students rated their agreement with the statement, “My friends think that it is important to do well in school”. School motivation was measured through the use of two, five point scales which asked

questions regarding the how successful the students think they will be, and the value they placed on academic work. In an effort to measure the amount of effort and persistence shown in the face of difficult work, the students answered two questions.

Goodenow (1992) found that sense of belonging, which includes what the student's think of their own ability to succeed and how supported students feel by others in their environment, had a significant impact on motivation and persistence. It also found that gender and ethnicity create differences in the effects of social influences on motivation. In this case, friends' values had more of an influence on motivation, and sense of belonging was related to self-expectations in girls than for boys. The ethnic differences showed that Hispanic students had a strong connection between sense of belonging and expectations for success, and African American students had a weak connection between belonging and expectations for success.

Arhar and Kromrey (1993) studied the relationship between students' sense of belonging to their personal and social backgrounds, the school organization, and their relationships with teachers and peers. They proposed four guiding questions to focus the study. The first one questioned whether the student's ethnic group, socio-economic status and family composition affected student bonding. The second question proposed whether school organization affected student bonding. The third question asked if there was a relationship between disadvantaged student qualities and school organization. And fourth, they questioned the effect of the school's general socioeconomic (SES) status affect student bonding to teachers and peers.

The study was conducted using an ex post facto design from a sample of a larger study on student bonding. The study from which the sample was drawn used middle

school students from schools that ranged in size, minority population, and socioeconomic status. This created a diverse group of participants totaling 4,761.

Participants completed the *Social Bonding Scale*, which is made up of 25 Likert scale items. This test gives three scores, which tell the level of bonding to peers, teachers, and schools. To determine the affect of SES on relationship to bonding with the school, ethnic group, personal SES, gender, family structure, and student-peer bonding, a sub-sample was created. In this sub-sample of 1,052 students, seven teamed and seven non-teamed middle schools were created. These groups were then paired according to their percentage of student receiving free or reduced lunch.

This study found that in low SES schools, boys had a more difficult time than girls bonding with the school and the teacher, whites had a more difficult time than other ethnic groups in bonding to the school, and teamed organized schools improved bonding of students to peers and teachers. Also in low SES schools, female students were better able to bond with peers and school than males.

Zeichner (1978), examined the effects of the quality of student's group membership and the classroom social structure to his or her reading achievement, self-concept, attitude toward school, and anxiety level. This study used 621 fifth and sixth grade participants from 25 classrooms in four schools in New York. Group membership referred to the level of psychological belonging, or commitment to the goals of the group. This sense of belonging to the group is decided by two components. First, the attraction felt to the group's goals, values, and people, and second, the level of acceptance felt from the group members.

Classroom social structure meant the level to which friendships were diffused among the group members. The more centralized a group's social structure is, the fewer children are identified as desirable friends. And conversely, the more diffuse the social structure, the more evenly friendship choices are spread out.

California Achievement Tests (CAT) were used to determine reading ability, and indexes were completed in which the student had to finish sentences relating to how they felt about school to determine the participants' attitude toward school. The *Self Esteem Inventory* test measured their self-concept as a learner. To measure a child's conscious level of anxiety, the *Test Anxiety Scale for Children* was administered.

Zeichner (1978) found that students in diffuse classrooms achieved higher levels of reading ability than in centralized classrooms. Also, students who were more accepted by their peers achieved at a greater level in reading. In centralized classrooms students were more positive about school than those in diffuse classrooms. It was also found that a student who felt a high level of sense of belonging had better attitudes toward school than those who felt they did not belong. On those same lines, it was found that students who had a high level of belongingness had a more positive self-concept as a learner. Lastly, students who felt a higher level of belongingness experienced lower levels of anxiety.

The last study highlighted by this literature review studied the effects of sense of belonging on motivation beliefs and academic outcomes (Goodenow, 1991). There were 612 participants in the study ranging from fifth to eighth grade, and were from a small suburb in the Northeast. They were from the same middle school, which was made up mostly of white middle class students. Students completed the *Psychological Sense of*

Membership-Class scale as a means of assessing their sense of belonging in school classes. This test utilizes a Likert scale in which students rate, for example, the level to which they feel the teacher and other students like them. Self-efficacy and intrinsic value of academic goals was also measured in a Likert scale format in which the students chose from a range of not true to true. Report cards and teacher ratings of student engagement were collected to determine the grades of students and their effort level.

Goodenow (1991) found that sense of belonging increased with age, and those with the highest levels of belongingness were the students with the most experience in the school. Conversely, the students value and interest in school dropped with age. Also found was that students were more confident of the value and ability of their school than of their level of belonging. Specifically, the students doubted that their classmates respected their contributions and supported them academically. Also, sense of belonging had a greater impact on student's effort than did the intrinsic value placed on school. In addition this study found that the greater a child's sense of belonging, the better their grades are in social studies. This is not true for math classes and sense of belonging.

The studies that have been completed on sense of belonging point to many trends in the effects of belonging on school performance. High levels of a sense of belonging resulted in better attitudes toward school, and better self-perceptions as learners. Also found was that social studies grades and those in other similar types of classes improved, and effort was increased. A strong sense of belonging also increased motivation and persistence levels and decreased anxiety levels. Students who felt they had a high level of acceptance by their peers had improved reading scores.

Some generalizations can also be made concerning sense of belonging in low SES schools. In those schools, it was found that boys had difficulty feeling a sense of belonging with the teacher, and whites had difficulty feeling a sense of belonging with the school in general. Low SES schools that had teaming structures in place created a greater sense of belonging between students and their peers and students and their teachers.

These studies stress the importance of teachers and schools working to improve the sense of belonging felt by students. Two ideas stand out at this point. First of all, research needs to be conducted more extensively at the grade school level, and also, it still has not been established what constructs a child believes contributes to his or her sense of belonging. The knowledge of what a child feels is important to their sense of belonging could improve the ability of the teacher and the school to cultivate that belongingness.

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the theory on which class meetings were based, examined notable researchers thoughts on the theory of social interest, and examined various research studies. Some studies sought to verify the concept of social interest, some the effects of class meetings on students, and others, the effects a sense of belonging has on various aspects of students.

According to Adler (1931), humans have a basic need to belong. This need can be fulfilled through love, work, and social ties of life. Social interest, which stems from the social tie of life, is a person's desire to contribute to the functioning of community or to belong.

Ansbacher (1991) has broken social interest into two parts. A process dimension, which includes a sequence of steps, a person must go through to achieve a high level of social interest. First, each person has the innate potentiality for social interest, next, they begin to act on these impulses, and last, social interest is internalized. The second part of social interest is the object interest. This means that you become interested in things such as, the interests of others.

Dinkmeyer (1991) discussed the need for leadership by encouragement, an idea Adler has always supported and that is a component of class meetings. Dinkmeyer believes that encouragement creates workers who feel more involved and valued in the workplace. Ferguson (1996) also described an Adlerian process that a company used which involved the employees to take part in the decision making of the company. By using this method the company was able to gain the cooperation and support of its' employees. These two studies relate to Finn's Participation-Identification model (1989) which states that children who identify with and have a sense of attachment to school, feel a sense of belonging which promotes commitment to school goals and their own engagement of participation. In other words, if students or workers feel that they belong, they will buy into the goals of the school or the company.

Nicoll (1996) discussed Adlerian methods for changing schools. He has identified two types of change schools could make, first order change and second order change. First order change involves surface issues such as staffing. Second order change involves the underlying rule structures and beliefs of a school. Second order change involves goal disclosure and questioning techniques.

Nicoll's types of levels can be viewed in a manner similar to the levels of social interest discussed by Ansbacher (1991). Nicoll sees the types of changes schools could make in changing what they are and what ideals they represent. Just as Ansbacher sees levels to a child's social interest that range from potentiality, to surface skills, to internalization. The methods used to attain a deeper level of change in students are also questioning and goal disclosure. The more self-examination and discussion that takes place in both schools and individuals, the better change can be internalized and effectively made.

Research regarding social interest has provided validity to Adler's theory of social interest. Because social interest refers to a person who desires and is able to contribute to society, it would be expected that social interest would be associated with traits society finds desirable. LaFountain (1996) discovered a correlation between the level of goal attainment and the level of social interest present in a person. LaFountain also found that the greater the level of social interest present in a goal, the better that goal was attained. This could be so because a goal that is social interest oriented is more satisfying to our basic need to belong, than a goal that does not contain social interest.

Crandall and Harris (1991) also found desirable traits that positively correlated to the presence of social interest in persons. In their study, those participants who had a high degree of social interest, according to the SIS, were more willing to donate their time for others. Those with a high degree of social interest also held a level of cooperation that was resistant to pressure from others to be less cooperative.

Research concerning class meetings were all done using quantitative measures and resulted in conflicting information. Sorsdahl and Sanche (1985) found that self-

concept did not change after students took part in class meetings. On the other hand, Omizo and Cubberly (1983) found that four aspects of self-concept improved as a result of class meeting participation. Omizo and Cubberly also reported that locus of control did not improve, while Zeaman and Martucci (1976) reported a movement toward an internal locus of control as a result of students' participation in class meetings. In four studies (Sorsdahl and Sanche, Omizo and Cubberly, Marandola and Imber (1979), and Zeaman and Martucci) researchers found various benefits to using class meetings, such as improvements in behavior and class participation, higher academic interest or performance, and a reduction in anxiety. In light of this research, it is surprising that Hinman (1996) found class meetings to have no effect on students' reported psychological safety, the class climate, or learning environment.

There are some basic ideas regarding belonging that seem to have been accepted by researchers who study belonging issues. Belonging to a school group involves "more than just technical enrollment in the school. It means that students have established a social bond between themselves, the adults in the school, and the norms governing the institution" (Wehlage, 1989, p. 10). Goodenow (1993) states that psychological membership, or belonging, includes how the student feels about being "accepted, respected, included and supported by others in the school social environment" (p. 80). Finn (1979) believes that if a student feels that he or she belongs, then the student will commit to the goals of the school group.

Two tests have been developed to measure sense of belonging in students. The first is the Social Bonding Scale (Phelan, 1987) developed by Wehlage. The test questions were developed by compiling characteristics of at-risk students and those

that dropped out of school, such as bonding to peers and bonding to teachers. Rather than ask students who felt they belonged what contributed to their belongingness, they compiled a list of characteristics of students who were at risk of dropping out of school or who had already dropped out. This resulted in general reasons for feeling disconnected from the school group such as a lack of bonding to peers or teachers.

The Psychological Sense of School Membership scale was also designed to measure sense of belonging. Its questions were also conceived in the manner of those in the Social Bonding Scale (Phelan 1987). Another problem with these measures is that they were designed for use with Junior High and High School Students. Therefore, these tests could not be used with elementary students.

As an elementary teacher, I believe that grade school students are developmentally different from secondary students. This opinion has been supported by Ollhoff, who has identified four development stages of children. Children from the ages of six to twelve years of age are moving “out of the orientation of family relationships and move into a world of peers” (1996, p. 14). Also during this stage, Greenspan (1993) believes that children are creating a picture of themselves based on their relationships with other students. Because of the developmental stage elementary students are in, it is important to understand their perceptions regarding their sense of belonging.

It has been established that classroom meetings can positively impact the behaviors of students. It has also been established that a strong sense of belonging is related to a variety of positive school and personal characteristics. However, it still has not been established what components of their school life children perceive to be important to their sense of belonging. The quantitative measures that have been

completed up to this point have not been able to tell, from a child's point of view, what contributes to a child feeling like they belong. Therefore, I feel a qualitative, exploratory study was needed to discover what contributes to a child's sense of belonging. A qualitative study helped to ensure that I did not miss possible components of a child's sense of belonging. Another benefit to this type of research is that it opened the study up to the possibility of finding components of belonging that may not have been identified previously.

Knowing what children believe to be components of their sense of belonging would be valuable to me and to other teachers who would like to improve students' sense of belonging. If teachers knew the components that make up a child's sense of belonging, they could try to create a classroom environment that allows those components to exist. Because a sense of belonging seems to positively correlate with many positive school attributes, it is important to understand what children perceive as important to their sense of belonging. This opinion has been supported by Finn (1989), Weiner (1990), and Goodenow (1993). Belonging, according to Weiner, may be a key influence on motivation, yet little research has been done on this topic and few if any adequate measures of the construct exist (Finn). Goodenow states that, "Despite the convergence of several themes in recent developmental and educational psychology on the importance of belonging, very little empirical research has directly addressed this issue" (p. 81).

Chapter Three: Procedure

Assumptions and Rationale for a Qualitative Design

After finding a topic worthy of research, I examined the methodologies available and decided a qualitative study would best answer my question. The reasons I chose to do a qualitative study are supported by Creswell (1994) and Merriam (1988). Those reasons are as follows:

First, in qualitative research, concern is for process rather than a particular end result. I have seen the results of the available quantitative research on class meetings (Cubberly & Omizo, 1983; Russo et al. 1996; Sorsdahl & Sanche, 1985; Hinman, 1996). However, as a teacher, I was left with questions as to what the children experienced during class meetings and in the classroom, questions which could only be answered, it would appear, through the use of a study that details the experiences of the participants, from their perspective. Concerned with each of my students as an individual, I needed to take a look at how their perceptions progressed and changed their own sense of belonging. In an effort to understand that progression, I detailed what was taking place in the classroom during observations (what was being discussed, time of day, etc.), any comment I made directly to an informant. I also documented what the subjects under study said and nonverbal communications used. I did not look for a predetermined answer, rather I followed the informants closely and reported what I discovered in rich detail.

Second, qualitative researchers are concerned about the meaning people construct and gain from experiences. The end result, or the findings reported by the previously cited studied told me little about how the children felt their sense of belonging was

formed or impacted. What aspects the children value and how they feel are intrinsically important. In my study, interviews and journals will be used to understand what the informants think and feel regarding the subject of belonging.

Third, qualitative researchers are the instruments for interpretation. Teachers make many decisions every day that affect their children. To be effective, I need to be able to interpret how those things I do affect my students. I also need to understand how the children are impacted by what happens in the classroom so that I may create an atmosphere and promote learning opportunities that will foster their sense of belonging and growth appropriately. Tests utilized by quantitative researchers do not always give a true picture of children. By acting as the filter for information, I can see a larger picture of each child. In this study, I will act as the primary filter for interpretation. Data will be collected and analyzed by me.

Fourth, qualitative research involves going to students and observing them in the natural school setting. I cannot get a picture of how my students feel and behave in school, if I do not observe them in that setting. I hear parents describe their children in ways I never observe in school which leads me to believe that behavior in school is in itself unique and, therefore, must be studied in the classroom. Data will be collected and research done only within the confines of my classroom.

Fifth, when dealing with an affective topic of study, numbers and test results reveal very little. Because qualitative research is descriptive, I am able to see more aspects of the child's experiences. This makes the data much more valuable to a teacher interested in the "bigger picture" of a child, rather than separate images, which can be difficult to fit together. I will tell through "thick" description, which includes quotes, as

well as the verbal and nonverbal actions of the informants. This will enable a fuller picture of the child to develop throughout the course of the study.

Sixth, qualitative research is inductive. This is an important aspect of educational research because of the fact that a child's education is a collection of small experiences, or details that when combined account for the total school experience. It is important to scrutinize these details, in order to come to a greater understanding of the whole child. I will document individual events, interactions and actions of the subjects under study. From these small experiences, themes or patterns will emerge. From those patterns, an image of what it means to belong, from the child's point of view, will be constructed.

Programs like class meetings deal with qualitative issues such as dealing with others, and establishing oneself within a peer group. To truly understand these aspects of children's emotional state, an in-depth, qualitative study needs to be conducted.

Type of Design Used

The study I conducted was a qualitative descriptive study of two students' perceptions of their own senses of belonging within the classroom community. As stated in the definitions, a descriptive study provides a "thick" description of the research topic. Data collection included direct observations, in-depth interviews, and informant journal entries on the two subjects under study.

Role of the Researcher

My role in this study was that of a participant observer (Merriam, 1988). I participated in the research by leading the class meetings and participating in discussions when necessary. This enabled observations to be done as the meeting took place. I was

able to share the experience of the participants, as well as collect data in the context of the class meetings. Although I participated in the meetings, it was important to allow the students to control the conversation as much as possible and rely on each other for direction.

Method of Informant Selection

The subjects were selected by purposeful sampling (Bogdan & Biklin, 1992). Purposeful sampling meant that I chose particular subjects to include because I believed they would facilitate understanding of the topic of study. Informants were chosen from the students in my third grade classroom of 24 students because it was the only classroom conducting class meetings in my school. I sought one male and one female student who seemed to understand the classroom community and who seemed able to reflect on events and articulate their thoughts (Merriam, 1988). I discovered who these two informants were, through a process of elimination.

I needed informants who were not behavior problems. These types of children run the risk of being removed from the classroom by me, or being sent home during the day due to outbursts. This removed four students from the possibility of being informants. I also needed to avoid children who would tell me what they thought I wanted to hear which ruled out four more students from the study. Since my study was designed to study regular classroom students, I chose to eliminate five of my students who had received or had been referred for Special Education. Because student journals were used as one method of data collection, I needed students whose writing was legible. Two students wrote sloppy and still relied on invented spelling, which made their written work difficult to understand. Another student had the potential to be excluded from class

meetings due to religious beliefs. This particular religion requires that she not discuss or celebrate holidays. Because of this, if a discussion surrounded how to celebrate an upcoming holiday, this student would be unable to participate in a discussion of the matter. Lastly, because I am the filter for data collection and analysis, I needed to be able to infer meaning from students' actions and verbalizations. I was unable to gain meaning from the nonverbal cues of four students, because of a lack of facial expressions on their part and who seemed unwilling to share their thoughts and opinions with me. For that reason, I did not use them in the study.

Through this process of elimination, I was left with one female and one male student who I believed would serve as reliable informants for the purposes of this study. Because I had been teaching this group of children for seven months, I felt qualified as a professional educator to make these judgments regarding the informants.

Informants

In order to protect the identity of the informants, I created a pseudonym for each of them. I selected names different from the names of any of my student, as an added precaution for anonymity. The male informant will be referred to as Steve and the female informant as Tiffany.

Steve was eight years old during the study. He had attended the same school from kindergarten through third grade. His father was in the military and I do not know if his mother worked. Steve is the older of two children. His brother was in kindergarten at the same school during the time of the study. A detailed description of Steve can be found in Chapter four.

Tiffany was also eight years old during the year of the study. She had moved to the school district shortly before the school year started. She was the middle child of three. During the time of the study, her older sister was in high school and her younger sister was in second grade at the same school. A detailed description of Tiffany appears in Chapter four.

Gaining Access

In order to gain access to the setting, I first obtained verbal permission from my building principal, and then obtained written permission from the school district. Once Institutional Review Board approval was granted, a parent information letter was sent to the parents of the participants. After the letters were sent to the parents, I received written permission from Steve's mother, and verbal permission from Tiffany's mother. All identifying information regarding informants or the school system was kept confidential by the researcher.

Data Collection Procedures

This study took place in a midwestern public school in a third grade classroom of 24 students. Two of my students were purposefully selected (Bogdon and Biklen, 1992) to act as informants. Because the researcher is the primary instrument of interpretation, multiple methods of data collection were used to lend credibility to the study. The methods used were observations, interviews, informant journals, and a parallel observer. As the researcher, I also kept a reflective journal regarding the process and data collected. Because the researcher is the primary instrument of interpretation, multiple methods for data collection can provide evidence of the emerging information. All data collected was in regard to the perceptions, attitudes and actions of the two participants.

The collection of data began Wednesday, March 4, 1998. Data was scheduled to be collected for six weeks. However, due to absences on the part of the researcher, the informants, and an unexpected string of snow days, data collection was extended to May 20.

Observations

Observations were chosen as a method of data collection because previous researchers had experienced success using observations to obtain information regarding informants perceptions. For example, in a study by Brosnan, et al. (1994) observations were used successfully to provide a shared experience between the researcher and the participant and as a basis for formulating future interview questions. In the Brosnan study, observations also allowed for the opportunity to take descriptive notes within the setting, as they occurred. They also provided documentation of potential discrepancies between the observations and the interview data, and were used to triangulate with interviews and journal entries. In another qualitative study (Hurley & Wooden, 1994) observations were used to provide contextualization for interview questions.

In my study, I was seeking the perspectives of informants. Therefore, I needed to understand their perceptions within the setting of the classroom and in class meetings. I also used the observation data to form interview questions and to triangulate data. Observations were done primarily by myself and supplemented by a parallel observer. They were conducted during two structured times and two unstructured times. The structured times were in class meetings and a science class. The unstructured times consisted of center times and in the mornings before the school day began. I observe

during these times because I thought it important to see the types of interactions the informants would choose and how these peer interactions unfolded.

I completed most of the documentation during class meetings, center times, mornings, and science classes. For this study, data collection through observation meant that I would watch and listen to Steve and Tiffany and hand-write on a notepad all of their verbal and nonverbal actions during the identified times.

Structured Class meetings. Class meetings were held every Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 12:30-12:50 p.m. Observations were done by myself at each meeting. The dates of those meetings were March 4, 6, 16, 18, 20, 23, 25, 27,30; April 1, 3, 8, 15, 17, 20, 22, 27, 30; and May 1, 4, 6, 8, 13, 14, 15, and 21.

Structured Science Class. I collected observational data during science class on March 4, 20, 23, and 27; April 1, 20, 27, and 28; and May 14. On each of the dates listed above, the parallel observer taught science from 1:00-1:30 p.m. so that I might observe the two informants during structured class time. Since structured class time is something experienced as part of the classroom community, it is important to observe the informants during this time as well.

Unstructured Mornings. The first 15 minutes of each day was unstructured. School started at 8:15 a.m. but the children began to arrive in the classroom at 8:00. Since most students arrived at 8:00, there are 15 minutes each day in which the children interact with almost no interruption by the teacher. I observed the two participants from 8 to 8:15 a.m. on March 12, 16, 17, 18, 19, 23, 24, 26, 30, and 31; April 1, 2, 14, 15, 16, 17, 20, 22, 23, 29, and 30; May 1, 4, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 20.

Unstructured Center Time. In addition to mornings, I also selected center time to conduct observations. Centers were completed on Thursdays when the school counselor pulled groups of five students to her office to work on certain skills, such as getting along with others, solving problems, etc. There were six centers from which to choose, and each center was set up at its own table with all the materials and chairs the students needed. They could choose to work at one of the following: math, computer, science, listening, social studies, or writing. The center activities were designed to complement what was taught in the classroom at a level they could complete independently of the teacher. Although the children had to work at the center they selected, they were allowed to interact with other students as they chose. Because they completed activities independently of the teacher, I was able to move about the room and observe the two informants in self-motivated interactions. I observed the two participants on as many Thursdays as time allowed, from 12:45 to 1:15 p.m. The actual dates were April 2 and 23; May 7, 12, 14, 18, and 19.

Parallel Observer

I realized early in the study that it was very difficult to conduct meetings or supervise students while I collected data. It was difficult because students would ask questions that required me to divert my attention, or the events of the class meetings would require that I be doing something when I should be taking notes on the informants. I decided an additional observer would help ensure the quality of the data collection process. This would also provide an unbiased view of the events that took place in the classroom, which improved the validity of the research.

I selected my district mentor, Anne, who was in an administrative position for the district during the year of the study. Since she had been a teacher in the district for many years previously and had taught science several times that year in the classroom under study, her presence did not create a novel atmosphere nor cause different behavior to occur as a result.

Anne's observations also consisted of watching the two informants and hand-writing, on a notepad, their verbal and non-verbal actions in the same manner as did I. The parallel observer collected data during each of the identified times on the following selected dates. Anne observed class meetings on March 4, 18, 20, 23, and 27; April 1, 8, 15, 20, and 27; May 14. She also observed from 8 to 8:15 a.m. on March 18, 19, and 26; April 8, 21, and 30. Center time was observed and data collected on April 2 and 23 and May 7.

In-Depth Interviews

Brosnan et al (1994) used in-depth interviews to discern patterns in the way participants talked about the process of change. My data analysis involved looking for patterns or themes, which seemed to lend itself to the use of in-depth interviews. As in previous qualitative studies (Brosnan et al. 1994; Heller and Sottile, 1996; Hurley and Wooden, 1994), interviews went from a more general, broad focus to a more specific format. Interviews were also semi-structured in nature, which allowed for immediate and further clarification of responses. These interviews also helped to develop rapport between the interviewer and the person interviewed, as was the case in a qualitative study by Hurley and Wooden in 1994. Interview questions used to investigate student perceptions yielded useful information for Davis and Henry (1997) in their qualitative

study. Therefore, interviews were an appropriate method to use when attempting to ascertain perceptions of informants. Interviews were also used to triangulate data with observations and informant journals.

Interviews (Appendix C-K) were conducted once a week for six weeks in an attempt to understand further the perceptions of the informants and develop a rapport between the researcher and participants. The interviews were conducted in the classroom after school or over lunch recess in the counselor's office. They were conducted in privacy, so that the students would not be embarrassed by the presence of other children or adults hearing their responses. As Steve and Tiffany spoke, I took notes by hand on a pad of note paper. Interviews took place on Wednesdays or Thursdays, based on the schedule of the informants. I chose the middle of the week to avoid any effect the weekend might have on the frame of mind of the informants.

Informant Journals

As a qualitative measure of participants' habits, practices, motivations, strategies and reflections, Davis and Henry (1997) successfully used informant journals to answer the question of their study. This type of information regarding their participants related to the purpose of my study, which was to understand the perceptions held by the informants in the study. This supported the use of informant journals in my study.

In the same study, Davis and Henry also used journals to triangulate and confirm journal data with observations and interviews. Renick (1996) explained through examples how journal entries helped the researcher understand how the informant viewed herself. A participant's view of themselves is similar to their perceptions about

themselves, which I sought to discover. Renick also used journals to triangulate data with interviews and observations.

Journals allow participants to focus on events and topics that hold meaning for them, and is also an unobtrusive method of data collection (Bogdan and Biklin, 1992; Creswell, 1994). In this study, informants wrote journal entries immediately following each class meeting. They were given five minutes to write journals entries in a book that I provided. Each page was labeled with a section asking informants to write down the topic of the meeting and a section that asked them to write down their thoughts and or feelings about the meeting. The only time this format varied was on the last day of journaling. On that day, I asked them to write whether they thought class meetings were useful and why (Appendix L). Steve wrote 22 journal entries and Tiffany 23.

Unfortunately, informant journals did not yield information useful to this study. Their answers were quite brief, and non-reflective in nature. Even though I asked them to give an opinion and support it with at least one reason, most entries gave one unsupported statement. For example, after one meeting Steve wrote, “We got finished with building block number four. I was very happy” (S-JNL p. 6/22).

Researcher Reflective Journal

A researcher reflective journal (Creswell, 1994) was kept throughout the research period. I wrote in this journal at least once a week for the six weeks of the study. This journal contained my thoughts on how the study progressed, any changes that took place regarding the participants, and any opinions I had about the process.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis was conducted in a parallel manner (Tesch, 1990) with data collection and interpretation. This meant that data was analyzed through what Tesch calls de-contextualization and re-contextualization (1990). In a notebook with a line down the center, I took descriptive notes on the left side. The right side was reserved for analysis notes. This separation of the page was designed to facilitate the analysis process.

De-contextualization means to look at the data collected, and identify meaning segments in the data. Once these segments are identified, they are removed from the context of the document, or de-contextualized. These de-contextualized text segments are to be tagged by describing the *topic* of the text segment. A distinction is made between identifying the topic and the content of a section. A list is then made of the topics in a particular document with repetitions deleted. This is the start of an organizing system for all the data to be collected. The data must then be re-examined and coded with abbreviations of the topics into which they would fit. These topics became the themes that emerge as findings.

Every Friday, I looked at my observational data and made notes about the topic of each piece of information I had recorded. About a month into the study, I began to notice patterns, such as a high level of participation by the informants. I made a list of possible patterns of topics that, in addition to participation, included sense of humor, positive facial expression, and eye contact. This constituted the start of my organizing system. After reviewing the interviews, I added complements and participation in extra-curricular activities to the tentative list.

After data was collected, I assigned each topic a color and then highlighted each piece of data that fit into each topic. I then moved into the next phase of data collection described by Tesch (1990) as re-contextualization. The color codes for the tentative list of emerging themes were as follows:

Purple = sense of humor

Blue = positive facial expression

Orange = extra-curricular activities

Yellow = class participation

Green = eye contact

Pink = compliments

Once all the data was coded, it was then re-contextualized. Re-contextualization meant that all text segments with the same codes were collected into one place, so the researcher can read them in a smooth manner. As Tesch puts it, "The segment is settled in the context of its topic, in the neighborhood of all other segments of the data corpus that deal with the same topic" (p. 122). Topic sections are not necessarily set. Some may be deleted later or combined with later emerging topics. Tesch recommends going through the process of listing possible topics with one set of data, then attempting to apply the topics to other data sources.

Although I did not physically move the text, I read all of data coded for a certain topic in one continuous manner. I then eliminated extra-curricular activities and eye-contact as topics because they could not be verified by three sources. This method of data analysis recommended by Tesch (1990) worked very well for the purposes of this

study. I felt that the enormous task of analyzing data was broken down in such a way that it allowed for careful analysis.

Data Notebook

In addition to color coding emerging themes, I created codes designed to express to the reader when each piece of cited data took place and the context with which it was from. I put all the data I had collected into a three-ring binder divided into seven sections. The section names were, interviews, class meetings, science, A.M., center time, Anne, and researcher reflections. Each section was then numbered and started at one. For example, data collected in class meetings went from page one to fifty-five. Science notes started at one and went to twenty-four. Because each section is placed in chronological sequence, the larger the number from a section, the later it took place in the study. For the benefit of the reader, each citation from the data is labeled by the page it is found on, out of how many total pages. This will enable the reader to easily place the chronology of the data. The coding system is as follows:

Interview Codes:

S-INT. = Interview, Steve. This section had five pages.

T-INT. = Interview, Tiffany. This section had five pages.

Journal Codes:

RR = Researcher Reflections. This section had twenty-five pages.

JN-S = Steve's journal. This section had twenty-two pages.

JN-T = Tiffany's journal. This section had twenty-three pages.

Observational Codes:

CM = Class Meetings. This section had fifty-five pages.

SCI = Science class. This section had twenty-four pages.

AM = 8:15-8:30. This section had fifty-four pages.

CT = Center Time. This section had fourteen pages.

All of Anne's observational data was numbered in the order she recorded it, regardless of the context. Her data is signified by a capital letter 'A', followed by a dash, then one of the observational codes above, and the page number out of how many pages. For example, (A-CM. p. 2/38) signified data collected by Anne during a class meeting, and is located on page two out of thirty-eight pages in the section labeled "Anne".

Methods for Verification

Triangulation:

Merriam (1988) cites another author who gives an excellent description of triangulation. Denzin is quoted on triangulation as saying, "The rationale for this strategy is that the flaws of one method are often the strengths of another, and by combining methods, observers can achieve the best of each, while overcoming their unique deficiencies" (p. 69).

In this study, I used triangulation through the data collection methods of observation, student journals, interviews and the parallel observer. Triangulation was achieved by first coding data by topic, then verifying its existence in other data sources. Topics not corroborated by at least three methods were discarded as findings. Topics corroborated with three other methods were reported as *emerging themes* in Chapter four.

Parallel Observer:

I accessed my mentor and adjunct thesis committee member to act as what I termed a "parallel observer". This meant she collected data at some of the same times, in

the same settings, and in the same manner as I did. Topics that we saw emerging were discussed and used to corroborate the interpretation of the data. By combining our research, we were able to review possible findings and confirm the existence of emerging themes.

External Audit:

I used an external auditor (Bogden & Biklen, 1992) to verify the presence of collected data, to investigate the credibility of data analysis procedures, and to confirm the trustworthiness of the codes. The external auditor was a fellow graduate student, who was familiar with qualitative research, had written a qualitative thesis.

"Thick" Description:

According to Merriam (1988), thick description is detailed narrative used to describe and analyze data. This method is used in a qualitative study in place of numbers usually used in a quantitative study. This rich description allows the reader to decide how these findings will relate to another environment.

Limited Generalizability:

The nature of qualitative research is to come to a deeper understanding of an individual phenomenon. Researchers in a similar school and classroom situation, as that described in my study, may be able to apply its results to their classroom.

Statement of Researcher Beliefs:

I am a firm supporter of Adler's social interest theory and the general assertion that the individual works in harmony as a whole, unified being. Because of this, I believe classroom meetings help students feel like contributing members of the classroom community; hence, I wanted to understand this phenomenon better. As a former college

student who worked in a public school setting, and as a teacher currently in the public school setting, I have come to the conclusion that children's behavior is goal-oriented.

This program fits into my philosophical beliefs, and would have been integrated into my classroom, regardless of the undertaking of this study.

Chapter Four: Findings

Sense of belonging, as experienced by a child, is a multidimensional construct. It cannot be defined simply and, as a result, each component that contributes to a child's sense of belonging needs to be described until a picture is created.

Although there are common themes that have emerged from the data, the male and female informants approached their own sense of belonging in different ways. I will introduce you to each informant as they developed throughout the study. From there, I will describe the themes that have emerged as they relate to each informant.

Participants

Male Informant-Steve. Steve was eight years old and attended the same school from kindergarten through third grade. His father was in the military and I do not know if or where his mother worked. He also had a younger brother who was in kindergarten, at the same school, the year of the study.

The first interview was designed to establish general information about the groups that Steve belonged to as well as how he thinks he belongs within those groups. The interviewing began in February, so the class had spent a great deal of time together before the questioning took place. Steve already had a great deal of time to establish himself within the classroom group.

Steve had this to say about making friends at the start of the school year, "I played with people (then named several boys)." I asked him how he did that and he responded with, "Well, most of us liked soccer and we all played soccer at recess" (INT. S1/5). This did not give a complete picture of how Steve made friends, so I followed up on these answers in the second interview. In that interview he said, "At recess we would

talk and at lunch we would talk” (INT. S2/5). I asked him who approached whom during these conversations with other students and he said, “I approached some, and some approached me.” At that point he added, “later we began to play” (INT. S2/5).

The way in which Steve established friendships seems to fit with the general description he gave for belonging. When I asked what belonging meant to him, he said, “Like belong to someone or something... feel like when you know those people. It makes you feel more comfortable and that they know you; what I like and stuff and what I like to eat” (INT. S2/5). In addition to this definition, I also asked what it felt like to belong. To this Steve said, “Like you know those other people in the group, when they give you awards, when we talked about the solar system, I got compliments on how much I knew” (INT S2/5). According to these descriptions, it is important to Steve that others know what his likes and dislikes are. Because of this, it makes sense that he spent time talking to classmates before play took place. He established a rapport with the students, then played with them.

When I asked if he felt comfortable in our classroom, Steve said, “Yes. I know all of these people. At the beginning of the year there were new kids and I felt a little uncomfortable, but now I know them all” (INT. S1/5). When asked in a later interview if Steve felt he belonged, he said, “Yeah... sometimes I’ve gotten the right answer and gotten compliments” (INT. S4/5). I asked Steve what things we do in the classroom to make him feel like he belongs, he said, “When I get called on, when I score goals at recess and got compliments, and when a kid helps you with Math or something” (INT. S2/5).

When I asked him what he does to help himself feel like he belongs in our classroom community, Steve said, “I work hard on assignments and stuff, during soccer (at recess) I pass to other kids, in Music I sing, and I helped (named a student) in Math” (INT. S2/5). In contrast, I asked Steve what made him feel like he did not belong. He was very specific and said, “when someone said to me, ‘move you stupid idiot’, and one time in basketball (at recess) someone called me a name” (INT. S2/5). I asked him how he responded to the incident playing basketball and he said, “I felt sad and left the game” (INT. S2/5).

In the final interview, I attempted to ascertain from him if using the word “belong” is one that third graders would use to describe feeling like a valuable part of the group who makes it run well. Steve misunderstood the question and told what the word belong meant to him. He said, “I would like to be here... Sometimes I wish school was all year long.” I asked him what kinds of things made him wish school went all year, and Steve said, “When I’m getting questions right and having a good day.” I found his answer to be interesting since it seemed to relate to the feeling of belongingness, so I asked him what makes for a good day. He said, “Not make anybody feel bad, to get some compliments, when my team wins at recess, teacher says you did a good job” (INT. S5/5).

Besides the classroom group, Steve also belongs to other groups. “Cub Scouts, soccer league, and I used to belonged to a baseball league (INT. S2/5). I asked him to tell me a little bit about those groups and to say whether he felt he was accepted in those groups. Steve was excited and gave a rather lengthy answer.

“In Cub Scouts we were partnered up and did group activities, like soccer last week, that helped...yes, I felt like I was accepted” (INT. S1/5). I then asked if he felt like he belonged on the soccer team and Steve said, “Yes, cause everyone-I was the best goalie on the team. Like the first or second time we played, a guy went past my defender and kicked the ball hard and high. It looked like it would go over my head and I jumped up. It bounced off my hand and went over the goal” (INT. S1/5). I inquired about the team’s reaction, and he said, “The team reacted really noisy like ‘Good save!’” Which made him feel, “Really good” (INT. S1/5).

At the end of this conversation Steve told me about a time he played goalie when the other team was able to take two penalty kicks at the goal. He was able to stop one of the goals. He laughed and told me that he didn’t know it at the time, but his mom told someone in the stands that she would give him five dollars if he stopped a ball. Again Steve laughed and told me that after the game he got “five bucks” from his mom (INT. S1/5).

Steve did not have as much to say about baseball. He said, “I wasn’t as good at baseball, but the team won. One time I came up to bat and I hit a grounder really fast and almost had a homerun, but I had to stop at third” (INT S1/5). Steve seems to know that he is not as good at baseball as he is in soccer, but was still able to make the situation sound positive.

In a later interview, I asked him if his participation in sports gave him confidence when he entered the classroom group, Steve said, “Yeah. ‘Cause basically sports is like school and your coach gives you your assignment, and a coach is like a teacher and teammates are like classmates” (INT. S5/5). I then asked if getting compliments in

sports, outside of school, gave him confidence when he entered the classroom group, he said, “Kind of. Well sports and school are different. In school we have Social Studies, Math, Spelling, and stuff. In sports we’re playing something, but in school you’re not playing, so they don’t have to do with one another... (ellipsis added to show brief pause) Compliments make you want to work harder to get more compliments...(brief pause) Yeah, it gives me more confidence” (INT. S5/5).

In an effort to get a wider picture of how he sees himself within the classroom group, I asked him what he saw as his role among his classmates. He said, “Well there was this question in social studies ‘What’s something man-made?’ (A particular student’s name) said ‘Nascars’, and took the words right out of my mouth!” He laughed and continued, “So if it’s something I like, they would expect me to say it” (INT. S5/5). Since I knew he liked the Green Bay Packers football team, I asked him if the other kids would think he liked the Packers as well as Nascars. He said, “Yes, them too” (INT. S5/5).

In observing Steve, I noticed that he frequently told jokes or found humor in everyday things. I told him in an interview that I noticed he did this, and asked Steve to tell me about it. He said he told jokes to people. “One time (student’s name) was frustrated and I made him laugh” (INT. S2/5). In a later interview I asked him if he thought a sense of humor was important if he wanted to get along with others and feel like he belongs in the group. He responded by saying, “Yeah. To try and get people to like you. To make things fun” (INT. S4/5). When I asked Steve how it made him feel to make someone laugh he said, “Makes me feel good.” When asked how he thought being made to laugh made them feel, he said, “Probably makes them feel good” (INT. S4/5).

Steve had several thoughts on what the teacher could do to make students feel like they belong. “One thing they could do is answer questions that are different (slightly off topic). One time in the afternoon we were talking about something and I wanted to say something about the topic but different and I didn’t get to share it.” He continued with suggestions, “(teachers could) Take time to call on everybody, make lessons seem more fun, and after days off that we don’t usually get, we can share what we did” (INT. S3/5). When answering this question he also gave an answer of a more personal nature. Steve shared that “a lot of times I want to be partners with (named a particular student) and he only wants to be with (named another student). But I just kind of let that go by” (INT. S3/5). Although he did not explain that answer, I think he thought the teacher could arrange for kids to be partnered differently.

Because Tiffany, the other informant said that teachers should encourage those students who raise their hands and give a wrong answer, I wanted to find out if the Steve thought this was important also. When I asked him, he said he thought they should. I also asked Steve if it would make that student feel more a part of the group. He said, “Yeah, it would reassure them they could get a question right a different time”(INT. S5/5).

In the time I spent observing, I noticed that Steve frequently waved his hands around when he was attempting to answer questions. I asked him why he did this and he said, “Sometimes I’ve had it up for a while and I have to move it around to get the blood flowing. Sometimes the teacher is way over somewhere else and I need to get their attention” (INT. S4/5).

I asked Steve if he thought discussing problems and allowing everyone a chance to talk, like we do in class meetings, would help kids feel like they belong. He replied with, “Kind of. By each kid giving their opinion it’s important. It helps that we tried to keep a safety zone” (INT. S5/5). (A safety zone meant that no one could laugh at what another child said or be rude in any way.)

Steve seems to like order and predictability. This desire showed up in several little things throughout the research process. For example, both the parallel observer and I noticed that he was the one who changed the date on the chalkboard, which was supposed to have the current day’s date. I asked him why he did this and he said, “We have to change it, or people will write the wrong date” (INT. S3/5).

Some changes took place in Steve this year in terms of how he interacted with the other students. For about the first four months of school, whenever I changed the seating arrangement, he complained to me that he did not get along with the student he sat next to. About halfway through the data collection it occurred to me that I had not heard him complain about who he sat by. As a result, I reminded him of the trouble he had at the beginning of the year, and asked him why that doesn’t seem to be a problem anymore. Steve explained, “Because I wasn’t used to having to sit there, because it was summer and I would run around. It was hard to get into that mode... And I’ve learned not to be so picky about what they do because they’re different from you” (INT. S3/5).

This information tells quite a bit about Steve, but I had an experience with him one morning in March that I found to be enlightening. It seemed to provide insight into the kind of person he is, and his outlook on life. I had stopped taking my documentation for that morning and was directing some students as to what they should be doing. My

paraprofessional pointed out to me that Steve was sitting at a back table sobbing. I was shocked since I had not seen that kind of emotion in him all year. After I got the rest of the class was working I made my way over to him.

When I asked Steve what was wrong, he told me that he wasn't going to be able to see his snow fort again. When I asked him why, he said, "It is getting hot outside and it will melt before I can see it again" (RR. 10/25). I agreed with him that it would melt and told him I was sad that I was not able to help him. I told him it was disappointing to have something you've spent time on to melt.

I asked Steve what made him think of his snow fort at school. He said, "I played outside that morning and didn't have time to see my fort before school and it has been bothering me ever since" (RR. 11/25). He seemed to think he would feel better if he could talk to his mom, so we went to the office, where I left him to make his call. He seemed to feel better when he returned and was able to do his schoolwork.

Female Informant-Tiffany. Tiffany is also eight years old. She had an older sister in high school, and a younger sister who was in second grade at the time of the study. Her mother worked part time at a grocery store and although her father worked full time, I do not know what he did for a living. Whitney spent time curling her hair for school every day and dressed very fashionably. She was also an experienced athlete and provided the boys with a great deal of competition on the soccer field.

As with Steve, the first interview for her was designed to establish general information about the groups she belongs to, as well as how she thinks she belongs within these groups. The difference for her was she was new to the school and the area,

so she needed to get to know the entire class, whereas the male only needed to adjust to seven new students.

When I asked Tiffany how she made friends, she said, “Asked them what their names are and if they want to be my friends” (INT. T1/5). I asked who she spoke to and she said, “(named two students) playing soccer and then through them” (INT. T1/5). The two girls she chose to be friends with were children who were friends with most of the class, and like her, dressed fashionably and spent time doing (curling, in pony tail, etc.) their hair. I asked the Tiffany how long it took her to feel like she belonged in the classroom group. She said, “About a week” (INT. T1/5).

Besides the classroom group, Tiffany also belonged to a soccer team and a volleyball team. When I asked her how she saw herself in those groups she responded by saying, “In soccer, goalie and forward. I was good at it and made five goals in games. Other kids said, ‘Will you be on my team because you’re really good.’ On volleyball I can serve overhand and I’m a good setter” (INT. T1/5). I asked Tiffany if her teams ever disagree and how she handled that. She told me, “sometimes we argue... if we’re not doing well and get mad I say, ‘C’mon you can do better than that and you can get the ball over” (INT. T1/5). I followed up immediately and asked what she says when they are doing well. Tiffany said, “Sometimes we help each other... ‘You can get down more and pass it to someone to hit it over” (INT. T1/5).

Tiffany described her comfort level in the classroom as “really comfortable” (INT. T1/5). The only time she is not comfortable is “When people make fun of each other.” I asked her how that made her feel and she said, “Feel bad. Like something bad is going to happen” (INT. T1/5).

To the female informant, belonging means, “You’re a part of it”. When I asked her to describe what it felt like to belong, she said, “Good, because you know the people want you to be there” (INT. T2/5). To further develop her idea of belonging, I asked Tiffany what things we did in our classroom that made her feel like she belonged. She said, “At recess when we play together. At class meetings, sometimes people don’t laugh. You know you can say something and think that you’re a part of it” (INT. T2/5). I asked Tiffany why she felt that she could speak openly in the class meetings, she said, “You talk to them and say not to talk or laugh and they respect it... because it’s our time and we try not to waste it” (INT. T2/5).

In a later interview, I asked Tiffany what class meetings gave her an opportunity to do. She said, “To get along better with classmates” (INT. T3/5). In that same interview I asked her what she liked about class meetings, and she said, “I like to share my own ideas and I like to hear other people’s ideas” (INT. T3/5). Tiffany remained consistent in this idea. In the final interview I asked her if discussing problems and allowing everyone who would like to talk, like we do in class meetings, would help kids feel like they belong. She said, “Yes. It would make you feel like you’re a part of the group” (INT. T5/5). I asked her why, to which she responded, “People would listen and not laugh” (INT. T5/5). To which I said, “It’s important for you to give ideas and be taken seriously.” She said simply, “Yes” (INT. T5/5).

I then asked what Tiffany does to help make herself feel like she belongs. She listed three things. First she said, “Try to be nice to other people. If you’re stuck on a question try to help them. Like (named a student) was stuck on a problem and me and (named another student) tried to help.” Second, she said, “Try to take part in it, listen to

others, I try and raise my hand all the time if I know the answer, look at them so they know you're listening." And third, she said, "Look at people and smile. That's what my sister does" (INT. T2/5).

When I asked Tiffany if there were things adults or children did that made her feel like she is not a part of the group, the female informant told me, "When kids say, 'I don't like you', or ignore me" (INT. T2/5). She also told of a time with her *Odyssey of the Mind* (An after school group run by parents, in which the kids take part in academic competition.) when a parent yelled at them for throwing food. Apparently this made her feel like she didn't belong.

When I asked Tiffany if her classmates expected her to do or say certain things, she responded without hesitation and said, "To be nice to them and not to talk (during class)." Then after a pause she added, "(named a student) expects me to be her best friend" (INT. T1/5). I asked her how she felt about that and she said, "Kind of bothers me sometimes. They (named the girl and another student) want me to play with them and not play with other people."

In a later interview, I followed up on the situation with the two students who wanted her to be only their friend. I asked how that was going, to which Tiffany replied, "Pretty good, but sometimes when I play soccer they get mad" (INT. T3/5). I asked if this caused her to spend less time with other children and she said, "Yes, because they're my friends and they want me to play with them" (INT. T3/5). I asked Tiffany why she played with them instead of doing she wanted to do, and she said, "So they won't be mad at me" (INT. T3/5).

I also followed up on the expectations she thought the other kids had of her. I asked Tiffany what people would think or do if she was not nice or talked in class. She said, “They wouldn’t like me as a friend and they might think I was a bad student” (INT. T5/5). I also asked her what she would think of herself to which she said, “I would think I was a bad student and not a good friend” (INT. T5/5). When I asked her what made her think she needed to be nice and not talk, she said, “My mind. I thought of it on my own” (INT. T5/5).

Tiffany told me that her soccer coach made her feel more a part of the group by asking what her name was and introducing her to the other players on the team. Her volleyball coach also asked her name, and talked to her a lot in order to make her feel like she belonged with the team. This prompted me to ask Tiffany what she thought teachers could do to make her feel like she belonged in the classroom group more. She first responded with a few silly remarks and while laughing said, “Let you have food fights, go in teacher’s lounge and eat all the food” (INT. T4/5). Then on a more serious note said, “Always call on you, be first in line, try to make you feel included in everything.” I asked her to explain *included in everything* in more detail, to which she said, “Call on lots of different people, and encourage people who don’t get it (questions) right. Say, ‘That’s all-right, you’ll probably get it next time’” (INT. T4/5).

Both Tiffany and Steve brought up the sports they participated in outside of school. I was interested in whether that impacted her sense of belonging in school. I asked her if participation in sports gave her confidence when she entered the classroom group. She replied, “Yes because when I was at where I used to live I played soccer. When I moved here I didn’t think they had fields. I was excited when I found out. And

we got to play against older kids” (INT. T5/5). Tiffany’s answer was not very clear, so I asked her if she thought being complimented in sports outside of school gave her confidence when she entered the classroom group. She said, “Yes, because it gave me confidence, no, it gave me more confidence.” At that point, I asked if her confidence level increased because she was good at soccer, or because others noticed she was good at something she felt she was good at. She said, “I’m good at it and liked that others noticed it” (INT. T5/5).

Since Tiffany seemed very interested in other students and events in their lives, I asked her if she thought it was important to show other kids you are interested in them. She told me, “Yes, to show them I want to be friends. They feel like they want to be wanted” (INT. T4/5). I asked her how she did that and she replied that, “By saying nice things and by playing with them and asking how something went” (INT. T4/5). Along those same lines, I asked her if it is important to be helpful to other kids. She said, “Yes, so they can understand things better. They feel like they want to, that the people who help them in the class are their friends” (INT. T4/5).

Emergent Themes

Sense of Humor-Steve. Steve’s use of humor to relate to other students and to adults first began to show itself during observations. For example, during a class meeting, he acted silly, laughed and raised his hand twice to suggest a compliment for himself when the person who was to compliment him was having trouble thinking of one for him (CM p. 4/55). There are many examples of his humor showing up in class meetings. The next example of humor during class meeting observation happened when Steve noticed that I had forgotten to throw the ball, which gives people the power to talk

in a meeting. He asked me, "Where's the ball? How come you're not throwing it to anybody?" He had a big smile on his face when he asked, because he knew the ball was on my lap and I had simply forgotten to use it. During this same meeting, whenever he noticed that I was not throwing the ball Steve laughed, held his hand over his mouth and pointed at each child talking without the ball (CM p. 12/55).

His sense of humor also showed up during interviews. After answering a question I had asked him about his soccer team he laughed and told me about a time during a soccer game in which the other team was allowed to try to kick two goals while he was playing goalie. He was able to stop one of the balls. He found out later that his mother had told another spectator that she would give him five dollars if he stopped a ball, so he received five dollars from his mom.

The male informant is also able to laugh at himself and share that with other students. During a class meeting, the ball was overthrown slightly. When a classmate threw him the ball, he missed it and the ball hit his hair. He responded by looking at those around him and laughing (A-CM p. 14/38).

Steve also used humor during class periods. During a science discussion following up a lab on motion, he answered a question by saying, "Cause we were blowing on them so we knew it had to move. But it has to be light." Then he laughed and looked at his neighbor, "You can't blow a building down!" (SCI. p. 5/24)

One morning when Steve walked into the coat hook area located in an enclave right outside our classroom, another student handed him a card in an envelope and claimed there was \$100.00 in it. Steve began to laugh, and looked at me and said, "(name) gave me a card and said there was a hundred dollar bill in it and I'm trying to

find it.” Meanwhile, he pretended to frantically open the envelope. When it turned out to only have a card in it, he looked at me and laughed, then handed me his report card (AM p. 8/38).

For three days during class meetings, we did some group activities that involved choosing what animal we would like to be and listing reasons why. The students also had to tell why they did not want to be the other animals. Their choices were an eagle, chameleon, turtle, and lion. No one chose the turtle, so we only discussed the other three. During the first of these three days, Steve’s group was discussing eagles. At one point he said, “He’s bald. Eagles use *Just for Men*” (CM p.19/55). On the second day his funny ideas for the chameleon were, “Put bad manners” and “Put too lazy” (CM p.22/55). On the third day, when discussing the advantages and disadvantages of each animal, Steve said, “The lions might eat the chameleons because they can’t run very fast.” And laughed while sharing it (CM p. 22/55; A-CM. p. 18/38).

One morning Steve was sitting at his desk when another student said, “I know (named informant) is having a bad day because his hair is sticking up.” He responded to this by smiling and saying, “You’ve got a good point.” This made the girl who said it laugh (AM p. 10/54).

Steve also shows that he enjoys the humor of adults in addition to his own. During science class one day the teacher told a joke and he responded by smiling for a second, then laughing (SCI. p. 12/24). He came in and announced to me, “I can tell that Mrs. Pangle is back.” When I asked how he said, “Because I saw her!” and then walked away laughing (AM p. 20/54).

A great deal of Steve's humor is geared toward his peers as well. For example, in a class meeting I offered a dollar to anyone who could guess the two rules of class meetings. A student guessed one of the rules right so Steve said, "He should get 50 cents for guessing 'have fun'" (CM p. 26/55). This made everyone in the room laugh and agree with him.

As mentioned earlier, Steve can also take jokes or humor at his own expense. During a science lesson one afternoon, the teacher asked what things flitter in the air. No one raised his or her hands, so after about one minute the male informant raised his hand and said, "Garbage." Although he was serious about his answer it made the other kids laugh. He responded to their laughter by laughing and saying, "It was worth a try, garbage does flitter around" (SCI. p. 14/24). Most of the students in my class would have been very upset by being laughed at, but he seemed to enjoy the attention.

Another example of using humor with his peers came up while Steve was playing a computer game. He came to a point where he needed a one to get ahead of his opponent and sang "gimmie a one, gimmie a one" to the tune of the Kit Kat *Gimmie a Break* song (CT p.2/14). Also during this time, he counted how many squares it was to the bottom and realized that several nines in a row would make him the winner. Steve knew that the computer, which randomly tells the player how many spaces to move, much like rolling dice, would not give him that many nines. He laughed and said, "All I need are lots of nines, then I'll win the game!" (CT p. 2/14)

Steve enjoyed another series of activities that took place in the class meetings. During role-play, in which the students were supposed to exaggerate and have fun, he laughed at the kids exaggerating the situation (CM p. 31/55). In another, we discussed

how a parent can give all of their love to many people and still have love left to give. In the demonstration I used a candle to signify the mother's love to light other candles which stood for other family members. When I was giving a demonstration about love using candles, the male informant leaned forward and puffed out cheeks as if he were going to blow the candles out (A-CM p. 26/38). After the demonstration was over and the candles were blown out, he noticed the child candle smoldering so he laughed and said, "That kid still has some love left" (CM p. 32/55).

In reviewing my data, I began to realize that Steve used humor or found humor in things frequently with other children and adults. Because of this, I asked him in an interview if he realized how much he relied on his sense of humor. Steve said that he tried to tell jokes when he could and gave an example, "One time I made (said classmate's name) when he was frustrated, laugh" (INT S2/5). His acknowledgement of his use of humor caused me to pay more attention to it during observations.

Steve seems to respond to other children's attempts to joke with him. While talking to a few classmates about soccer, one of the kids jokingly told the male informant that his team was the worst in the league. Steve just laughed in response (AM p. 24/54). On a different morning, Steve had walked in and sat at his desk without talking. Another student said to him, "What's your problem?" Although I could not hear his response, it made the other student laugh (AM. p. 29/54). Also, during a class meeting he laughed at a funny story being told by a student (CM p. 36/55, A-CM p. 27/38).

One afternoon in science class while the students were moving into groups and awaiting further instruction, he got his group to play a hand game called Rock, Paper,

Scissors. In that game he laughed and pretended to “cut” a classmate. This made both of them laugh (SCI. p. 18/24).

Sometimes his humor was silly. On a particular day during a class meeting, he began to read the list of suggested guidelines on the board, then realized what he was doing and said, “Ew, what am I doing?” While speaking, he looked at friend and laughed (CM p. 39/55). On another occasion I couldn’t find the class meeting ball, so he rolled up a paper ball and offered it to me while trying not to laugh (CM p. 42/55). One morning Steve came in and took his chair down then spoke to other classmates. Without thinking, he came back over to his desk and put his chair up. When he realized what he was doing he said, “Why am I putting my chair up?” and then he laughed (AM p. 42/54). During a class meeting, I gave a humorous example of what would not be a solution and said “Not turn in homework and have teacher nag him.” The male informant thought it funny and laughed (CM p. 47/55).

Because Steve seemed to use humor so extensively, and because the other students seemed to respond so positively to him, I wanted to find out why he used humor. During an interview I asked him, “Do you think a sense of humor is important if you want to get along with others and feel like you belong in the group?” He responded by saying, “Yeah” and nodding his head. Immediately following his response I asked him why he thought a sense of humor was important. He said, “To try and get people to like you. To make things fun.” I then asked how it makes him feel when he makes someone else laugh. He responded with, “Makes me feel good. When asked how he thought other people feel when someone makes them laugh, he said, “Probably makes them feel good” (INT S4/5).

Soon after the interview, during a science discussion, he was playing with a Tupperware container in his desk. It fell on the floor and bounced around loudly. When I looked at him he smiled sheepishly and picked it up. After he picked it up he realized that the discussion was about picking up objects and unbalancing them. He looked at me and laughed at the fact that he had just unbalanced his container. His reaction also made me laugh. About a minute later I as I walked past his desk, he balanced his container on his finger and looked at me and laughed (SCI. p. 23/24).

One morning Steve came in and began to work on reading his fables for reading class. He turned to his tablemate and said that Pecos Bill was really, "Pickled Bill" and "Picasso Bill" and then they laughed (AM p. 51/54).

Sense of Humor-Tiffany. Tiffany's sense of humor also presented itself first during observations. Her use of humor was much more reserved and passive when compared to the Steve. Rather than laugh out loud, she mostly giggled, which is quieter and less visible than laughing. Also, Steve seemed to tell jokes more, whereas the female informant usually just enjoyed the humor of others.

I have only documented three situations in which Tiffany initiated the humor. The first time occurred after a successful class meeting when Tiffany asked while giggling, "Could we give ourselves a hand?" (CM p. 6/55). She mostly directed this comment to me, and because others were moving back to their seats already, only those next to her heard.

The second time this took place was right before, and on April Fool's Day. When Tiffany came in, she was very excited and had a smile on her face. She said, "I've got to tell you what I'm doing for April Fool's. Last year I broke my arm and I'm going to

pretend that it's broken" (AM p. 16/54). She followed through on this when April Fools Day arrived. She came in late that morning with her arm in a sling. Her face was red and she giggled a lot that morning, and finally confessed at lunch that it was not really broken.

The third time this occurred was during center time. Tiffany was in the listening center with another classmate. They were listening to a story on tape. There was a point where both of them laughed out loud because of something that happened in the story. She rewound the tape a total of seven times to hear the funny part. Every time she rewound it, both of them laughed. After the second time the boy said, "This is funny." He tried to stop her the last two times, but laughed the whole time. To stop her, he stood up and held his hands over the player, while they both laughed (CT p. 8/14).

All other examples of Tiffany's sense of humor occurred in non-initiated situations. For example, she laughed at a joke of another student during a class meeting. Then, a few minutes later, when I asked what might happen if you blame someone, she laughed and said, "You might finally fight". This caused some of the kids to giggle (CM p. 13/55).

On another occasion, at the beginning of class meeting when we moved into the shape of a circle Tiffany realized she was on the outside with no room for her. She shrugged her shoulders and laughed while standing there. She then leaned over and whispered to each person and they scooted over and made room for her (A-CM p. 14/38). There were also many times a classmate told Tiffany a joke and she either laughed or giggled at it (CM. p. 18, 39/55; AM. p. 37/54).

As was the case with her comment about giving themselves a hand, she enjoyed humor with the teacher. For example, during science class she laughed at a joke told by the teacher (SCI. p. 12/24). On another occasion, she came in with water spilled on her shirt and shorts, laughed and told me, “My mom hit a bump and the fish water spilled all over me” (AM p. 40/54).

Some of the humorous moments she shared with classmates occurred because of an accident. I saw this happen on two occasions. The first occurred when she threw the class meeting ball too hard and sat down laughing (CM p. 41/55). On the second occasion, Tiffany was working on a science lab with a classmate. While she rolled a tennis ball across the desk, the other child was supposed to blow on it in the opposite direction. When she rolled the ball it hit her classmate in the forehead. This caused both students to laugh (SCI. p. 24/24).

Her enjoyment of humor was evident in several situations. One morning she came into the room in the morning talking about a soccer game with another girl. I made a joke, and she looked at me and laughed. A few minutes later, she went up to the chalkboard to add up some seconds that were written on the board. Another student was pretending that he was unable to add up the time, and told her that she was not doing it right even though she was. She laughed throughout the exchange with the other child (AM p. 51/54).

On another day, a boy was telling several students about something he and another boy did the day before. She went over to his desk and smiled at him, then began laughing (AM p. 53/54). During class meeting one afternoon the female informant

laughed when a friend complimented her, as part of the class meeting procedures, on not being a “ball hog” in soccer (CM p. 45/55).

In order to find out how the female informant viewed the function of humor, I asked her in the third interview. The question was, “Do you think a sense of humor is important if you want to get along with somebody, or feel you belong in a group?” She responded, “Yes, so you can make them laugh and be better friends. If they laugh, I feel good” (INT. T3/5).

Class Participation-Steve. In the first interview when I asked the informant if he felt his classmates expected him to do or say certain things, he said, “Sometimes when I raise my hand for a question, I try really hard to remember it” (INT. S1/5). I did not understand this comment at the time, but think I have come to a greater understanding of it by reading through my data. This was the first indication of the importance class participation held for him.

In the second interview, I asked him, “What does it feel like to belong?” He said, “Like you know those people in the group, when they give you awards, when we talked about the solar system, I got compliments on how much I knew” (INT S2/5). When he said this, it made me think back to the class discussion of the solar system. When we discussed the solar system, we were actually practicing the reading and extraction of information from expository text using books about the solar system. Steve had participated frequently that day, and apparently remembered that as a specific example of a time he felt he belonged (INT. S2/5).

In that same interview, when I asked him what things he did to help himself feel like he was a part of the classroom community, he listed several items, “Work hard on

assignments and stuff, during soccer-pass to others, music-sing, helped (named a student) in math (INT. S2/5). Working hard on assignments, singing in music, and helping a student in Math are all class participation activities. I was surprised by his response, as I expected him to mention activities dealing with play. Steve answered in a similar manner in the next interview.

In interview three, I asked Steve what he thought teachers could do to help you feel like you belong, he again mentioned academic related items. He said, “One thing they could do is answer questions that are different (not on topic). One time in the afternoon we were talking about something and I wanted to say something about the topic, but different, and I didn’t get to share it. Take time to call on everybody, make lessons seem more fun...” (INT S3/5).

At this point I began to notice his participation, and his eagerness to participate, so I asked him, “Why do you wave your hand around sometimes when you are raising your hand?” He explained, “Sometimes I’ve had it up for a while and I have to move it around to get the blood flowing... Sometimes the teacher is way over somewhere else and I need to get their attention” (INT. S4/5).

An example I used that fits in well with class participation came up in the final interview. When Steve listed the components that make up a good day, one of the things he listed was, “Teacher says you did a good job” (INT. S5/5). This implies that he would need to have worked on something first in order to receive a compliment of that nature. Throughout the course of this study, the male informant was very involved in class participation. This included raising his hand, whether or not he was called on, answering

questions in class, working on assigned work or completing tasks required of him by the teacher. This is evidenced in all sources of data.

Raising his hand in an attempt to answer a question appeared several times in observational data done the parallel observer and by me (CM. p. 5, 7, 13, 15, 39, 43,47, 48, 49/55; SCI. p. 2, 4, 5, 6, 14, 15, 21/24; A-CM p. 5, 10, 11, 18, 20, 38/38). Usually when he was not called on he would just put his hand down; a few times he would give a disappointed look at not being chosen to share (A-CM 20/38).

The times that Steve raised his hand, which allowed him to contribute to discussion, were also numerous and represented in the observational data (CM. p. 7,12, 16, 18, 32, 33, 43, 47, 54/55; SCI. p.1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 15/24; A-CM 3, 5, 7, 10, 14, 15, 18, 23, 30, 33, 38/38). One example of his contributing behavior took place during a class meeting. We were discussing the feelings an older sibling might have after his or her parents have a new baby. Steve raised his hand, and when called on said, "I went through the exact same situation and I didn't get as much attention" (CM p. 32/55). Another example of his participation took place in Science class when the teacher asked him what was in a swamp. Once called on, he said, "Frogs" (SCI. p. 1/24).

Steve consistently worked on assignments and completed tasks required of him by the teacher (CM. p.18, 19, 20, 53/55; SCI. p. 10, 11, 12, 13, 16/24; AM. p. 12, 13, 23, 28, 31, 36, 42, 49/54; CT p. 1, 2, 4, 13/14; A-CM p. 7,16/38; A-AM p. 13/38; A-CT p. 22, 31/38). An example of a time he completed a task required by the teacher occurred during center activities. He had chosen the computer center, and once there stayed actively involved for the entire half-hour, then he assisted putting away materials (CT. p. 1/14).

Class Participation-Tiffany. I first noticed that class participation was important to Tiffany during interview two. I had asked her, “What things do you do to help yourself feel like you are a part of our classroom community?” She responded, “Try to be nice to other people, if you’re stuck on a question, try to help them. Like (named a student) was stuck on a problem and me and (named a classmate) tried to help. Try to take part in it, listen to others. I try to raise my hand all the time if I know the answer. Look at them so they know you’re listening” (INT. T2/5).

In that same interview, I asked her what things we do in our classroom that help her feel like a part of the group. She said, “At class meetings. Sometimes people don’t laugh. You know you can say something and think that you’re a part of it.” At this point in the conversation I asked her why she thought she was able to talk and feel a part of the group. She said, “You (teacher) talk to them and say not to talk or laugh and they respect it. It’s our time and we try not to waste it” (INT. T2/5).

To understand that answer better, I asked her in the next interview what she thought class meetings gave her an opportunity to do. She told me, “To get along better with classmates.” Right away, I asked her what she liked about class meetings. She said, “I like to share my own ideas and I like to hear other people’s ideas” (INT. T3/5).

In the fourth interview, I asked Tiffany, “What can teachers do to make you feel like you belong in the classroom group more?” She answered by saying, “Always be called on, be first in line always, try to make them feel included in everything.” I asked her how teachers could make a student feel included in everything. She replied, “Call on lots of different people, encourage people who don’t get it (questions) right. Say, ‘that’s all right, you’ll probably get it next time’” (INT. T4/5).

In the final interview, I asked Tiffany, “Do you think discussing problems and allowing everyone who wants a chance to talk to do so, like we do in class meetings, would help kids feel like they belong?” She replied, “Yes. It would make you feel like you’re a part of the group.” I asked her why and she said, “People would listen and not laugh.” Since she had brought up the idea of not being laughed at when speaking, I said, “It’s important for you to give ideas and be taken seriously?” To which she replied, “Yes” (INT. T5/5).

There is much evidence in the observational data by the parallel observer and myself that supports her statements. She also had a range of ways to participate. They were, raising her hand, raising her hand and actually being called on, and working on assigned work or completing tasks required by the teacher.

Tiffany raised her hand frequently during all times of observation (CM p. 4, 5, 26, 42, 45, 48, 55/55; SCI. p. 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 14, 15, 17, 21/24; A-CM p. 15, 18, 20, 21, 27/38). This seemed to support her statement that she tried to raise her hand when she knew the answer. In addition to simply raising her hand without being called on, there were numerous times in which Tiffany was able to contribute to discussion.

Her contributions to discussion were also represented in the data (CM p. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 22, 30, 31, 33, 34, 39, 43, 47, 50, 53/55; SCI. p. 2, 6, 7, 20/24; A-CM. p. 3, 7, 10, 11, 14, 23, 18, 33, 38/38). For example, during a discussion on *I statements*, I asked the students why it was better to start a discussion with someone you are having a problem with by using the word “I” instead of “you”. She raised her hand, and when called on said, “If you say ‘you’, they might think that you, they might take it

wrong” (CM. p. 12/55). These contributions also support Tiffany’s notion that she tries to answer questions when she knows them.

In addition to this type of participation, Tiffany also participated by doing assigned work and completing tasks required of her by the teacher. This type of participation was represented in the data as well. It also showed up in data collected by both the parallel observer and myself (CM p. 18/55; SCI. p. 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 17, 20, 21, 24/24; AM. p. 1, 4, 7, 14, 25, 30, 32, 34, 37, 38, 46, 49, 52/54; CT p. 3, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13/14; A-AM. p.12; 30/38; A-CM. p.16/38). An example of completing a task required by the teacher took place in Science class. Anne had explained a lab activity in which the students would record motion with a tennis ball using two methods. I observed the female participant completing the steps of the activity as well as helping her partner (SCI. p. 11/24). This data also corroborates her statement in which she said she tries to participate in class.

Positive Non-verbal Cues-Tiffany. This characteristic was only shown consistently by Tiffany. Steve usually had a deadpan expression on his face, unless he was telling a joke or laughing at a joke. Tiffany’s non-verbal cues first began to present themselves during observations.

At our first class meeting she sat smiling and looking at each child as they spoke (CM p. 1/55). During another class meeting, Tiffany looked at the child speaking and smiled (CM p. 2/55). Another meeting, I was showing pictures of animals the kids might choose, when deciding which one they most identified with. While I was doing this, Tiffany sat in her seat watching what was going on and smiling (CM p. 18/55). During another class meeting she was again looking, with a smile on her face, at a child who was

talking (CM p. 33/55). On another occasion, while another student was complimenting her, she looked at two of her friends and smiled.

During science class one afternoon, the students caught someone being sarcastic and thought they could earn marbles for it. (Once the class filled a jar with marbles by being good in P.E., music, and library they earned a party. I had caught myself making a sarcastic remark early in the year and did not like it. Because of this I told the kids that if they caught me being sarcastic, I would give them five marbles.) While I explained that they could only earn marbles when I was sarcastic, Tiffany looked at me and smiled (SCI. p. 1/24).

When the class was participating in a discussion of a Science class, Anne accidentally called Tiffany by a different name when calling on her. Tiffany just smiled at Anne, who corrected her mistake immediately, and answered her question (SCI. p. 7/24). During another science class, Anne was explaining a concept to the students. Tiffany sat listening with a smile on her face. A few minutes later, in the same class period, the students got up to meet with their assigned partners; she looked over at a friend and smiled at her (SCI. p. 11/24).

Tiffany frequently displayed a positive facial expression when interacting with her peers and myself in the mornings. The first day of morning observations she walked in the classroom talking to three other girls while smiling at them (AM. p. 1/54). The group seemed engrossed in their conversation with each other.

Tiffany seemed to enjoy telling me about her volleyball success in the morning. On another morning, she came in smiling, and told me about winning a bronze medal in a volleyball tournament. After she told me, I observed her walk over to a friend and while

smiling, tell her the same story (AM. p. 2/54). One day Tiffany came in smiling from ear to ear and said, “Did I tell you my tournament was Sunday? I spiked nine of them! (Volley balls)” (AM. p. 7/54).

While listening to an announcement on the P.A. System, the secretary mispronounced a student’s name. Although most students laughed, I noticed that Tiffany looked at a particular person and smiled while looking at her. This person returned her look and her smile. In a similar manner, when a student brought in a picture of her new baby brother and gave it to Tiffany, she smiled and gave a pleased look to the girl who gave it to her (AM. p. 16/54).

Every morning, I made it a point to stand at the door and greet all of the kids as they came in. Most students said hello, but did not look at me. When Tiffany came in, she smiled said hello and looked me in the eye (AM. p. 48/54).

On another morning Tiffany walked in alone, smiling as she marked herself for lunch and sat in her seat. Once seated she spoke to the girl next to her (AM. p. 49/54). Her facial expression in the morning was generally consistent. A few days later she smiled at a classmate while he was telling a story, and then spoke to another classmate with a smile on her face (AM p. 53/54).

Twice during center activities, Tiffany displayed positive facial expressions when she was successful at a task. The first time occurred when she was attempting to get a paper clip, which was attached to the table by a string, to suspend in the air underneath a magnet. After changing the string length and the magnet height she was able to do it. She reacted by showing a big smile to her partner and to me and saying, “We got it!” (CT. p. 10/14). During another center activity, she played *Brain Quest* on the computer

with a partner. After they solved a particularly difficult question, she smiled and said, “Yeah! We got it!” (CT. p. 12).

The parallel observer also noticed several examples of Tiffany displaying a positive facial expression. During a class meeting, when another student passed her the ball, she looked at that person and smiled (A-CM p. 3/38). During another class meeting Tiffany again showed a positive expression when she realized that she had no room to join the circle. She shrugged and laughed, then she quietly asked the kids on either side of her to move, which they did. Later in the same meeting after she had shared an answer she sat back in her chair and gave a big, relaxed smile (A-CM p. 14/38).

The parallel observer also recorded the female informant providing support to another student through positive facial expressions. When I asked a student to explain a situation again, so I could understand it, the informant looked at that student and smiled to her (A-CM p. 20/38).

Because Tiffany seemed to use positive facial expressions so often, I asked her if she did this on purpose. I asked her if she realized that she looked at people and smiled and usually had a pleasant look on her face. She said, “That’s what my sister does, I learned it from her” (INT. T2/5).

Compliments-Steve. This theme only existed in one source, therefore it is not as reliable as the previous themes mentioned. I felt compelled to report it, because of the consistency with which Steve brought it up. In every interview, he managed to work the topic of compliments into his answers. This theme is important, but very tentative.

Steve first brought up compliments in the initial interview. When he was describing the other groups that he belonged to and how he saw himself in that group, he

told of something he did well and the things other children said to him. For instance, he told a story about a particular soccer game in which he performed well, “cause everyone, I was the best goalie on the team. The first or second time we played, a guy went past my defender and kicked the ball hard and high. It looked like it would go over my head and I jumped up. It bounced off my hand and went over the goal. The team reacted really noisy like, ‘good save’” (INT. S1/5).

In the second interview, he brought up compliments again, without being given a prompt about them. When I asked him, “What does it feel like to belong?” Steve said, “Like you know those other people in the group, when they give you awards, and when we talked about the solar system and I got complimented about how much I knew” (INT. S2/5).

Again, in the fourth interview he brought up compliments. When I asked him, “Do you feel like you belong in our classroom?” He responded by saying, “Yeah, (nodding head) sometimes I’ve gotten the right answer and gotten compliments” (INT. S4/5).

The topic of being complimented was talked about twice in the final interview. I started to wonder about the link between extracurricular sport activities and a child’s sense of belonging, so I asked him about it. My question to Steve was, “Do you think being complimented in sports outside of school gave you confidence when you entered the classroom and, if so, why?” He thought for a moment and said, “Kind of. Well sports and school are different. In school we have social studies, math, spelling and stuff. In sports we’re playing something, but in school you’re not playing, so they don’t have to

do with one another. Compliments make you want to work harder to get more compliments. Yeah, it gives me more confidence” (INT. S5/5).

In this same interview, I asked Steve a question, which due to a misinterpretation, he told me what he thought *belong* meant. To him it meant, “I would like to be here.” After a brief pause, he added, “Sometimes I wish school was all year long when I’m getting questions right and having a good day” (INT. S5/5). Immediately, I asked Steve what made for a good day and he said, “Not make anybody angry, to get some compliments, team wins at recess, and teacher says you did a good job” (INT. S5/5).

Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusions

This study was an attempt to understand two third grade students' sense of belonging. Through a thorough investigation, four themes have emerged as constructs of their sense of belonging. These themes are sense of humor, participation, positive non-verbal cues, and compliments. In this chapter, I will summarize my beliefs as they relate to each of the findings, and tell how these findings relate to research that has already been done on the topic of a child's sense of belonging. Once a thorough discussion has been completed, I will explain the implications this study holds for the use of class meetings, for teachers and for future research.

Sense of Humor

The thought that stands out the most, concerning Steve's sense of humor, is that he seems to recognize humor as a tool to fulfill needs. Because he usually received a positive response for his humor, Steve has been encouraged to continue using it. Based on this, Steve seems to use humor to get attention in an appropriate manner, to get or maintain friendships, and to be helpful to others. He seems to want to be enjoyed by others, and seeks to find enjoyment for himself. He also has a need for order, or a set way of doing things, and uses humor to ensure that.

Tiffany uses her humor in a much more passive manner than Steve does. A great deal of her sense of humor came from simply enjoying others' show of humor. As came through in the things she said about making and keeping friends, she builds relationships by focusing on other people's actions and needs. She appeared more needy when she chose to use humor. By that I mean, she would have been upset if no one laughed when

she made an attempt at humor. She guarded herself from that by sharing humor quietly with me, or only when she felt ensured of a positive response.

Both Steve and Tiffany see a sense of humor as a component of their sense of belonging, but Steve takes much greater risks than Tiffany. When he uses humor, he puts himself on display for his peers and teachers to see. Part of his sense of humor is the recognition he receives for attempting it. Tiffany, on the other hand is much more guarded in her use of humor. She does not make an attempt at humor if she is not virtually guaranteed a positive response. In an opposite manner from Steve, part of her sense of humor is the recognition she gives to others for attempting humor. She also spends more time than Steve, being the person who laughs at others jokes or attempts at humor, rather than being the one telling jokes or being funny.

Class Participation

Steve seemed to view class participation as encompassing several areas, which include academics, extra-curricular, and recess. His actions, as well as the statements he has made about belongingness, support this view of participation. Steve also seems to have a need for attention and uses class participation as a method for gaining attention appropriately. Being called on in class is probably the largest component of Michael's sense of belonging. When he was unable to share, he became visibly disappointed, and sometimes disruptive of class.

Tiffany also used class participation to fill a need. She seemed to feel best when helping others with their work. Even her participation in discussions seemed to be done to help me. She seemed to think that answering questions helped ensure that the class ran smoothly, a goal she knew I desired. She "helped me" by volunteering to read in

class, and offering to help the teacher, Anne or me, organize materials. Tiffany also thought it was important to have an opportunity to share her thoughts and ideas.

Both Steve and Tiffany used their class participation as a means to achieve a goal. Steve participated to get attention, where Tiffany participated in order to help others. Along these same lines, Steve participated in a manner that was more academic. He expressed this by consistently giving answers that displayed knowledge of the topic at hand. Whitney used participation as more of a social vehicle. It allowed her to connect with the teacher and to show others she cared for them.

Early in the study, when I began to see class participation as contributing to a child's sense of belonging, I was personally surprised. I realized that I had not given thought to academic interactions being important to the students' sense of belonging. However, once I went back into the research, I discovered that class participation was supported by Goodenow (1992). In a test she developed to measure sense of belonging, she includes the "... respect and encouragement for participation" as an important part of a child's sense of belonging.

Positive Non-Verbal Cues-Tiffany

Tiffany's use of non-verbal cues, such as smiling and eye contact, is an attempt by her to put others at ease and to appear likeable. This strategy is in keeping with how she accesses a sense of belonging. By being a "fixer", and attending to the needs of others, she is able to gain a sense of value within the group.

What is interesting is that Steve did not use this strategy at all. When he wasn't laughing, he carried a very deadpan expression on his face. It could be possible that because he had been at the same school for years, that he did not feel the need to express

his good intentions through his facial expressions. He may have assumed his classmates knew him well enough to understand him.

Compliments-Steve

Although I was unable to corroborate compliments with other data collection sources, I believe compliments, combined with Steve's class participation, are the biggest keys to his sense of belonging. He brought up compliments so consistently in the interviews that I felt they could not be overlooked. He enjoyed receiving compliments from his peers, as well as other adults. His desire for compliments also points to a need for attention. He takes notice when others compliment him and is freed to simply enjoy their attention. When Steve has accomplished something, he is very good at making others aware of it, in a manner that does not come off as bragging. He did this when he described his experience playing baseball. He told me he was not very good at it, but then proceeded to tell me about a triple that he hit.

I noticed that Tiffany referred to encouragement a few times, although not consistently enough to report as a finding. But this would be in keeping with her overall behavior in school. Encouragement expresses that someone is in need of support from another person. Since she enjoys being able to help others, it would make sense that she would use encouragement more frequently than compliments.

Relationship of findings to past research

Goodenow, (1991) found that students with more experience in a school have a greater sense of belonging. This seems to explain why Steve, who had attended the same school since kindergarten, seemed to feel much more comfortable than Tiffany, in the classroom. Another finding that seemed to be corroborated was the academically related

manner in which Steve participated in class. Zeichner (1978) found that students who felt they belonged had a positive self-concept as a learner. His actions provide evidence of his positive self-concept as a learner.

Steve's use of humor seems to relate to another finding by Zeichner (1978), who found that students who had a high sense of belonging also experience less anxiety. Throughout documentation, I only observed one negative show of emotion by Steve. He seemed to have a zest for life, and was very relaxed. The fact that Tiffany seems to rely on others, or has a need for others to rely on her, supports the idea (Goodenow, 1992) that friends values had more of an influence on the motivations of girls than on boys.

Speaking from the point of view of the classroom teacher, neither informant was a behavior problem in the classroom. Because they both seemed to know how to fill their needs in appropriate ways, they did not need to resort to mistaken behavior. When discussing my findings with the parallel observer, she had noticed that Steve seemed to have a need for attention, which is one of the four mistaken goals of misbehavior identified by Dreikurs (1968). However, because Steve seems to be able to satisfy his need for attention through his use of humor and participation in class, his need for attention has not become mistaken goal.

If Steve were not able to fill his need for attention in socially acceptable ways, he would probably begin to have difficulty with his behavior. On one of the days I was absent, I returned the next day early to read the notes left to me by the substitute teacher. In her note to me she reported that Steve had misbehaved while she was teaching. He had thrown pieces of paper at other students, and had talked out repeatedly. When the students arrived that day, many of them told me that they liked the substitute teacher.

Steve, on the other hand, said he did not like her at all. When I asked him why he told me he had his hand raised many times throughout the day, but never got called on by the substitute. This incident, combined with how he usually behaves, lends credibility to Dreikurs' (1968) mistaken goals of misbehavior. He had a need for attention that was not being filled through participation that was not being filled, and as a result, his behavior deteriorated.

Tiffany did not fall into any of the categories of mistaken goals for misbehavior although the parallel observer and I believed her actions were goal driven. She has a need to be needed, and a need to be the fixer. She accomplishes this goal by enjoying the humor of others, participating in a helpful manner, and using positive non-verbal facial expressions. Her goal driven behavior agrees with Adler's philosophy (1931) that the individual acts as a unified whole that expresses itself in a consistent behavior pattern.

Steve's definition of belonging is multi-faceted. He believes that belonging means that you belong to someone or something, and that you know and feel comfortable around the others in your group. In return others know you and your likes and interests. Also included in Steve's definition of sense of belonging is when he experiences success at a task, is recognized by peers or the teacher, complimented by peers or the teacher, called on in class, and when helped by another student. In addition, Steve believes that working hard on assignments and being kind to other students make up his sense of belonging

Tiffany defined sense of belonging as being a part of a group. Sense of belonging also includes others wanting you to be present. Also included in Tiffany's definition of sense of belonging is being nice to others, taking part in what is going on, listening to

others, participating in class, and eye contact. In addition, Tiffany believes that looking at people and smiling, being nice, and showing others you are interested in them make up her sense of belonging.

Both informants' definition of belonging agrees with Wehlage (1989) who said that belonging in a school group consists of more than just being enrolled. It means that social bonds have been formed. Although each child began their description with being physically present in the classroom group, they defined belonging at a deeper level. Steve went on to say that others know his likes and dislikes, and Tiffany said that others want you to be there.

Goodenow (1993) stated that a child's sense of belonging includes the level to which a student feels "accepted, respected, included and supported by others in the school environment" (p. 80). This is also true for both informants. Steve gives a great deal of importance to others complimenting him, and to noticing he has done something well. Tiffany also believes that a sense of belonging includes others wanting her to be included and accepted by the group.

Both Steve and Tiffany see their participation as a crucial component of their sense of belonging. This seems to support what Finn (1979) asserted in his Participation-Identification model. He believes that students who have a sense of belonging in the school community will become committed to the goals of the group and will engage participate. Steve and Tiffany's actions and verbalization of belonging support this theory.

Implications For the Use of Class Meetings

Two of the findings in this study, participation and compliments seem to lend support to the use of class meetings as a strategy to foster a sense of belonging. The format for class meetings requires that students give compliments to each other before every meeting. It also requires a great deal of individual participation on the part of the students. These procedures have a direct relationship to the findings of this study.

In reflecting upon my classroom and others I have been in, I couldn't think of a time where each of the students heard on a regular basis, a compliment or appreciation from their peers. Even though my classroom provided a generally supportive climate, consistent sharing of compliments by peers was not a normal part of the school day. Therefore, a situation needs to be created to ensure that the children hear the compliments of their classmates. Rather than come up with separate constructs for both compliments and participation, it would be ideal to combine them through one strategy.

Goodenow (1992) who recommends the development of programs designed to foster a sense of belonging in school supports the idea that a construct should be designed and used in schools to promote a sense of belonging.

Class meetings require that each child participates and encourages the sharing of his or her comments and thoughts. Because class meetings are regarded as separate from the "normal" school day, the children seem to be able to listen to others without passing judgement on what they say. I believe that this encourages students to participate who would be unlikely to share in regular classroom discussion.

Implications for Teachers

As a teacher, I have always been aware of the need to call on a variety of students throughout the day and within individual subject areas. However, I was surprised to discover how important participation was to their sense of belonging. I also found it interesting to see the many different forms participation can take. The informants participated by answering questions, helping other students, following directions in other classrooms, and including others at recess. Therefore, as teachers, it is important to be sure that every student participates in class discussion at least once in every subject area. I also think teachers need to recognize and allow students to help one another with academic work and to set up situations in which the students can share their knowledge with peers. This concept is supported by Goodenow (1992) who believes that reciprocal teaching and cooperative learning will help foster a sense of belonging.

It may also be important for teachers to teach students strategies to help them feel they belong. Some students may need to learn how to send positive non-verbal messages to others. Additionally, some students may need to learn how to enjoy the humor of their classmates, if they have a difficult time initiating humor.

Implications for Future Research

A need exists to further study compliments and their relationship to a child's sense of belonging. If it could be corroborated that compliments enhance a child's sense of belonging, it would make sense to include class meetings in the school day.

Also, this study seems to suggest that a sense of belonging could consist of different components for different individuals. It would be of value to discern what other components could make up a child's perception of their sense of belonging. Once this is

done, future researchers could examine the effectiveness of procedures on the components of belonging. It would also enable teachers to foster, in the classroom, as many of the components that make up children's sense of belonging as possible.

Also important for future researchers to examine is how sense of belonging changes or exists outside the classroom such as in the cafeteria, at recess or during classes conducted by other teachers. It would be important to know if the same types of components make up a child's sense of belonging in an alternate setting within the same school, or if different criteria exist.

Internal validity could have been improved in this study if a formal member check was completed with each informant. Future research similar to this study should include member checking. This will most likely produce results that more closely reflect the perceptions of children.

For the informants in this study, sense of belonging seemed to have consisted of two types of components. The first type involved how the students felt based on how they were treated or accepted by their peers. The second type involved the actions students took to assert their own sense of belonging for themselves. This is encouraging because it allows individuals some power over their own sense of belonging. The two types of components seem to be interlocking, and I don't believe either one could exist without the other. This discovery needs to be researched further to determine its generalizability to the general public.

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Appendix B

Interview Two Questions-Male Informant

1. In the last interview, you said you were a little uncomfortable at the start of the year, because there were some new students, but now that you know them, you are comfortable. How did you get to know the new students?

2. What does “belonging” mean to you?

3. What does it feel like to belong?

4. What things do we do in the classroom that you think help you feel like you are a part of the group?

5. Are there things adults or kids do that make you feel like you are not part of the group?

6. What things do you do to help yourself feel like you are a part of our classroom community?

Appendix C

Interview Two-Female Informant

1. I noticed in a recent class meeting that you were laughing and looking at your two friends when I was asking you to scoot closer to Tyler. I also noticed that you only moved a tiny bit. Could you tell me about why you didn't want to scoot over, and why you were looking at your friends?

2. What does belonging mean to you?

3. What does it feel like to belong?

4. What things do we do in this classroom that you think help you feel like you are part of the group?

5. Are there things that adults or kids do that make you feel like you are not part of the group?

6. What things do you do to help yourself feel like you are a part of our classroom community?

Appendix D

Interview Three Questions-Male Informant

1. You mentioned in another interview that your Cub Scout leader made you feel like a part of the group when he partnered you up and had group activities like soccer. What can teachers do to help you feel like you belong?
2. I remember at the beginning of the year, you seemed to have a lot of trouble getting along with other people you sat by. But that doesn't seem to be a problem anymore. Can you tell me about that?
3. I've noticed in the mornings you change the date on the board quite often. Why do you do that? How does it make you feel?

Appendix E

Interview Three Questions-Female Informant

1. In the first interview, you said that a particular friend wants you to be her best friend and want you to only play with her and another girl. How has that situation been going? Do you think you spend less time with other kids as a result? Why?

2. In the last interview you brought up class meetings. What do they give you an opportunity to do?

3. I noticed in the listening center that you rewound the tape several times to hear a funny part. Do you think a sense of humor is important if you want to get along with somebody, or feel you belong in a group?

4. Are there ever times when you want to do something, but you decide not to because your friends want you to do something else?

5. I noticed that you look to a particular friend when something funny happens, or when something out of the ordinary occurs. Why do you do that? What does it mean?

Appendix G

Interview Four Questions-Female Informant

1. Is it important to show other kids you are interested in what they are doing, and what is happening in their lives?
2. Is important to be helpful to other kids?
3. Think about how you became a part of other groups. What was done by the adults that helped you feel like you were a part of/belonged with the other kids?
4. What can teachers do to make you feel like you belong in the classroom group more?

Appendix H

Interview Five Questions-Male Informant

1. Do you think your participation in sports outside of school gave you confidence when you entered the classroom group? Why?

2. Do you think being complimented in sports outside of school gave you confidence when you entered the classroom group? Why?

3. You said in a previous interview that you thought people expected you to know the answers when you raise your hand. What do you think others would think of you or do if you didn't know the answers? How would you feel about yourself? What made you think others had this expectation of you?

4. Do you think the teacher should always encourage those who raise their hand and are wrong? Would it help them feel more a part of the group?

5. Do you think discussing problems and allowing everyone who wants a chance to talk to do so, like we do in class meetings, would help kids feel like they belong?

6. When I say "belong", to me that word means that you feel like a valuable part of the classroom group and that you do things to help the group work better. What word(s) would you use to name feeling like a valuable part of the group who helps make it run better?

Appendix I

Interview Five Questions-Female Informant

1. Do you think your participation in sports outside of school gave you confidence when you entered the classroom group? Why?

2. Do you think being complimented in sports outside of school gave you confidence when you entered the classroom group? Why?

3. You said in a previous interview that people expect you to be nice and not to talk in class. What do you think people would think of you or do if you weren't like that? What would you think of yourself?

4. Do you think discussing problems and allowing everyone who wants a chance to talk to do so, like we do in class meetings, would help kids feel like they belong?