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The Perceptions of Peer Tutoring Among Middle School Teachers Within Multi-Ability Classrooms.

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THE PERCEPTIONS OF PEER TUTORING AMONG MIDDLE SCHOOL
TEACHERS WITHIN MULTI-ABILITY CLASSROOMS

by

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DEDICATION

I want to give thanks and honor to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for the strength and ability to complete this monumental task. I don't know where I would be without the love and support from my wife Jeannie, who was my most patient cheerleader. There were times when I did not think I could finish—I am so glad that she did. This is also dedicated to my family, who sacrificed time, finances, and attention to allow me to complete this study. This is dedicated to my Mom, who taught me to never stop trusting God, even when I don't feel like I can make it. This is also dedicated to my Dad, who challenged me to finish my graduate program. I will always remember the day when he lovingly—but firmly—told me that I had something in my life that was unfinished. It was with that encouragement I went back to graduate school to finish.

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of the study was to explore middle school teachers' perceptions of peer tutoring and its utilization within multi-ability classrooms. The primary questions addressed in this study were focused on perceptions of teachers within multi-ability classrooms and the effects of teaching in a multi-ability classroom on the teachers' lesson plans, teaching styles, and the utilization of peer tutoring.

The participants in this study included 10 middle school teachers from a suburban public school and 9 middle school teachers from a suburban private school. A phenomenological study was conducted to gather information related to the following research questions: (1) What are the perceptions of middle school teachers in regards to how multi-ability classrooms modify the preparation? (2) What are the perceptions of middle school teachers regarding peer tutoring and its implementation in the classroom? (3) What are the perceptions of middle school teachers with regard to peer tutoring as an effective teaching strategy in the multi-ability classroom? and (4) What are the perceptions of middle school teachers regarding peer tutoring and its effect on community in the classroom?

Three themes emerged from the data collected from public and private school teachers: (1) Educators find that multi-ability classrooms require differentiated instruction to be a successful teaching strategy among lower level students. (2) Peer tutoring was perceived as a beneficial teaching strategy for lower achieving students as (Lower achieving students were classified as those "below present grade level" regardless

of the cause of the deficiency.) (3) Students respond to peer tutoring in a more positive manner than teacher instruction because of possible peer intimidation by teachers in the classroom. Study results also revealed one theme that was exclusive to the public middle school teachers: community in the classroom. Community in the classroom, which seemed to create a "family" atmosphere, is perceived as an essential element for the success of peer tutoring. While both groups of teachers expressed the importance of community, participants from public schools felt that the atmosphere created a "family" feeling, which is what made the idea of community important regarding to peer tutoring. The characteristics of a "family-type" community included security and belonging for all members of the community.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The current study investigates middle school teachers' perceptions of peer tutoring in multi-ability classrooms and the influence of peer tutoring on the "sense of community" in the classroom. By evaluating the perceptions of middle school teachers in reference to the use of peer tutoring, possible misconceptions about and lack of the understanding of peer tutoring can be addressed and corrected, thus enabling teachers to utilize this historically successful strategy. The perceptions of the teacher participants in the current study concerning peer tutoring will focus on its success as a teaching strategy, its ease of implementation, how it can be used to modify lesson plans due to multiple levels of student ability in the classroom, and finally how it can be successful in helping to foster a sense of community in the classroom.

Historically, the one-room schoolhouse, a model for the education of students in the early stages of education in America, had one teacher and several students that spanned a number of grade levels. All students were taught in the same classroom by one teacher, with the goal of providing content mastery for each student. Will Fischel (2009) describes the process of education in the one room schoolhouse. Fischel (2009) states:

> …school districts once numbered in the hundreds of thousands, most of them governing a single, one-room rural school. Such schools had a pedagogical method that was much different than that used today. Children were not divided into age-specific cohorts, rather each was taught the same standard lesson each day. In one-room schools, children were divided into "tutorial-recitation" groups, not grades. Recitation group membership was not by age but by previous accomplishment. (p. 1)

With many public school classrooms reaching capacity or near capacity, all students in the same classroom may not be on the same cognitive level as far as content mastery, skill mastery level, or educational ability is concerned. At the beginning of each

school year, students will start at the same point within the curriculum, but each student's prior knowledge may not be the same. This challenge, as previously stated, is not a new phenomenon for today's educators. Although the inherent causes of these challenges are different, the challenges of modern-day educators do mimic the challenges of teachers during all other eras of education. Ehly and Larson (1976) discuss the history of peer tutoring based on the notion that "children have helped one another to learn since antiquity. In early America, older pupils in one-room schoolhouses frequently helped younger pupils with their lessons" (p. 475). Rekrut (1994) provides a good overview of the daily activity of students in the one-room schoolhouse:

> In the monitorial system, one schoolmaster had responsibility for a large number of children, so older and more able students were trained to teach what they learned (largely the basic 3 R's reading, writing and arithmetic) to younger children, and monitor their practice. (p. 356)

When questioned, both present and former educators will share many different teaching strategies that they use to help students reach their potential within the multi-ability classroom. Student potential in the classroom refers to a student reaching the inherent ability or capacity for growth and development within the classroom. The role of an educator working to help each student to reach their potential can be marred by problems that are seemingly out of the hands of educators. These problems are not a lack of motivation or an issue of commitment or dedication to the task, but they exist in classrooms today due to other factors in the classroom. According to Ehly and Larsen (1976):

> In the 1960's, programs in which children helped other children were in effect on a large scale. The term "peer tutoring" was created for the individualized tutoring

of one pupil by another. Peer tutoring is in progress when a child teaches a school-related subject to another child. (p. 475)

Although the physical dynamics of class have shifted from the one-room schoolhouse to the modern-day classroom, the challenge of having students in the same classroom that are on different cognitive levels still exists. The problem that is prevalent in the modern-day classroom pertains to students with differing levels of mastery and cognition in any given subject. According to Wang (1984):

> A major complicating factor in this purposeful design and use of learning environments is the diversity in the requirements of individual students for achieving given outcomes. Thus, adapting school learning environments to each student's unique needs and capabilities, and enhancing each student's capability to respond effectively to the demands of the environment to attain the intended outcomes, have continued to pose a challenge to educators. (p. 161)

This phenomenon is not new to America's educational system. In addition, the practice of peer tutoring resulting from students' differing levels of mastery can be traced back to ancient Greek society. Research by Fogarty and Wang (1982) indicates that cross-age peer tutoring to help facilitate instruction on different levels can be observed throughout history. Topping (1996) suggests:

> …that peer tutoring is a very old practice, traceable back at least as far as the ancient Greeks. Archaic definitions of peer tutoring perceived the peer tutor as a surrogate teacher, in a linear model of the transmission of knowledge, from teacher to tutor to tutee. Later, it was realized that the peer tutoring interaction was qualitatively different from that between a teacher and a student, and involved different advantages and disadvantages. (p. 322)

The practice of peer tutoring was also observed in working-class English schools during the Industrial Revolution. Resulting from school budgeting woes in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, peer tutoring became an effective way of giving underprivileged male children an opportunity at a public education. According to Hager (1959), this

introduced the first systematic approach to peer tutoring, which is credited to Andrew Bell, superintendent of the Military Male Asylum at Egmore located in England.

Throughout history, a lack of resources within educational systems is not a new problem. In the late 1800s, America's education horizon was filled with one-room schoolhouses with limited resources. These schoolhouses had only one teacher and thus multiple students with different learning styles. Today, the phenomenon exists due primarily to two factors: social promotion and the mobilization of society.

According to the U.S. Department of Education (1999), social promotion is defined as:

> …the practice of allowing students who have failed to meet performance standards and academic requirements to pass on to the next grade with their peers instead of completing or satisfying the requirements. Promoting students in this way is called social promotion because it is often carried out in the presumed interest of a student's social and psychological well-being, without regard to achievement. Retention, sometimes viewed as the only alternative to social promotion, is a policy that holds back students who have failing grades at the end of a school year. Retention is most often a policy of *repetition*—students are given an additional year to repeat a grade to go over the same academic content, often taught the same way, that they failed to master the previous year. (pp. 5–6)

Moving students forward using social promotion without mastery of essential skills allows a student to advance that is not prepared or academically ready to progress to the next level, which broadens the gap between the upper-level and lower-level students in the classroom. As Labaree (2004) describes, "administrators and progressives argued that holding students back like this for reasons of academic failure was grossly inefficient, since in many districts it was taking the average student ten years to complete eight grades" (p. 146). The moving forward of students who did not complete the requirements of a specific grade but moved on to the next grade was the beginning of what came to be

known as social promotion, which allows a student who has not mastered a specific

subject or grade to be advanced to the next level. Crain (2003) notes that "standards

advocates rail against social promotion. It's unfair to students, they say, to promote them

if they haven't mastered the material in the prior grade. Schools must insist on grade

retention—holding back—when necessary" (p. 159).

Another factor of multi-ability classrooms is the mobilization of society. Families

are more mobile nowadays and move from state to state at a far greater rate than families

did in the 19th century. Due to the increased relocation of students from one school

system to another, state standards adopted in one school system may not be similar in

content and level of mastery in comparison to their new school and thus leaves a student

not fully prepared to excel in the school they are presently attending. Siddiqui, Yeo, and

Zadnik (2002) suggest that "some of these students come from schools that maintain very

high teaching standards and develop conceptual learning, while the others come from

schools with normal teaching standards where subjects may have been taught in a passive

learning environment" (pp. 5−6). Regardless of the reasons that a student may be lacking

in skills, a teacher is expected to come up with organized methods to reach students in the

most effective ways possible. In an article written from a parent's perspective, Boer

(2001) reflects upon the expectation of a parent as he states:

> I hope that they can appropriately apply methods and strategies for dealing with
> children in all ways, not just academically or example, teachers know full well
> that children grow, develop, and learn in different ways and through individual
> processes. Teachers must then have the competence to perceive student levels and
> provide direction and instruction beginning at those levels. If my children are
> developmentally more immature than the others in the class, then the teacher's
> behavioral directions and instructional techniques need to be different for them. In

this case, perhaps my children would need more specific directions and more direct instruction. (p. 52)

Whether or not early educators labeled this method of utilizing other students within the classroom to serve as tutoring as peer tutoring is unclear. Historically, educators utilized the resources that were available in their classrooms. Strom (1978) points to this use of resources "in the USA, the one-room schoolhouse and peer teaching probably began at the same time. The practice was not always effective, but it did recognize children as capable of teaching peers" (p. 76). Because of limited resources, Lippitt and Lippitt (1968) noted that:

> Teachers in one room schools often called upon their older students to help teach the younger ones. They did so in the belief that young children would benefit from the extra attention and help they got from their tutors and that the older children were proud to be cast as assistant teachers, would be motivated to improve their own school work. (p. 24)

One factor that contributes to the multi-ability classroom that was evident in early schoolhouse and is also present in modern-day schools is the wide variety of learning styles and the pace of learning among students within the same grade. Hart (1998) documented the lack of success with these strategies, explaining that:

> None of the educational reforms of the past decade, introduced with the aim of raising standards, has had as its focus to challenge or displace the idea that individuals are endowed with a fixed ability which determines the upper limits of their potential for learning in school. If anything, their impact has been to reaffirm assumptions of differential ability, as the basis for establishing standards for National Curriculum assessment, and for devising fair means of compiling league tables of school effectiveness based on the 'value added' by the school. (p. 153)

The lack of differentiated instruction is one factor that contributes to the challenges of the multi-ability classroom; however, it is not the only factor. In previous studies (Bloom, 1984; Lepper, Aspinwall, Mumme, & Chabay, 1990) that have examined

the issues of tutoring and the multi-ability classroom, success has been shown in many different subjects. Slaven (1987) demonstrates that there is not a justification to have ability groups and that, in fact, multi-age, cross-grade groups supported achievement. According to Topping (1996), "in sixty-five studies with control groups, tutored students out-performed controls in forty-five. There was again evidence that tutor training produced larger sizes of experimental effect" (p. 326). According to Lloyd (1999):

> …, the diversity in a multi-age class could prove beneficial to an underachiever. There are many reasons why a child chooses to underachieve, in terms of someone else's assessment of potential, but one common reason is inappropriate curriculum. A teacher committed to a multi-age class is more likely to have different expectations of different students and consequently to be less rigid in his/her approach to activities. The freedom to explore in ways which might be different from the ways of others could encourage underachievers to be more motivated. (p. 190)

Peer tutoring has been used effectively within the disciplines of music, math, reading, and other subjects in which there is an easy and identifiable process of teaching among peers. As Elliot (1973) notes, "structured tutoring, while providing the student tutor with the systematic and scientific approaches to learning advanced by Skinner, retains the positive qualities of human interaction and socialization" (p. 537). With the use of a structured tutoring program, studies have shown that peer tutoring works effectively either among children around the same age or in situations where the tutor is a little older than the student being helped. Sheldon (2001) remarks that "peer and cross-age tutoring, characterized by children teaching other children, has many benefits. It has been associated with increases in student achievement, problem-solving skills, independence, and self-initiative for tutors and tutees" (p. 33).

Educators express that in peer tutoring situations within the classroom, not only does the student being tutored (the tutee) benefit from this relationship, but the tutor also gains reinforcement, subject mastery, and even a personal sense of accomplishment as a student. This dual benefit was highlighted by McGee, Kaufman, and Nussen (1977), who stated that both the student being tutored and the student doing the tutoring is successful in "both social and academic behavior."

It should not be concluded that peer tutoring is the magic formula for all education settings within the classroom. Prior research (Bremmer, 1972; Davis, 1967; Devries & Edwards, 1972; Nurith Bar-Eli et al., 1998; Richer, 1973) shows that some teachers have found success utilizing peer tutoring, whereas some have not been as successful. Furthermore, Lloyd (1990) articulates the safety of multi-age classrooms:

> Many good studies have been done and many conclusions offered. Perhaps the least controversial way of expressing any overall tendency is that there is no evidence of any disadvantage to a child who is a member of a multi-age class. Tests of academic achievement consistently show either the same or slightly improved scores from children in multi-age classes. (p. 190)

Peer tutoring has been successfully used throughout the decades, such as in the early days of American education and during the 1960s and 1970s, but it has later been shelved for other practices or teaching strategies. According to Sheldon (2001), "peer and cross-age tutoring, characterized by children teaching other children, has many benefits. It has been associated with increases in student achievement, problem-solving skills, independence, and self-initiative for tutors and tutees." Thelen (1968) also supports peer tutoring and the utilization of students, as he notes that "tutoring programs have so far been conceived, planned, and supervised by teachers, but there is no reason why students could not shoulder much of this responsibility" (p. 229).

Peer tutoring can elevate levels of volunteerism and positive attitudes toward school. When students move from one school district to another, they oftentimes fall behind based on differences in state standards within the curriculum being taught. This idea of falling behind, and thus not being on the same academic level, not only causes a break in the "community" of the classroom, but it can also lead to more long-term problems in students' educational features. These long-term problems are described by Lee and Burkham (2003), as they note that "there is a difference between the exact moment when students leave school and the process of disengaging from school that begins well before they arrive at the moment when they leave school" (p. 357).

Lee and Burkam (2003) also elude to this long-term effect, yet they observe the dropout rates of students and the reasons for this. "Both qualitative and quantitative studies suggest that students who leave high school before graduating often cite lack of social support as one reason for doing so" (p. 356). Studies have been conducted (such as the Equality of Educational Opportunity Study, which is also known as the Coleman Study, and a study by Jencks, 1972) to examine social capital, defined as the relationship between a student and a teacher; it is shown that the amount of social capital is in direct correlation with school dropout rates.

Context of the Problem

Classrooms filled with students on different cognitive levels, students achieving at different rates, and students with different learning styles date back to the beginning of education. According to Lou et al. (1996), "contemporary classrooms are notable for the number and diversity of students who occupy them" (p. 423). Teachers continue to find strategies and tools to accommodate both ends of the spectrum of their students. Lotan

(2006) describes this ongoing challenge by saying that "many classrooms today include

students who have a wide range of previous academic achievement and different levels of

receptive and productive proficiency in the language of instruction" (p. 1). Lotan (2006)

also shows how these types of challenges affect teachers, suggesting that these

classrooms "pose considerable pedagogical challenges for teachers and administrators"

(p. 1) and that these challenges interfere with teachers' desire to meet the needs of all

students. Teachers are saddled with greater responsibility for their students as far as

success and mastery within the classroom are concerned. In looking at responsibility and

accountability, Miller (2005) recommends that:

> …with accountability imposed by the No Child Left Behind Act and the increased
> expectancy for inclusion of all students in the regular school population, teachers
> are finding themselves in classrooms of diverse learners, including students with
> emotional / behavioral disorders with many classrooms reaching capacity. (p. 25)

Although teachers have, for many years, shared the responsibility of educating the

students in their classrooms with administration and parents, it may appear that most of

that responsibility has indeed been delegated to the teachers. No longer are teachers seen

as factors in a student's success, but many teachers are seen as the *sole* factor of the

success of these students. If the student is successful, then this is not an issue for teachers,

but if the student does not succeed for whatever reason, then the teacher is the one to

blame. Expectations of teachers entering the field of education and these teachers'

experiences with responsibility can differ greatly. McCann and Johannessen (2004)

conducted a study with teachers and found that "stressful experiences, such as an unruly

class, a phone call from an angry parent, or a supervisor's highly critical assessment of a

lesson, are generally unexpected by novice teachers" (p. 140). These unexpected events

serve to further erode the confidence of 1st-year teachers. The lack of confidence that can be produced by stressful situations can be harmful to the learning atmosphere of the classroom.

The issues that result from differing student ability in the same classroom can be more challenging when coupled with the feelings of some of the students that shy away from additional help. Ehly and Larsen (1976) note that many adults have negative expectations about children's interest in learning activities, and some adults are beset by inhibitions about remedial work with "slow learners."

The current study will seek to identify reasons peer tutoring, which has been so successful historically, is often relegated to the "back burner" of pedagogical strategies. The perceived negativity associated with peer tutoring can inhibit a teacher's application of the various forms of peer tutoring. Lesh (1997) gives a strong mandate for teachers by stating "we need to go beyond mere assertions that humans construct knowledge and begin to explore mechanisms that contribute to the 'construction of knowledge'" (p. 398). What are the challenges consistently faced by teachers that do, in fact, utilize peer tutoring within their classroom? The increased pressure placed on teachers and the effects of this pressure can be attributed to standards dictated in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. According to Porter-Magee (2004), NCLB teachers must not only continue to encounter multi-ability classrooms but must now have set levels of achievement. Guisbond and Neil (2004) note that "we believe that rather than threatening educators with sanctions based on test results, our more effective approach focuses on gathering multiple forms of evidence about many aspects of schooling and using them to support school improvements" (p. 12). According to the National Council of Educational

Statistics (NCES) (as noted by Guisbond & Neil, 2004), "only about three in ten

American students now score at the proficient level on NAEP reading and math tests"

(NCES, 2004). Thus, within a few years more than a decade, all students are expected to

do as well as only a third now do—a goal far more stringent than simply "grade level" (p.

13). Statistics taken from 2009 did not show significant improvement from 2004,

according to NAEP figures. Teachers do not predetermine the students that are placed in

their classrooms, yet they are expected to be able to meet all of their educational needs.

Porter-Magee (2004) states, "it is often said that teachers can control neither who ends up

in their classroom nor the personal baggage those students bring into it" (p. 26).

Misconceptions about Peer Tutoring

Peer tutoring, used as an alternative teaching strategy, encourages student

participation in the learning process. Unfortunately, classroom teachers do not find that

alternative method of instruction useful or credible. Joan Gaustad (1993) of the

University of Oregon makes reference to one of the potential misconceptions of peer

tutoring, stating that "simply putting two students together won't result in successful

tutoring. Untrained tutors--whether adults or students--may resort to threats of

punishment and scornful put-downs" (p. 3). Some teachers may have tried some form of

peer tutoring, only to become frustrated and to never view it again as a viable option.

Common misconceptions held by teachers center on a lack of clear understanding of the

goal of peer tutoring. Gordon (2005) examines the reason some teachers do not utilize or

have a difficulty utilizing peer tutoring. Gordon states that:

> One of the chief obstacles is the difficulty in overcoming the entrenched culture
> of schooling. The predominant images of being student and teacher can best
> summed up by the medieval monastery rule, it belongeth to the master to speak

and to teacher: it becometh the disciple to be silent and to listen. (p. 14)

Teachers could possibly feel that peer tutoring does not fit into the modern-day classroom because it does not fit into their ideal characteristics of a teacher, as compared to the teachers they had when they attended school. Furthermore, Gordon (2005) addresses this possible discrepancy between the teachers' framework based on their past experiences and new teaching strategies by stating:

> It is not very surprising that most teachers are not guided by current critical-thinking instructional models, but by the powerful mental models of teaching that shaped their own behavior as students. Other community members are also very suspicious of the teaching methods that are different from those they remember as part of their own schooling experiences. Instead, we have the public calling for back to basics, real, or fundamental education. The recent increased interest in preserving or studying one-room schools is perhaps part of this yearning to go back to "authentic education practices. (p. 14)

Oftentimes, the lack of understanding of a specific program or teaching strategy can not only cause educators to become resistant to change but can also lead to an educator's total abandonment of considering the program as a possible tool in their educational toolbox. With misinformation being a major hindrance for innovation and change, it is vital to explore the experiences of teachers in multi-ability classrooms and gain a more transparent picture of what educators' experiences are. If all of the benefits of peer tutoring that have been described in the literature are indeed available to educators, then the question that was posed by Rabow, Chin, and Fahimian (1999) is relevant: "Why isn't everyone tutoring? Everyone will admit that it sounds like a good idea (it doesn't take tax dollars. and it gives everyday citizens a chance to do something personally)" (p. 20). However, misconceptions toward peer tutoring, such as (1) unwarranted anxiety, (2) inferior instruction by the tutor, and (3) benefits not worth the

time invested may continue to hinder this pedagogical strategy from increased daily use in the multi-ability classroom.

Exploring the misconceptions about peer tutoring begins with the perception that peer tutoring causes undue fear and anxiety for the educator that tries to implement peer tutoring in the classroom. Although education is replete with tradition (e.g., the one-room schoolhouse, cleaning chalk boards as punishment, giving apples to teachers), the pedagogy of teachers is not without these same elements of tradition. Traditions that may include strong teacher leadership in the classroom, teachers being the sole resource for learning, as taught in a behaviorist theory of education, are found entrenched in today's classrooms. With strongly entrenched education traditions, resistance to new pedagogical strategies is understandable. As Rossman, Corbett, and Firestone (1988) note:

> …tampering with the sacred is most likely to elicit responses such as 'I will quit before I go along with that,' or 'they'll have to fire me first.' Such anomic situations are debilitating. Teachers' behavior under these conditions may seem irrational and out of sync with what are viewed. (p. 12)

A teacher's anxiety can impede necessary experimentation. Rabow, Chin, and Fahimian (1999) identify anxiety as one of the road blocks that impede teachers' involvement with peer tutoring, based on their own misconceptions from their experiences with peer tutoring. "Fear and anxiety are natural emotions we often feel in our daily encounters and interactions with others. New situations such as tutoring, where people start out as strangers, frequently heighten these feelings" (p. 1). Oftentimes, teachers will not implement a teaching strategy that is associated with fear or anxiety. However, teachers must be willing initiate a peer tutoring program and must do so with an unconditional acceptance of the students involved. Using "potential of fear and

14

anxiety" as a reason for not allowing peer tutoring, educators continue to view peer

tutoring as a strategy that will not be used in their classrooms. But fear is not the only

reason that some educators refuse to use peer tutoring, as there are other misconceptions

as well. These misconceptions play a role in overall educational philosophy, as noted by

van den Berg (2002):

> The results of several studies show teachers' meanings to be very existential, highly personal, resistant to persuasion, and quite evaluative. Teachers' meanings are also seen to determine the amount of energy they are willing to invest in their work. Relative to the technical or intellectual qualities of teachers, however, their meanings are often quite intangible, sometimes undetectable, and not always manageable. (p. 580)

Another misconception held by some educators is that a peer tutoring program

can be implemented easily with little to no preparation. These educators feel that simply

placing students into pairs and then giving them work is the basis for an effective peer

tutoring program. However, as Samway, Whang, and Pippitt (1995) express:

> We may be excited by the success stories that we hear and read about, and vow to implement such a program immediately. However, despite our good intentions, many cross-age tutoring programs die a quiet death almost as soon as they are introduced. In some cases, it is because the two teachers are not equally committed to the program and do not spend much time sharing and planning. (p. 15)

Any pedagogical strategy that shows the potential of success must be carefully

planned and thoughtfully executed to achieve the maximum level of success and the

greatest benefit for students. If an educator has a misconception concerning the amount of

time required to implement peer tutoring, this is reflected in the educator's abandonment

of the use of peer tutoring. Samway et al. (1995) remind teachers that "successful

programs do not appear overnight, as in a fairy tale" (p. 15).

Another misconception about peer tutoring is that the quality of instruction suffers when a tutor is instructing a student in contrast to a teacher. As Topping (1996) states, "the quality of tutoring from a peer tutor may be a good deal inferior to that from a professional teacher, although this should not be assumed" (p. 325). This misconception of peer tutoring is further advanced by McKellar (1986), who stated that "this certainly can inhibit educators from implementing peer tutoring within the classroom. Although the giving of incorrect information did not occur frequently in this study, this behavior was negatively related to the pair's success" (p. 167). Critics suggest that if an educator believes that knowledge can only transferred in one way, then the opportunities to consider peer tutoring as an effective pedagogical strategy are severely limited. Kail (1983) describes this "linear" type of teacher by stating that "our assumption about teaching and learning have been based traditionally on the authority of a linear model. We imagine ourselves standing with knowledge behind us and our students waiting expectantly for the most part, in front of us" (p. 595).

There is a misconception that a student who is being instructed by a fellow student in the role of a tutor will not be provided quality instruction and that allowing a student to be involved in the problem-solving aspect of peer tutoring can lead to more incorrect information being passed along to students. This incorrect or faulty information emerges from students attempting to solve problems using their own ability and the tutors allowing the student to come up with the correct answer and not simply providing the correct response. Merrill, Reiser, Ranney, and Trafton (1992) discuss the danger of this misinformation by stating, "…allowing the students to do most of the problem-solving tutors allow them to learn by doing" (p. 280).

16

As previously stated, misconceptions of peer tutoring can hinder an educator from utilizing peer tutoring as an effective teaching strategy in the multi-ability classroom. It is also vital to investigate the common practices of these teachers as related to classroom management and to explore these teachers' perceptions of peer tutoring. The ways that informed teachers perceive this strategy or, in fact, the extent of use of this strategy in their classrooms remains largely unknown. The exploration of teachers in multi-ability classrooms and the dissection of their experiences can also clarify areas of misinformation about peer tutoring.

In examining the experiences of teachers in the multi-ability classroom, it was interesting to see factors emerge that identified these teachers' own exposure to peer tutoring during their educational training. Just as any other discipline, the field of education is based on certain pedagogical standards, beliefs, and a theoretical framework on which to build successful educational programs; these things influence and direct the pedagogical strategies that are taught to new teachers. The ways that peer tutoring fits into to this context can also be explored through evaluating the experiences of teachers within the multi-ability classroom. As teachers are exposed to new teaching strategies, Kail (1983) asks:

> Will the habits of our lineal epistemology prove so profoundly established in our institutional and professional lives that collaborative learning in the form of official peer tutoring will be perceived more as an annoyance than a contribution to literacy education? (p. 598)

Purpose of the Study

As dynamics within the classroom continue to change and more classrooms become "multi-ability classrooms" and considering programs such as "No Child Left

Behind" that urge all students in a classroom to reach the same goals, teachers must begin to discover and implement teaching strategies to meet these challenges. These challenges, as previously stated, are what have motivated the inquiry of the current study. The idea of peer tutoring as an effective teaching strategy in the multi-ability classroom can be critical in the search for effective teaching strategies. The ways in which peer tutoring is perceived by educators presently teaching in junior high school and senior high school environments may potentially indicate value in the use of peer tutoring in the classroom

The researcher sought to determine the perceptions of teachers of junior high school and senior high school students concerning the use of peer tutoring as an effective strategy for managing multi-ability classrooms. Data were organized based on the three major misconceptions of peer tutoring as well as the general themes that emerged from the data obtained. The current study contributes to the larger body of knowledge that focuses on pedagogical strategies in multi-ability classrooms. Administrators and other educational leaders who are responsible for the organization and implementation of classroom protocol will also benefit from this study. The information that will be provided in this study will assist administrators in creating a working strategy to assist teachers in the instruction of students with varying ability levels in the multi-ability classroom.

Research Questions

Four research questions will guide the current study:

1. What are the perceptions of middle school teachers in regards to how multi-ability classrooms modify the preparation?

2. What are the perceptions of middle school teachers regarding peer tutoring and its implementation in the classroom?

3. What are the perceptions of middle school teachers with regard to peer tutoring as an effective teaching strategy in the multi-ability classroom?

4. What are the perceptions of middle school teachers regarding peer tutoring and its effect on community in the classroom?

Scope and Limitations

Although every effort was made to ensure trustworthiness, there are limitations to every study. Limitations include the number of participants, time to conduct study and the lack of ability to generalize findings among other educators. The findings of the current study should not be applied to similar situations, nor should broad assumptions be made on the basis of the data gathered. The issue of bias could possibly be raised due to prior knowledge that the researcher has about the schools selected and the freedom of accessibility that the researcher is given to conduct research, interviews, and future studies. Although there is a comfortable relationship between the selected schools and the researcher, this is a minute issue and does not outweigh the benefits of the researcher's access to the schools.

Definitions of Terms

The terms listed here will be referenced throughout the study. These terms have been developed through the literature review (Chapter 2) and will be developed and explored throughout the study.

Peer tutoring: The process of one student (the tutor) offering help and training to another student (the tutee) near the same age to bring the tutee to the same level as the tutor and other students.

Multi-ability classrooms: A classroom containing a blend of students of varying ages, academic abilities, and/or experiences.

Community: A social group linked by common interests through residence in a specific locality, whether or not in physical proximity, whose members perceive themselves as sharing a common ideology, interest, or other characteristic.

Purposeful sampling: A sampling technique based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight into a situation and must therefore select a sample from which the most can be learned.

Nonrandom sampling: A sampling technique used when it cannot be guaranteed that each item has an equal chance of being selected or sampling situation in which selection is based on expert knowledge of the population

Qualitative study: A field of inquiry that is applicable to many disciplines and subject matter. A qualitative researcher's study goal is to gain an in-depth understanding of human behavior. The qualitative method investigates the "why's" and "how's" of decision-making.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Basis of Peer Tutoring

Studies that directly relate to the historical basis, utilization, and perceptions of peer tutoring will be evaluated in this chapter. It is the intent of the researcher to use the extant literature mentioned here to lay the foundation of knowledge about peer tutoring and to help reveal areas where this knowledge is scarce.

The primary focus of this chapter is to investigate the history of peer tutoring, beginning with the ancient Greeks, proceeding to the use of peer tutoring during the 1800s, and moving finally to the use of peer tutoring in the one-room schoolhouses of the earlier days of traditional education.

The secondary focus of this chapter is the use of peer tutoring as an effective teaching strategy, the implementation of this strategy in history, and the application of peer tutoring in modern-day classrooms.

The tertiary focus of this chapter is to examine peer tutoring as a teaching strategy and investigate its use in the multi-ability classroom. Teachers deal with multi-ability classrooms frequently and for several reasons. The use of peer tutoring within the multi-ability classrooms and its past success will be presented here. Teachers may be familiar with a certain teaching strategy but will not implement it in their classrooms due to lack knowledge or ability or because it differs from their educational philosophy.

The History of Peer Tutoring

      Greek influence. According to Mayfield and Vollmer (2007), "peer tutoring is an intervention in which one student provides instruction or academic assistance to another student." Research on peer tutoring shows many educational benefits for those who are tutors and for students in grades kindergarten to 12th grade (Calhoun & Fuchs, 2003). Peer tutoring relationships occur in a school setting and provide supplemental practice for fundamental skills such as spelling, reading, or mathematics. Topping (1996) reminds us that tutoring, and especially peer tutoring, is not a recently discovered teaching strategy. Peer tutoring can actually be traced back to ancient Greek times. According to Fogarty and Wang (1982), cross-age peer tutoring, the process by which students teach each other, has been around for a long time. Deese-Roberts (2000) points back to the ancient Greeks and their association with peer tutoring by stating that "this may have first become part of formal education during ancient Greek and Roman times" (p. 21). The use of peer tutoring, as mentioned by Deese-Roberts, is not confined to that time period or to that region of the world. The early uses of peer tutoring in Greece has an effect on the interaction of teachers, and students in modern times. Moust and Schmidt (1994) note that:

      …students tutoring other students is not an educational innovation of recent times. In the ancient Greece and roman schools, and in the middle ages, teachers regularly required students of older age and higher grades to help them with reading and arithmetic in the classroom. (p. 471)

      Peer tutoring is certainly not a new educational strategy for some teachers. According to Ehly and Larsen (1980), "the process of peer tutoring is certainly not a new concept. Children have been helping and teaching each other for as long as people have banded together with common goals" (p. 10). Peer tutoring and its use by teachers has

been observed for decades in viewing the history of education. Whitman (1988) states, "certainly peer tutoring is not a new concept" (p. 1). Wagner (as cited in Topping, 1996), in presenting a historical perspective, traces peer teaching back to Aristotle's use of archons or student teachers. As Topping (1996) notes:

> Peer tutoring is a very old practice, traceable back at least as far as the ancient Greeks. Archaic definitions of peer tutoring perceived the peer tutor as a surrogate teacher, in a linear model of the transmission of knowledge, from teacher to tutor to tutee. Later, it was realized that the peer tutoring interaction was qualitatively different from that between a teacher and a student, and involved different advantages and disadvantages. (p. 322)

19th-century European influences. Although practices involving some element of peer tutoring were observed in ancient Greek times, peer tutoring gained widespread use in Europe during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The emergence of the use of students to teach other students in a tutoring-based role was result of a lack of resources available to teach the poor children of England.

The practice of peer tutoring was utilized by working-class English schools during the Industrial Revolution. This practice gained acceptance largely due to the shortage of teachers during this time period. Peer tutoring was and still is used due to a paradigm shift concerning students and their roles in learning as well as other factors in education present during the Industrial Revolution. As described by Hager (1959), "In early nineteenth century England, rudimentary school education for many children consisted of learning facts shared by monitors, youngsters of their own age" (p. 164). A lack of successful progress in education was noted during the 18th century. Browning (1921) describes this period as "…a period of mental squalor on both sides of the pond" (p. 49). He also notes that the educational scene in England was in "intellectual

stagnation" at this time. This stagnation was only amplified by the need to educate the poor children of England.

        Contributions of Andrew Bell and John Lancaster. The name that surfaces most when examining the history and concept of peer tutoring during the 19th century is Dr. Andrew Bell. Bell was responsible for instituting a form of peer tutoring at a school in Madras, India. His innovative strategy, inspired by watching children draw in the sand in Madras, helped shape the educational system in England. Andrew Bell was a graduate of Saint Andrew's University of Divinity. In the late 18th century, Bell was the superintendent of the Egmore Male Military Academy in Madras, India. It was here that Bell begins, as Hager (1959) explains, "sensing teaching possibilities in the activity, he had sand brought into his classrooms and drilled the older boys to teach younger students the alphabet by tracing the figures on their individual slates" (p. 164). This use of older students helping younger students became the foundation of many advancements in education, not only the innovative teaching practices of Bell but also other effective education-based practices that sprang up in the future.

        The school setting in which students around the same age are used to assist in the classroom is referred to by Fouts (1974) as "the monitorial school, developed in England in the late eighteenth century Joseph Lancaster and Andrew Bell" (p. 112). Another type of school that existed during the 19th century that had an effect on the use of peer tutoring is the *charity school*. Charity schools were developed to promote the education of the poor children of England. The plight of these poor English children seemed to trigger the development of the *monitorial school*, created by Joseph Lancaster. Browning (1921) alludes that:

…a number of charity schools provided gratuitous instruction for the children of the very poor, but the greater number of schools which pretended to minister to the needs of the children of the working class were the results of private enterprise. (p. 50)

Two key figures, Andrew Bell and Joseph Lancaster, are involved in the creation and implementation of the monitorial system. Bell's idea of an ideal number of students in a classroom was between 24 and 30 pupils in smaller schools and between 24 and 40 in larger schools. This system of using other students or monitors in the classroom was effective in Madras and was adopted in 1798 by Saint Botolph's school in London, according to Hager (1959). Bell's system was a success in the beginning. Meiklejohn (1881) states:

Dr Bell introduced his System; and his energetic efforts to make the little scholars understand and appropriate every even the minutest detail, are still a memory in the parish. 'He hammered it into them,' Mr Strickland used to say, 'like a blacksmith on an anvil.' Education, under the enthusiastic fostering of Bell, spread in the parish, until there were no fewer than thirteen day-schools in it, and three Sunday-schools. The introduction of his plans into one of the disorderly local schools was, he says, 'like magic; order and regularity started up all at once. In half an hour more was.' (p. 35)

Andrew Bell's Madras school system was an inspiration for Joseph Lancaster, the founder of the Lancaster system. The support of Bell by Lancaster is referenced by Salmon (1932), as Lancaster writes, "I ought not to close my account without acknowledging the obligation to Dr. Bell of the Male Asylum at Madras, who so nobly gave up his time and liberal salary, that he might perfect that institution" (p. 23). For many years, Dr. Bell would serve as the forerunner for student-to-student teaching, also known as peer tutoring. Bell's ideas and strategies in the classroom were carried on by Joseph Lancaster.

The ideas that were developed by Dr. Andrew Bell within the walls of the Egmore

Male Military Academy eventually ceased, but they were reignited by Joseph Lancaster,

who was born to a poor shop-keeper in Southwark, London. According to Rayman

(1981), Lancaster's parents desired and envisioned a ministerial career for him because of

their strong religious convictions. It is possible Lancaster's desire to teach the less

fortunate was cultivated at an early age. At only 14 years of age, as noted by Rayman

(1981), Lancaster ran away from home to go to Jamaica and fulfill what he considered

was a calling from God "to teach the poor blacks the Word of God" (p. 4). Poor planning

prevented Lancaster from reaching his destination of Jamaica, and after one tour in the

navy, Lancaster found his way to Bristol, England. His focus on education was sharpened

by his involvement with the Society of Friends, this society which was involved in social

issues and social justice. In 1798, Lancaster finally opened his first school with the

purpose of teaching the poor children of Southwark. Reigart (1916) described Lancaster

as someone that "had many of the qualifications of a great teacher—zeal, self-confidence,

ingenuity in devising methods, intuitive insight into the nature of children, an ardent love

for them and rare power of managing them" (p. 9).

While in Southwark, London, Joseph Lancaster developed an original system of

educational instruction for students, referred to as the Lancasterian system. According to

Upton (1996), Lancaster "developed his method in the late 1790's for us in his royal Free

School in Borough Road, Southwark, London. The Borough Road School was a charity

school, and the poor were Lancasterian education's intended subjects everywhere" (p.

238). The Lancasterian system, which was more detailed than Bell's school in Madras,

involved a bare room with students who were placed into groups. These groups, formed

based on specific characteristic such as age and level of education, were taught by other students or monitors. Rayman (1981) describes that the Lancasterian school system "operated under rigid rules and strict discipline. Absolute control rested with a headmaster who selected and trained the student monitors. They, in turn, taught younger, less educated pupils" (p. 397). This system of utilizing students to teach other students was not only successful in England, but it quickly found success all over Europe (Hager, 1959). This success was noted in an annual report by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions from 1820, as noted by Rayman (1981):

> The school is taught on the Lancasterian plan, and the progress of the children has exceeded our most sanguine expectations. There have been instances of lads 14 or 16 years old, entirely ignorant of our language, who have learned the alphabet in three days; and on the fourth could read and pronounce syllables. We have never seen the equal number of children, in any school, who appeared more promising. (p. 400)

North American influence. The 19th century was also important for the education system in North America; it was during this century that the focus shifted away from private education to more of a "common school." This shift, emerging around the 1840s, was influenced by men like Horace Mann and Henry Barnard. It was also during this time that the number of students getting an education grew, but with this growth came a lack of resources. As the success of the Lancasterian system had been noted in European countries, this system found its way to the United States. As Parker (1910) illustrates, "this system was imported from England in 1806 for us in New York city schools. It derived its name from the use of more capable children as instructors of the others" (p. 388). A message by Governor Wolcott of Connecticut, delivered to the legislature of 1825, is recounted by Russell and Fowle (1826): "…if funds can be obtained to defray the expenses of the necessary preparations, I have no doubt, that

schools on the Lancasterian model ought as soon as possible to be established in several parts of this state" (p. 102).

As previously noted, the Lancasterian system or the monitorial school provided students with educational instruction with a limited supply of teachers, supplies, and resources. According to Upton (1996), "frugality was achieved by teaching the greatest possible number of students in the largest possible space with the fewest possible resources" (p. 240). The use of students to serve as peer tutors was significantly advanced by Lancaster and his system. Although the Lancasterian system was successful, it eventually deteriorated around the mid-19th century. Noted problems that led to the demise of these Lancasterian schools included students deciding to quit school, parents' fears of a quality education, and also a feeling that peer tutors, or monitors, had become "indentured servants bound to the school board until their twenty-first birthdays" (Upton, 1996, p. 251). The ultimate demise of these schools, as described by Warner (1987), suggests that:

> One by one, urban school boards abandoned Lancasterian instruction: Philadelphia surrendered in 1831. Baltimore in 1839, and the District of Columbia in 1844. In 1953, New York, the first to import Joseph Lancaster's method, became the last major city to give it up. (p. 251)

Although the Lancasterian school now ceased to exist, educators enjoyed two aspects of the system and sought to continue this: its ability to manage large groups and the inexpensive cost of education. It was inexpensive because of employed monitors, and it was effective because it embodied the results of a careful study of every detail of classroom management. The monitorial system, which was identified as the Lancasterian system of education, served as a catalyst for the use of peer tutoring during the late 19th and early 20th centuries in America.

28

Knight (1948) notes that "most if not in fact all educational theories and practices in the American colonies came naturally from the mother countries and a few theories and practices came from England to this country after revolution and independence" (p. 54). According to Ehly and Larsen (1976), "children have helped one another to learn since antiquity. In early America, older pupils in one-room schoolhouses frequently helped younger pupils with their lessons" (p. 475). The one-room schoolhouse is often synonymous with the concept of peer tutoring. As described by Strom (1978), "in the USA the one-room schoolhouse and peer teaching probably began at the same time. The practice was not always effective, but it did recognize children as capable of teaching peers" (p. 76). It is from the one-room schoolhouse classroom that the perceived importance of peer tutoring emerges. According to Melaragno (1977), "the idea of using pupils as tutors for other pupils has a long history. During much of that history, tutoring by pupils was a part of the folklore of educational practice" (p. 384). What made the one-room schoolhouse unique to the educational process? The one-room schoolhouse demonstrated the ability of a teacher to utilize older students in the class as a resource, allowing them to assist in the teaching of younger students.

Noted by Ehly and Larsen (1980), early settlers in American had to rely on the more mature of their children to handle home-making and caretaking chores and to teach these tasks to younger siblings, while the parents attended to matters outside of the household. When schooling became possible on community level, children were sent to on-room schoolhouses to receive their instruction.

The one-room schoolhouse contained students of both varying ages and varying levels of ability—a wide range of ability and a myriad of ages were present. This was a

challenge to the lone teacher in the schoolhouse/classroom because instructional activities

had to focus on all of the students in the room. Daily activity in the one-room

schoolhouse was described by Lippitt and Lippitt (1968) as:

> Teachers in one-room schools often called upon their older students to help teach the younger ones. They did so in the hope that younger children benefit from the extra attention and help they get from their tutors and proud to be cast as assistant teachers, would be motivated to improve their own school work. (p. 24)

Research by Ehly and Larsen (1980) suggests that the lack of resources available

to communities and educators in the age of the one-room schoolhouse necessitated peer

tutoring. Having only one teacher and one classroom available was a challenge for early

teachers in America. Although most schools in America have grown to incorporate more

than one classroom and some even have more than one teacher in each classroom, this is

not true in all parts of the world; this same challenge, a one-room school with limited

resources, can be found today in several developing countries. Noted by Birch (1992) in a

discussion of the multi-grade/multi-level teaching context, "many children in developing

countries will experience their only education in such contexts. Peer tutoring, an

important teaching strategy has very positive implications for teacher, pupils and

educational providers" (p. 200). In these developing counties (Birch, 1992), resources are

very limited, including teachers and classroom space. The one-room schoolhouse, which

is virtually nonexistent in America today, is used more effectively in these third-world

countries, and this is largely due to the lack of resources in these countries.

Historical Uses and Implications of Peer Tutoring

As with any teaching strategy, there must be an evident or at least a perceived

benefit before teachers are willing to implement the strategy in their classroom; this

applies to peer tutoring as a teaching strategy. According to the literature (Elliot, 1973;

Miller, 2005; Sheldon, 2001), peer tutoring has provided some measure of success in several areas of the classroom. These benefits are not isolated to one specific subject, but they can be applied across all disciplines. Benefits of peer tutoring as a strategy can be observed in any discipline or subject in which peer tutoring is used.

> Herbert Thelen, a leader in peer teaching movement from the University of Chicago, has observed that the benefits do not seem to depend on the subject matter or on the nature of the lesson plan. What does appear important is that the school formally recognizes the helping relationship. (Strom, 1978, p. 77)

With Strom's suggestion that peer tutoring can be used in many different subjects, it should be noted that Deborah Sheldon, a professor of music at The University of Illinois, strongly supports the use of peer tutoring within the discipline of music and instrumental instruction as well (Sheldon, 2001).

Children are better as teachers than we have thought them to be in the past (Strom, 1978). This success has often caused researchers to differ on the reasons for this success. According to Fogarty and Wang (1982), "some have suggested that the positive academic outcomes of peer tutoring programs may be attributed simply to additional instruction for the tutee and a review of materials for the tutor" (p. 452). Research by Gartner, Kohler, and Reismann (1971), experts peer tutoring, attribute the possible success of peer tutoring to the fact the tutor can focus more on the individual needs of the student, both academically and personally.

Peer tutoring can help strengthen a student's academic weaknesses as well as aid the improvement of a student's social life. Interaction between peer tutors and tutees provides each with a chance to improve interpersonal skills and social interaction skills. Lesh and Kelly (1997) point to the success of peer tutoring in relation to the model of

education that supports this strategy. If a teacher has used the behaviorist model to develop their teaching style, then support for peer tutoring may not be present, but if a teacher leans more toward a constructivist model, then peer tutoring can be viewed as a potentially useful strategy. Lesh and Kelly (1997) suggest that:

> Constructivist models of learning apply not only to children but are statements about human learning generally. The view of constructivism that we adopt builds on work in the cognitive learning movement, most directly on the work of Piaget. That is we view learners as active, purposive, self-regulating and continually adapting agents who structure their environments as well as their own experiences in these environments. (p. 398).

In a constructivist model, the desired outcome is active learning. It is in this model that peer tutoring would be utilized more. Kali (1983) notes that:

> Our assumptions about teaching and learning have been based traditionally on the authority of a linear model. We imagine ourselves standing with knowledge behind us (in our background) and our students waiting, expectantly for the most part in front of us. (p. 595)

This type of educational method of transmission is the standard in most classrooms today. The current behaviorist model of teaching is described by Prawat (1992): "Teachers' views of teaching and learning influence their classroom practice. Currently, these beliefs support traditional practice, best characterized as transmission approach to teaching and an absorptionist approach to learning" (p. 352). Kail (1983) suggests that as teachers, "we think of ourselves thus as the transmitters and interpreters of important cultural knowledge" (p. 595). This mindset among teachers may stifle the possibility of peer tutoring being implemented in classrooms. The previously mentioned success is observed in different areas of the classroom. Peer tutoring has been shown to have a successful impact on the transmission and structure of curriculum, and it has also been a key strategy for managing the multi-ability classroom

Attributes of Peer Tutoring

One way that peer tutoring is rationalized is the idea that it compensates for a lack of resources; there is also strong rationale centered on the benefits of peer tutoring for both the tutor and tutee. As mentioned in Keatinge (1892), the great Moravian teacher John Comenius stated, "He who teachers others, teaches himself" (p. 309), which is supported by Gartner et al. (1971) who similarly state that:

> …because constant repetition does impress a fact indelibly on the mind, but because the process of teaching in itself gives a deeper insight into the subject taught. Within the one-room schoolhouse, learning was taking place outside of tutee that was being tutored. (pp. 14–15)

Research (Ehly & Larsen, 1976; Oakland & Williams, 1975; Ross, 1972) has shown that the tutor that is engaged in the learning process benefits from the peer-tutoring relationship. The learning acquired in a tutoring relationship does not rest solely on the side of the one being tutored, but the student that is tutoring also has an opportunity to review and have his knowledge strengthened as they tutor.

> Fogarty and Wang (1982) elude some investigations of the cross-age peer tutoring relationship have directly examined the potential effects of the peer tutoring process on tutors' attitudes toward school learning and on their self concepts. Several studies have shown that following participation in a tutoring experience, tutors exhibit both more positive attitudes toward teachers and school life. (p. 453)

Strom (1978) notes that "if students are to teach as well as learn in school, they can improve their influence on others, think well of themselves for being responsible and experience the respect of a grateful society" (p. 80). Starting in the late 1800s, each classroom has had a source readily available to teachers: older students who could serve as peer tutors. Whitman (1988) concludes that "constant repetition and deeper insight are reasons on a cognitive level that explain why learning through teaching works" (p. 4).

The concept behind the one-room schoolhouse was the collective grouping of students engaged in cooperative learning and peer tutoring. Older students offering assistance to younger students produced a "community" of learning that yielded great success in those schoolhouses. According to a study supported by The Education Commission of the States:

> Chickering and Gamson (1987) point to the fact that learning is enhanced when it is more like a team effort than a solo race. Good learning, like good work, is collaborative and social, not competitive and isolated. Working with others often increases involvement in learning. Sharing one's own ideas and responding to other' reactions improves thinking and depends understanding. (p. 4)

This team effort has been valuable not only to other students but also to teachers. The use of team efforts in the monitorial-style classrooms of the 19th century and the one-room schoolhouse emerged from the need of resources. A measure of success could be achieved by teachers who would have the resource of students in the class available to assist them in the classroom. This success was not limited to the student being tutored, but there was success for the tutor as well. According to Ehly and Larsen (1980):

> With one teacher to provide that instruction, older or more able students were given the responsibility of teaching younger or less gifted student on a part-time basis. The tutoring arrangements apparently worked. Children were able to learn their lessons even in a multi-grade classroom with only one teacher. (p. 3)

Gartner and Riessman (1993) address the documented success of the various pedagogical implementations of peer tutoring by stating that "research on peer tutoring indicates that the intervention is relatively effective in improving both tutees' and tutors academic and social development" (pp. 14–15). Peer tutoring is easy to implement and "permits the efficient application of the teacher's and peer tutor's skills in the process of individualizing instruction and managing students' classroom behavior" (Kohler &

Greenwood, 1990, p. 307). Academic success among the students in a classroom that may be "behind" can be observed in peer-tutoring situations. Elliot (1973 notes that "In recent years school systems have begun to recognize a phenomenon that resourceful teachers have always known—that students can and do teach each other" (p. 535). Other positive aspects of peer tutoring are observed in the educational benefits gained by the student tutor and not only the student receiving the instruction. Topping (1996) suggests that "peer tutoring is often promoted on the grounds that, for the tutors, it is 'Learning by Teaching'. This view is expanded in the old saying 'to teach is to learn twice'" (p. 324). Not all educators support the heralded benefits of peer tutoring.

Greer (2002) labels the key components of effective tutoring as: (1) high levels of engaged academic time and (2) increased opportunities to respond. Cairo and Craig (2005) state that the main reason for a tutoring relationship is to benefit the student and that this benefit may be in the form of academic help, improvement in study skills, or in providing of social interaction for some. Hattie (2006) suggests that the simplicity of peer tutoring will often mask the deep and meaningful analysis of the process of teaching. The tutoring arrangement provides the tutee the benefit of receiving immediate feedback and clarification on the topics covered during the one-on-one instruction with the tutor. Although the main measured outcome of peer tutoring is achievement (Hattie, 2006), peer tutoring can lead to more positive interpersonal relationships or greater social acceptance, particularly for younger students (Eiserman, 1988).

According to Hattie (2006) "the mere presence of tutoring does not guarantee positive effects" (p. 100). Hattie also mentions that the success of peer tutoring does not necessarily rely on the one on one component of the process. Cairo and Craig (2005)

35

acknowledge that some researchers (e.g., Dean, 2000; Jenkins, Jewell, Leicester, Jenkins, & Troutner, 1991) have found no significant improvement in academic performance resulting from cross-age or peer tutoring. The notion of peer tutoring not having a solid foundation for implementation is supported by Snapp et al. (1972) as well as others (Cohen, Kulik, & Kulik, 1982). Success depends on training of the tutors, the purpose for selecting the tutors, and the quality of the program.

Structure of Peer Tutoring

Peer tutoring is not intended to be a substitute for organized educational structure that with the teacher as the focal point; rather, as McNall (1975) insists, peer teaching is not a technique designed to simply "pacify" students, but it actually helps to give the student more of a personal stake in or more control over his or her learning. Conversely, peer tutoring, according to Beck et al. (1978), is used to assist and supplement rather than replace what we know as the normal structure of teacher-to-pupil learning. Peer tutoring can be helpful for students who need additional practice to help them reach the level of mastery displayed by the majority of the class. In some educational settings, the average class size ranges from 15 to 25 students, with one teacher being responsible for educating all of these students within a limited time frame.

Additional researchers (Beach, 1974; Bloom, Caul, Fristoe, & Thompson, 1986) contend that peer tutoring does not increase achievement for students who are lagging behind other students in the class but that the answer is with ability groupings, in which students are grouped based on ability level and/or performance. As a result, there are two groups of students: upper ability students and lower ability students. According to Marcus and Johnson (1999), those that oppose ability grouping purport that all students

need a strong education and that slower students can achieve more and become more successful when taught alongside higher achieving students. Not only does peer tutoring allow students with lower academic ability levels to interact with higher achieving students, but it also allows lower ability students an opportunity to receive tutoring from students they already have relationships with, which could help create a more inviting learning experience.

Topping (1996) indicates that when examined, peer tutoring has a strong focus on the content and structure of curriculum and that it is successful for students who lag behind academically or are below the level of mastery of the majority of the class. The structure of the curriculum provides a roadmap of progress for students and can be used to evaluate where students are and how much attention or help they will need. According to Fogarty and Wang (1982), benefits of peer tutoring programs are not due to the tutee being exposed to the material more than others in the classroom, but they are due to the relationship established between the tutor and the tutee. Ehly and Larsen (1980) note that true success in the tutoring relationship is accomplished when "the partners are shown how to focus on each other's strengths instead of their weaknesses" (p. 43).

As expressed by Roscoe and Chi (2007), some feel that the relationship between the tutor and the tutee is the same relationship that exists between the student and teacher. This relationship is based on the fact that a tutor and a teacher do basically the same thing. This is not supported by Bruffee (1980), who contends that peer tutors that are close in age to the tutees are likely to not be viewed the way a teacher is viewed but that the peer tutor has a role more so of a friend or helper. This does not suggest that the tutor should not be trained on how to effectively tutor his or her peers.

37

Another benefit of peer tutoring is the cost efficiency of using a peer as a tutor. In classrooms where one teacher is responsible for up to 25 students, the financial savings of peer tutoring is significant. Melaragno (1977) suggests that "pupil tutoring is often described as an economical way to provide individualized instruction" (p. 386). Another aspect of the benefits of tutoring can be seen in the readily available supply of tutors in any given class (Heward, Heron, & Cooke, 1982).

When one thinks of peer tutoring, reading and mathematics come to mind; however, there are other areas that are proving successful in the area of using peer tutoring to enhance these disciplines (Melaragno, 1977). By examining the structure of peer tutoring, the discussion is centered on the best structure for a peer tutoring program to offer the greatest potential for success. The more structured the program, the better success one can expect over a long-term tutoring program. It is noted that a peer tutoring program can be instituted in a classroom setting without difficulty and time constraints (Melaragno, 1977).

The Multi-Ability Classroom

Peer tutoring can help the learning process in multi-ability classrooms and can also be effective in multi-grade classrooms. Multi-grade classrooms are not common in the United States; however, in Europe, "…the incidence of multi grade teaching is quite high. For example, available data indicate that 53% of primary school teachers in the Netherlands teach multi grade classes" (Commissie Evaluatie Basisonderwijs, 1994, p. 4). Multi-grade classes exist in many parts of Australia and Canada as well (Mulryan-Kyne, 2005). Similarities between multi-ability classrooms and multi-grade classrooms

can be observed. Educators are challenged by trying to ensure that all students are taught regardless of level of ability. Little, as cited in Lingam (2007), states:

> For children to learn effectively in multi-grade environment, teachers need to be well trained and supported, well-resourced and hold positive attitudes to multi-grade teaching. If teachers are not adequately prepared to teach in multi-class environments it is likely that they will adversely affect the education of their students. (p. 186)

A differentiated class does not contain assignments that are the same for all learners and adjustments consist of varying the level of difficulty of questions for certain students. Differentiation results from teachers labeling students. This is noted by Hart (1998), who mentioned that what limits development is not lack of supposed "ability" per se, but the lack of ability—on the part of both teachers and children. Furthermore, from an equity perspective, it is known that there can be significant injustices in the way that categories of ability are applied. Children considered "bright" are likely to be those who display characteristics that most closely fit the teacher's view (Hart, 1998).

Classroom Community

As noted by Fiske (1992), schools have been unsuccessful in producing a successful learning environment because they were developed based on the 19th-century industrial-based framework that existed at the turn of the century. Meltzoff (1990) identifies 10 strands of classroom community, developed from a year-long study in a classroom at a school in Eugene, Oregon. These strands were shared leadership, communication, responsiveness, shared ethics, cooperation, shared environment, shared history, commitment, wholeness, interdependence (Meltzoff, 1990). The importance of community cannot be overstated. For a student to reach his or her full potential, a welcoming learning community is necessary. The antithesis is also true in the regard that

a hurtful, stifling, damaging community environment in the classroom fails to produce good results and may contribute to a negative learning environment.

Brabek (1987) states that feminists' goal for education is:

…to transform education in the direction of development of the ability to sustain human relationships based on what Jane Roland Martin calls the 3 Cs: care, concern, and connection, and ultimately, to create a social order that will not tolerate any group holding power to determine or limit the sovereignty of any other group. (p. 96)

The school is considered by many as the training ground for tomorrow's citizens. The things that are modeled in the classroom can become the mode of living as a student grows and becomes more mature. Meltzoff (1990) articulates the importance of community:

Classroom community is built on relationships, guided by the teacher, and develops in a synergistic context of culture, school district, school, staff members, teacher, parents, and students. Although not all teachers can depend on a fully supportive atmosphere, they can move toward the development of a classroom community in a variety of contexts. The process for developing community in the classroom is not fixed, nor is community-building an all-or-nothing proposition. The more elements of a community that are incorporated into the classroom, the richer the pattern in the weaving. (pp. 261–262)

In looking at the purpose of and activities in a community of learners, a true sense of community may be marked by collaboration, sharing, and support. Again, the emergence of the team effort observed in earlier references of the one-room schoolhouse can be observed within the classroom. This team concept, often labeled as "community," can be a major factor of the success of students in the classroom. Rogof (1996) states:

In a community of learners, students appear to learn how to coordinate with, support, and lead others, to become responsible and organized in their management of their own learning, and to be able to build on their inherent interests to learn in new areas and to sustain motivation to learn. (p. 410)

Community has also been linked to performance in the academic areas of education. Ryan and Patrick (2001) suggest that:

…there is some research supporting the argument that the social environment of the classroom will be important for students' motivation and engagement. A sense of relatedness or belonging at school is associated positively with students' expectancies for success and intrinsic value for school-both indicators of motivation. (p. 438)

Community and its impact on the learning process is more than evident in the literature (Bateson, 1979; Berman, 1981; Bowers, 1987). Although some teachers know the importance of community, there is an insignificant amount of resources concerning the ways to maintain a healthy learning community in the classroom. Community is a major factor in the students' success or failure. According to Randhawa and Michayluk (1975):

The class is a dynamic group. The context in which the class is embedded is a significant determinant of the learning environment. The context of a class includes all the independent variables that determine the learning environment singly, collectively, or interactively. However, no single study can exhaustively determine the effect of the various independent variables on the learning environment. (p. 274)

Regardless of the guidelines that are established by the teacher, some students need motivation to become involved in the peer tutoring process. Whether it is a special privilege or a type of grade modification, something is often expected by the students. Beck et al. (1978) suggest that the overwhelming majority of students surveyed about their learning preferences preferred student-tutors over faculty-tutors. A student can be intrinsically motivated to model the success of a peer as a good student while engaged in a peer-tutoring relationship. A beneficial relationship between the tutor and the tutee is a welcomed benefit when peer tutoring is considered a potential tool to use in the teaching of any curriculum. This type of peer relationship is not in the form of teacher-to-pupil, rather it emphasizes friend-to-friend interaction or even peer imitation on the tutee's part.

41

This friend-to-friend interaction is one of the strengths of peer tutoring in regards to the building of classroom community. A sense of community is vital to the learning process. When researchers examine the reasons that students drop out of school, lack of community within the classroom and the school have been mentioned.

The idea of social capital also emerges in the discussion of community. Lee and Burkham (2003) set forth this idea of social capital by stating, "the concept of social capital indentifies a crucial observation about collective life: that the quality of social relationships themselves either enhances or hinders individuals' capacity to attain desirable social goods" (p. 362). Social capital, in the parameters of the community in the classroom, appears to be important when the success of those students lagging behind is discussed. Peer tutoring has even been associated with increases in student achievement and positive attitudes toward attending school (Sheldon, 2001).

Classroom Management

Focusing on the benefits of peer tutoring and the sense of community in the classroom, teachers will find that peer tutoring is indeed a classroom-management strategy. Classroom management is vital to effective learning, and oftentimes, students with different levels of ability disrupt the community of learning within the classroom. Through the use of peer tutoring as a classroom-management tool, there is a possibility that the issues responsible for the disruption of community can be minimized in the classroom, providing a healthy learning community for the students.

Based on the literature, classroom management is connected to student knowledge. Many feel that it is the lack of knowledge or the boredom that comes from

not being challenged that contributes to the disruption of classroom environments and

hinders the process of learning. According to Alpert (1991):

> The concept of resistance is used in educational research to explain and interpret various student behaviors in schools that indicate the existence of tensions and conflicts between school and the wider society to which the student belong. Alienation from learning, rejection of the contents and skills taught, and criticism of the knowledge and values transmitted by the school appear to different degrees in many classrooms, including those within schools of upper middle class communities. (p. 350)

This type of behavior may be linked to a feeling of alienation due to a student not having

the correct answer; in this case, an effective classroom-management tool would address

those feelings and create a nurturing environment for both the low and the high achiever.

Social psychologist Rudolf Dreikurs developed a theory of classroom

management called the social discipline model (Dinkmeyer & Dreikurs, 2000). In this

theory, Dreikurs's fundamental belief is that the purpose of all humans is belonging and

acceptance by others. Dinkmeyer and Dreikurs (2000) noted that Dreikurs also developed

the Alfred Adler's system of individual psychology into a pragmatic method for

understanding the purposes of the reprehensible behavior of children, working in the area

of cooperative behavior of students without punishment and reward as well as noting that

"the process of encouragement is complex. It is not enough that one wishes to encourage

a child. Much needs to be known about the method and even more about the prerequisites

of the achievement of encouragement" (p. 4). The social discipline model of classroom

management has four main foundational pillars, which are based on Adler's social theory.

These pillars include: (1) humans are social beings and their basic motivation is to

belong, (2) all behavior has a purpose, (3) humans are decision-making organisms, and

(4) humans only perceive reality and this perception may be mistaken or biased

(Wolfgang, 2005). Tauber (2007) suggests that "Dreikers believes, as do other humanists, that children who feel they are getting their needs met, or who feel that are on a definite path to meet their needs, are far less likely to misbehave" (p. 147). Dreikurs felt that every action of the student was grounded in the belief that he or she is looking for or trying to secure his or her place in the group. He stated that a student who is disruptive in class or seeks to draw attention to himself and will defy the needs of the group to keep his or her social status. This theory of Dreikur supports the practice of using peer tutoring as an effective management tool for multi-ability classrooms. This is not a tool that will work for every classroom or every teacher, but Dreikurs's theory can be of assistance when the sense of community in the classroom is in question.

Students in a classroom have a desire to feel as if they belong to a community; it is in that community that they can thrive. Yet, this is not something that is taught because all humans desire to feel as if they belong to a community. Students will talk about not fitting in or feeling as if they are not a part of the group. Kant and Patton (1946) describe rational beings and their nature:

> Rational beings are called persons because their nature already marks them out as ends in themselves—that is, as something which ought not to be used merely as a means-and consequently imposes to that extent a limit on all arbitrary treatment of them. Persons, therefore, are not merely subjective ends whose existence as an object of our actions has a value for us: they are objective ends - that is, things whose existence is in it an end, and indeed an end such that in its place we can put no other end to which they should serve simply as means. The practical imperative [of the above is] therefore as follows: Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end. (p. 66)

Most students who exhibit certain behaviors in the classroom have some justification to support their actions, true of students whose behavior disrupts a

44

classroom's sense of community. Dismissing non-community–like behavior as a product of family, heritage, or genetics is not appropriate. So using peer tutoring in the classroom can help students feel as if they belong to a community, thus minimizing non-community–like behavior that stems from academic inferiority.

According to Tauber (2007), Dreikurs suggests that human beings are decision-making organisms. Dreikur's theory suggests that students make the decision to be a part of the community within the classroom or not. Students, because they are human beings, are indeed decision-making organisms. But what is it that affects those decisions in the classroom? The decision is made according to the perception of academic inferiority.

In Dreikurs's theory of classroom management, he suggests that students' perception of classroom community and those things that affect it are based on their perception of reality. Educators are realizing that the biggest battle that they face in the classroom is each student's perception about themselves, the class, the teacher, and their success and/or failure.

Perceived Weaknesses of Peer Tutoring

As a peer tutoring program is instituted, there is the potential for a lack of support by administrators or other teachers. This is because some are hesitant to adopt peer tutoring due to feelings that only teachers can do this type of instructional job and that needing a peer tutor shows a lack of success of the teacher in that class (Melaragno, 1977). With any program or teaching strategy implemented in a classroom, along with a list of benefits will be a list of perceived weaknesses by the teacher, administrators, and/or students. The importance of a teacher's perception is vital to the success of any teaching strategy. As earlier stated, teachers' perceptions are often based on false

45

information or perhaps a negative experience. A teacher's perception does affect their

reality in the classroom and their perception of teaching strategies such as peer tutoring.

As Wood and Wood (2008) quotes Albert Einstein in reference to what is real, "reality is

merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one" (p. 78).

The Perception of Additional Instruction

Among many educators that have experienced or have a working knowledge of

peer tutoring, there is a perception of a lack of structure involving peer tutoring and a

perception that peer tutoring is additional activity that is time consuming. Kail (1983)

suggests that "the problem that peer tutoring will pose in the next few years is simply

whether or not it is worth the trouble" (p. 598). More experienced teachers become set in

their teaching routines and are not supportive of new programs that will increase their

workload. As Samway et al. (1995) mention:

> We may be excited by the success stories that we hear and read about, and vow to
> implement such a program immediately. However, despite our good intentions,
> many cross-age tutoring programs die a quiet death almost as soon as they are
> introduced. In some cases, it is because the two teachers are not equally
> committed to the program and do not spend time sharing and planning. (p. 15)

Any teaching strategy that shows any potential of success must be carefully

planned. This planning requires time and additional effort, and this additional time

required maybe perceived as a negative to some teachers.

Lack of Trust

As with any newly introduced or reintroduced teaching strategy, there may be a

lack of pedagogical knowledge as a teacher attempts to embrace the new strategy.

Teachers often allow that lack of trust or confidence in a new strategy to prohibit the

strategy from becoming a permanent pedagogical strategy within a new program. Rabow and Chin (1999) address teachers by stating:

> Fear and anxiety are natural emotions we often feel in our daily encounters and interactions with others. Tutoring is not just any new situation, however; the great challenges, expectations, and social complications it brings compound normal fear and anxieties. (p. 1)

This perceived absence of trust or confidence in peer tutoring can hamper educators from even considering it as a teaching strategy. Although perceived as a weakness of peer tutoring, again, Rabow and Chin (1999) remind teachers: "the good news is that most tutors overcome their initial fears and anxieties of tutoring" (p. 3). Most teachers desire success when adopting a new program or strategy. Another issue that erodes confidence in peer tutoring is the idea that it exists to replace the teacher and the role of the teacher in the classroom.

When a senior high school system attempted to implement a peer tutoring program in its classrooms, Coldeway (1980) notes:

> The heart of the staff resistance to peer tutoring are concerns for the preservation of "regular, part-time tutor," and their perceived need for professional tutors who have corresponding degree credentials. Even though the stated goal of the proposed peer tutoring research program clearly indicated that an objective examination to determine if and how peer tutors functioned and performed would occur, a large number of staff indicated that they were not in favor of even experimenting with peer tutoring and had little interest in the results. (pp. 10–11)

This is an example of perceptions of a peer tutoring program hampering educators from implementing a program that has been shown to be successful.

Summary

In examining the foundation of peer tutoring, is peer tutoring successful in academically assisting students who have fallen behind or improving the sense of

community in a classroom by making students feel as if they belong to a group? Topping (1996) suggests that there is substantial evidence that proves the effectiveness of peer tutoring in schools. In an analysis of four different interventions (Levin, Glass, & Meister, 1987), peer tutoring was identified as the most cost-effective intervention, as it was shown as four times more cost-effective than the least cost-effective method. In a study by Heward et al. (1982), elementary students in a remedial reading class that were tutored by their classmates had more improved scores than students that were tutored by college students.

There are indeed major benefits of the peer tutoring system, according to Melaragno (1977), the more structured a peer tutoring program is, the more successful the program will be. Melaragno (1977) also notes that cognitive gains by those students who serve and benefit from peer tutoring are invariably found and are often very impressive. There are also positive, affective changes, but they are not as clear as academic achievements.

A peer tutoring program can be implemented with little cost and organization. But it is important to lay some foundational structure for the plan to be successful. McNall (1975) suggests general characteristics of peer tutoring programs that are present in the successful experience. McNall (1975) states that students should choose their peer partners unless there is a student who does not have someone, and then the teacher can assign partners based on need. Tutors and tutees are encouraged to meet as often as possible, and the tutors should have some guidelines of how to teach the material. In pairing peers, the predominant belief among educators is that same-sex tutoring pairs have better success; however, according to Devin-Sheehan et al. (1976), most studies

employ same-sex pairs in tutoring, but a few of these studies that are based orthogonally contradict this. According to Ehly and Larsen (1976), tutors should be acquainted with the structure and the goals of the tutoring program and the goals of the student who is involved in the program

As shown in this chapter, peer tutoring has played some role throughout the history of teaching and learning, beginning with the early days of education in Greece and Rome, moving on to the monitorial systems in the 19th century, continuing to confines of the one-room schoolhouse, and finally showing up in today's classroom. Peer tutoring has always appeared to be an effective teaching strategy that helps students succeed and progress with other students who are on more advanced levels. In today's classroom, we see a resurgence of peer tutoring and its use as an effective teaching strategy within the classroom. According to Topping (1996), "the dual requirement to improve teaching quality while doing more with less has recently increased interest in peer tutoring" (p. 321). The increased interest in peer tutoring has certainly been observed across the country over the past few years, more specifically due to the influence of the "No Child Left Behind" Act. Peer tutoring has many proven benefits for both the tutee and the tutor. Devin-Sheehan, Feldman, and Allen (1976) suggest that peer tutoring programs benefit tutees both "academically and in some cases benefit tutors" (p. 355). Peer tutoring has been shown to benefit curriculum and its structure, assist teachers in the management of and teaching within the multi-ability classroom, and to increase the sense of community within the classroom; it has also been shown as a classroom-management strategy. Person, Kreuz, Zwann, and Graesse (1995) state that "an understanding of the tutoring process is important, because tutoring typically is more

effective than classroom instruction" (p. 161). Although inconclusive in many areas, peer

tutoring does have some measure of success in increased academic achievement,

fostering a greater sense of community in the classroom and finally becoming a strategy

to be used by educators to manage multi-ability classrooms.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to explore middle school teachers' perceptions of peer tutoring in the multi-ability classroom. The ways that these teachers' perceptions change or modify the overall plans within their classrooms was also investigated. The lack of recent literature discussing the attitudes that middle school teachers have concerning peer tutoring and the limited amount of research identifying strategies to assist teachers of multi-ability classes of students also served as motivation for this study. The findings of a pilot study that investigated similar perceptions of middle school teachers served as a catalyst for the current study (Thompson, 2007). The study was designed to provide insight into the beliefs of middle school teachers in multi-ability classrooms concerning peer tutoring through interviews developed and administered employing a qualitative research design. Teachers' perceptions of the use of peer tutoring and its potential implementation within the classroom were explored.

According to Hanley, Hano, and Skivington, (2007), qualitative research "is an inductive process by which the researcher allows data interpretations to evolve and reveal patterns before, during, and after the data collection process" (p. 100). This study concentrates on the impact of teachers' beliefs of peer tutoring and the ways in which these beliefs influence its use as a teaching strategy. A phenomenological designed was employed in this study. According to van Manen (1990), in phenomenological research, the intent is "to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings" (p. 6). The experience that is to be known, according to van Manen (1990), encompasses the challenges of teachers utilizing peer tutoring and the

perceived benefit or harm that it causes in the classroom. The importance of these perceptions can be observed as the researcher investigates the use of peer tutoring in each of the selected classrooms. Creswell (2007) notes that a phenomenological study "provides a deep understanding of a phenomenon as experienced by several individuals" (p. 62). The primary focus of this study is to solicit educators' perceptions concerning peer tutoring and to examine their perceived realities of peer tutoring as an effective teaching strategy. Each educator provides details of educational theories, practices, and teaching strategies supported or utilized in his or her classroom. Pedagogy is formed by experiences and educational theories that mold an educator's teaching style or their lack of exposure to a specific strategy.

Research Questions

Four primary research questions will guide the current study:

1. What are the perceptions of middle school teachers in regards to how multi-ability classrooms modify the preparation?

2. What are the perceptions of middle school teachers regarding peer tutoring and its implementation in the classroom?

3. What are the perceptions of middle school teachers with regard to peer tutoring as an effective teaching strategy in the multi-ability classroom?

4. What are the perceptions of middle school teachers regarding peer tutoring and its effect on community in the classroom?

This study also includes interview questions that will provide more in-depth discovery at the interview stage. Eight interview questions were designed to probe the primary research questions (see Appendix A). Interview questions were the same for

public school and private school participants. Table 1 identifies the research questions

and the interview questions used during interviews of participants in both public and

private school.

Table 1

Research and Interview Question Matrix

		Research Questions			
		What are the perceptions of middle school teachers in regards to how multi-ability classrooms modify the preparation?	What are the perceptions of middle school teachers regarding peer tutoring and its implementation in the classroom?	What are the perceptions of middle school teachers with regard to peer tutoring as an effective teaching strategy in the multi-ability classroom?	What are the perceptions of middle school teachers regarding peer tutoring and its effect on community in the classroom?
Interview Questions	Some administrators say that peer tutoring can't be successful in today's educational classrooms, what would you say?	X			
	Suppose you could create a peer tutoring program in your classroom, how would that affect your students who are behind?	X			
	In what ways do multi-ability classrooms affect your teaching style?		X		
	Suppose you had a classroom where five students were at least one grade behind in reading or math, how would that change your daily teaching style and lesson plans?		X		
	What influences your use or non-use of peer tutoring within your classroom?			X	
	Why do some students respond more positively to a peer rather than a teacher in regards to learning?			X	
	Some teachers would say that being at least a grade level behind would not have an effect on whether a student feels a part of the class or not. What do you think?				X
	How does the idea of community in the classroom influence the success of the students in the classroom?				X

Site of Research

The current study was conducted at two middle schools in southeastern United States; one of the schools is public and the other school is private. Both the public and the private school have similar demographic profiles, and they are located within 10 miles of each other. Factors concerning the schools and community, such as the teacher-to-pupil ratio, surrounding-neighborhood demographic characteristics, and neighborhood socioeconomic levels were similar. The similarities of the two schools strengthen the credibility of both the study and the findings.

The selected schools are located in a suburban community. The median age in the community is 36 years; the median household income within the community is $109,781. The number of total family households is 11,118, in which 7,025 of these households contain families with children. Approximately 7,600 residents have Bachelor's degrees, and around 3,200 hold graduate-level degrees. Both the public and the private school have strong parental involvement, observed through parent/teacher organizations.

The first reason that teachers from a public school and a private school were selected is that there is a perception of superiority and advanced use of pedagogical styles in the private school setting as compared to the public schools. According to Benveniste, Carnoy, and Rothstein (2003), "many policymakers are convinced that private education is better and cheaper than public education" (p. 4). In addition to the perceived superiority of private schools regarding teachers and administrators, there also exists a perception that private school students outperform public school students, especially on standardized tests, as noted by Benveniste et al. (2003).

The second reason that teachers from both school types were chosen involves the importance of peer tutoring and the identification of students who are "behind" at the middle school grade level. According to Roswal et al. (1995), the elementary and middle school years are a critical time for students and has a significant role in the success of the student in high school, and identify middle school years as "critical to enhancing appropriate learning skills and attitudes as a predicator of school based achievements and subsequent school dropout" (p. 275). Middle school years are the prime entry point for teachers to begin to utilize teaching strategies to help lower-achieving students, these strategies of which may include peer tutoring. Kortering, Haring, and Clockars (1992) suggest that large numbers of students who dropped out of school during middle school years came from families that lack the support system necessary for the educational process during middle school.

The public middle school. The public middle school is located in the county school system and is accredited by Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). The public middle school is 1 of 14 middle schools in the county school system, and 380 students are enrolled in grades 6 through 8. The student population is classified as 74.3% White/non-Hispanic, 14.9% Black/non-Hispanic, 1.8% Hispanic, 8.2% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.8% American Indian/Alaska Native.

The middle school has a faculty of 16 teachers and 4 specialists. Seventy-five percent of the faculty has 10 or more years of teaching experience, and 65% of the teachers hold advanced degrees. The average student to teacher ratio is 17:1. The middle school focuses on social interaction within the classroom as well as group projects and hands-on activities. Mentoring is also an important part of the overall strategy for the

middle school, in addition to an academic program that fosters critical thinking, independence, and strong problem-solving skills. The K−8 campus that houses the middle school includes 42 classrooms, 2 fully equipped science labs, 13 portable buildings used as classrooms, space for clerical and administrative offices, workrooms, and a staff lounge for teachers. All classrooms are equipped with 2 or more desktop computers, and there is a computer lab with 25 Macs. The school is equipped with 7 mobile iBook laptop carts that provide 125 laptops for student use, and the entire campus is wireless. The school follows State-mandated curriculum guidelines and is guided by the state/national standards and the State Blueprint for Learning. Students attending this middle school can choose chorus or band in the 6th grade. Students in grades 7 and 8 have the options of art, band, chorus, or physical education (PE) for 3 days a week and a combination of general music, art, or PE for the remaining 2 days. The middle school also supports character education through the guidance office and through in-class instruction.

The interview site was a room on the school's campus located in the rear of that library that is utilized for student testing. During the time of interviews, this room was not be utilized for any other purpose. The room is located away from the daily flow of students in a quiet part of the building. The location and privacy of the room provided a comfortable atmosphere for the teachers and was supposed to minimize, if not eliminate, distractions and interruptions.

Focus groups were conducted in a teacher's lounge during the lunch period of the school day. The size and environment of the room was conducive to interact with the

teacher participants; it was centrally located and private, which enabled us to have an open discussion.

The private middle school. The private school is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and schools (SACS) and is a member of three other accrediting organizations, including the Association of Christian Schools International. The private middle school is 1 of 32 private schools providing middle school education. The population of the school includes is around 780 students; there are 170 students enrolled specifically in the middle school. The K−12 students are segregated among three areas, i.e., elementary area, middle school area, and high school area, with the middle school having a separate facility. The demographics of the school are: 90% White, 2% Black, 4% Asian, 3% Hispanic, and 1% other.

The present faculty profile of the middle school is as follows: 20 faculty members at an average age of 48 years; average number of years of experience for teachers is 16; and over 35% of teachers hold advanced degrees. The teachers have been at the school for an average of 9 years. The middle school schedule is arranged to include seven periods, with some classes offered two days a week. Standard classes are included in the schedule, along with electives in choir, band, the French language, and critical thinking. The private school is not required to adhere to the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP). The TCAP is the state examination for all public school students in grades 3 through 8. The test covers mathematics, language arts, and reading. Curriculum is selected by a curriculum committee that is appointed by the Head of School and serves to make recommendations and give approval for all curriculum used.

Teachers at the private middle school employ different strategies within their classrooms, including lecture, individual and group work, and forms of cooperative learning.

The interview site at the school was a private room that serves as an office but was not occupied at the time of study. The room is located in a low-traffic area on the 1st floor of the school; the room's location ensured minimal interruptions while interviews were in progress. The room was also locked throughout the interview process.

The site of the focus group was a large room on the second floor of the school. This room is often used by the faculty as a lunch room for teachers. The room is comfortable and large enough to accommodate the number of teachers participating in the discussion.

Descriptions of Teacher Participants

This qualitative study included 10 public school teachers and 9 private school teachers. Variables among the participants include teachers' length of teaching experience and subjects taught; however, grade levels taught and class size varied among the 19 participants as well. The differences in the number of years of experience and the subjects taught, along with different pedagogical strategies, were beneficial in this study and provided stronger foundation for data analysis.

Public school. Ellen (pseudonym) teaches middle school resource. Resource class at the public school involves working with students in math, science, history, and language arts. Susan has over 28 years of experience in education. Ellen holds both a Bachelor's and Master's degree and has 45 hours in addition to her Master's degree. Her resource class involves individual instruction, group activities, and the use of some of her students in peer tutoring relationships with elementary students.

59

Tammy (pseudonym) teaches 6th grade and has over 20 years of experience in the classroom. Taylor is viewed as a leader in the classroom and is well thought of. She has taught in 4 different states and has been at the school for over 15 years. She utilizes group projects and peer tutoring in addition to other teaching strategies.

Sheri (pseudonym) teaches social studies and is in her third year of teaching. She holds an education degree. Prior to teaching, Sheri worked as a physical therapist assistant for 13 years. Both Sheri and her husband work in the field of education.

Freeda (pseudonym) teaches 7th-grade geography. She has a degree in fine arts and is also certified to teach grades 1–8. She is very involved in the school and is the Beta Club's sponsor. She has been teaching for three years.

Taylor (pseudonym) teaches 7th-grade science and has over 20 years of experience. She holds a Bachelor's degree in sociology and has 45 hours toward her Master of Education degree. She has over 20 years of teaching experience and sponsors a club called the Aquatic Blur as well as the After-School Reinforcement club.

Felicia (pseudonym) teaches 8th-grade math. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in kinesiology and a Master of Education in Instruction, Curriculum, and Leadership. Felicia is certified in mathematics and physical education and has 16 years of teaching experience. She has taught at her present school for 13 years and uses teaching strategies that involve on one-to-one intervention, including after-school intervention classes and peer grouping.

Sarah (pseudonym) teaches 8th-grade social studies and math. She has a degree in education and 25 years of experience. She utilizes differentiated instruction in the

classroom as well as peer tutoring and group projects. Sarah also uses computer software for additional review of material covered in the classroom.

Tameka (pseudonym) teaches 6th-grade science and math. She holds a Bachelor's degree in elementary education as well as a Master's degree in Education. She has 16 years of experience and has taught at her present school for 15 years. One area of focus in her graduate program was reading.

Omi (pseudonym) teaches 5th-grade social studies and reading. She has a Bachelor's degree in education and is licensed and highly qualified to teach grades K–8. Omi has taught grades 6 and 7 at another middle school in the same city. She utilizes websites and online textbook learning to provide her students with information.

Nathan (pseudonym) teaches visual arts, has an art degree, and is in his first year of teaching. He also has a Master's degree in education. He teaches more than 500 students per week and teaches each class for 50 minutes. Nathan is involved in the after-school tutoring program offered to students by the school.

Private school. Frank (pseudonym) teaches junior high Bible and also provides counseling to junior high students. Frank holds a Bachelor of Science in Psychology. Previous experience prior to teaching includes management. His classroom instruction in Bible includes direct instruction along with projects, group work, and journaling. A strength that Frank brings to the classroom is that he is an alumnus of the school and often uses that as a relationship-builder with his students.

Nedra (pseudonym) joined the school staff full-time in 2008 and teaches 7th and 8th-grade literature. She also coaches volleyball. Nedra graduated in 2003 as class valedictorian. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in English with a minor in history. Nedra has

been involved in numerous mission-related outreach activities.

Thelma (pseudonym) began teaching at the school in 2002. She teaches high school geometry and 8th-grade algebra and manages the school's computer technology. Thelma holds a Bachelor's degree in journalism and a Master's in education. Prior to entering the teaching profession, she worked in business and advertising.

Ethan (pseudonym) teaches junior high social studies and history. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in History with a minor in sociology. Ethan said he appreciates the opportunity to work in a "friendly, small-school atmosphere." Ethan is in his first year of teaching, and he helps coach the football team.

Stacy (pseudonym) teaches junior- and senior-level art classes and serves as co-sponsor of the Student Government Association. She began teaching at the school in 1984 and is known for giving individual attention to students' artistic development. She holds a Bachelor's degree in visual art. Stacy is very involved in the life of the students and serves as the sponsor of several clubs. She has also spent time on the mission field with her husband.

Teri (pseudonym) began teaching French in 2003, and she also teaches wellness classes. Teri began her teaching career as a tutor and educational assistant. She began speaking French in high school and minored in French while working on her Bachelor's degree in marketing. Teri has studied in Paris and is involved in the French club. She also studies sign language.

Elizabeth (pseudonym) teaches elementary computer, junior high keyboarding, computer applications I and II, and high school web design and social studies. She earned a Bachelor's degree in business administration and a Master's degree in education, and

she has taken several doctoral courses. She joined the school in 1986, having taught at a business college. She also has direct business experience in the areas of data processing and accounting.

Fredrick (pseudonym) directs all of the school's athletic programs and teaches wellness classes. He taught Tennessee History at the junior high level for more than 20 years. Fredrick has Bachelor's degrees in (1) health and physical education and (2) history. He is admired by students and has over 35 years of experience in education.

Sharon (pseudonym) joined the school's staff in 1999 and has taught second, third and sixth grades for the school. She currently teaches 6th-grade math and science. Previously, she taught for 10 years at a local private school and for 4 years in the county school system. Sharon has a Master's degree in education.

Participant Selection

Interviewing a total of 19 middle school teachers from 2 middle schools, one private and one public, the researcher examined the perceptions and opinions of peer tutoring and its use within the multi-ability classroom. The schools selected provided a comparison among the schools that is based on class size, resources available, teacher training, socioeconomic factors, and intrinsic motivation for success.

From the public school, the group of 10 teachers was selected using stratified random sampling based on gender. McMillan and Schumacher (1997) describe stratified random sampling as selecting a sample so that "the population is divided into subgroups, or strata, on the basis of a variable chosen by the researcher, such as gender, age or level of education (p. 168). After the population was divided, samples were randomly selected from each strata or sample group. The teachers selected were grouped by gender; female

63

teachers comprised 75% of the total population and male teachers comprised the remaining 25%. The public school sample contained two male subject and eight female subjects. All subjects were interviewed utilizing identical questions, and interviews were conducted in the same interview setting and within the same time frame.

From the private school, the researcher began with 18 teachers. Participants were selected using the same stratified random sampling method utilized in the public school selection. Teachers were separated into two groups based on gender. Within the population of the 18 teachers selected, there were 14 female educators, which accounted for 75% of the total population. There were 4 males in the sample, comprising 25% of the population. Randomly, 50% of the sample size of each gender was selected to serve as participants in the study.

In both the public school and the private school, the non-proportional percentage was used in participant selection. According to McMillan and Schumacher (1997), "in non-proportional (or disproportionate) sampling, the researcher selects the same number of subjects to be in each stratum of the sample" (p. 168). Care was taken to make sure the sample size and participants reflected the overall population of the middle school teachers. The process of utilizing stratified random sampling for this study was to ensure that the sample was representative of the proportions found in the full population, as noted by Berg (1989).

Data Collection

   Data was collected in the form of interviews, focus groups and field notes. Each

data source served to help triangulate the findings. In a qualitative study utilizing a

phenomenological method, the experience of the educator and how that experience molds

their teaching style and methods, play a vital part in their formation of reality. From these

methods and Creswell's (2007) "structural and textural descriptions," the researcher

wrote a description that truly captured the "essence" of the phenomenon. To ensure

accuracy, all interviews were recorded using a digital recording device; the researcher

also took field notes during each interview. A release (see Appendix B) was signed by all

participants granting permission to use the interview data and comments made by the

participants within the confines of this study and any further study deemed necessary by

the researcher. Upon completion of all interviews, the recorded interviews were

transcribed and forwarded to the participants to check accuracy and to ensure that the

essence of the statements was captured.

   Eight questions that were asked in the smaller preliminary pilot study were asked

of all participants from both school settings to maintain continuity. This pilot study was

conducted in another private school similar in both enrollment and teacher size. The pilot

study was given in the fall of 2008 to 14 teachers in efforts to ensure credibility in

questions and interview questions, in which the pilot study validated the interview

questions. Following the interviews, interview data were collected and evaluated based

on emerging themes. A phenomenological research method was followed, and the

identified themes are discussed in the findings.

Permission to conduct interviews was granted by the Institutional Review Board at The University of Memphis (Appendix C), the private institution's Head of School, and the Principal and local school board of the public institution. Data were collected with triangulation standards as a foundation of research. Creswell (2007) describes triangulation and shows its importance by saying that it involves corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective. Patton (2002) also advocates the use of triangulation by stating, "triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods. This can mean using several kinds of methods or data, including using both quantitative and qualitative approaches" (p. 247). The methods chosen in triangulation to test the validity and reliability of a study depend on the criterion of the research. Recorded interviews, focus groups, and field notes provide triangulation and credibility.

Interviews. Participants were interviewed in the fall of 2011. Each interview was recorded using a digital tape recorder. Interviews were transcribed, and each participant was given a transcript of their interview to check for accuracy. Interviews were conducted in a standard, open-ended interview style. These interviews were formal interviews, as described by Holly, Arhar, and Kasten (2005), who described formal interviews as "interviews that have set, standard questions that are asked of all interviewees and are often recorded using a predesigned coding scheme" (p. 157). All interview questions and the sequence of the questions were predetermined. Finally, interviews were transcribed over an 8-week period.

All interviewees were asked the following questions:

1. Some administrators say that peer tutoring can't be successful in today's educational classrooms. What would you say?

2. Suppose you could create a peer tutoring program in your classroom. How would that affect your students who are behind?

3. In what ways do multi-ability classrooms affect your teaching style?

4. Suppose you had a classroom where five students were at least one grade behind in reading or math. How would that change your daily teaching style and lesson plans?

5. What influences your use or nonuse of peer tutoring within your classroom?

6. Why do some students respond more positively to a peer rather than a teacher in regard to learning?

7. Some teachers would say that being at least a grade level behind would not have an effect on whether a student feels a part of the class or not. What do you think?

8. How does the idea of community in the classroom influence the success of the students in the classroom?

Focus groups. Another effective method of data collection that was beneficial to this qualitative study was the use of focus groups. Holly, Arhar, and Kasten (2005) describe the benefits of a focus group by stating that "the advantages of a group interview over the individual interview are that it encourages elaboration, it aids in recall, and it is stimulating to have multiple respondents interact" (p. 162).

After interviews were completed and transcribed, the researcher held a focus group meeting to further discuss experiences with peer tutoring in their classrooms and the ways in which multi-ability classrooms have an effect on teacher preparation.

Protocol for the focus groups was based on the model by Richard Krueger and Dr. Mary

Anne Casey (2000). The purpose set forth in the focus group was to better understand

what was said during the interview process. The researcher discussed the parameters of

the focus group which included a time limit of 30 minutes. Questions were based on

initial interview responses and opportunity was given for all participants to discuss all

aspects of peer tutoring. This focus group served as part of the triangulation efforts of the

researcher. Participants were given an opportunity to clarify, modify, or expand

information that was given at the interview stage. Focus groups were another attempt by

the researcher to ensure that the interviews truly reflected the information provided by the

participants. Focus groups were held in a centrally located room used by the faculty as a

teacher's lounge. All participants in the study were invited to participate.

Field notes. Throughout the data collection process, the researcher recorded field

notes in a notebook during each interview and each focus group session to capture,

remember, and record facial expressions and other important elements of the interviews

and focus group sessions. Field notes were utilized and constructed based on the criteria

for taking field notes (Estram, 2003) used at Eastern Michigan University. Field notes

were typed weekly to create electronic records, although hand-written notes were

maintained to aid reliability of the typed field notes.

These notes, along with interview transcripts and focus group session data,

provide a strong body of data for analysis. To help streamline the process of taking field

notes, suggestions by Berg (1989) were implemented. These suggestions included: a)

Record key words, b) Make notes about sequence of events, c) Limit time in the setting,

d) Comprise full notes immediately exiting the field, and e) Write notes before sharing them with others."

Data Analysis

Based on the interview data, analyses of the perceptions of teachers were examined and the identified themes were analyzed. Perceptions focused mainly on peer tutoring, the multi-ability classroom, and the use of peer tutoring as a strategy in these classrooms. As data were analyzed, field notes were regularly reviewed. Data were coded, analyzed, and observed for any recurrent themes.

Within the data, special focus was placed on themes that suggested that educators have developed their perceptions of peer tutoring based on misinformation or the lack of adequate understanding of peer tutoring. Themes were not set as predetermined filters; however, themes do not appear from the data itself. Themes were analyzed and evaluated to allow the researcher to gain insight into the perceptions of the teachers as well as gain a better understanding of possible sources of the perceptions regarding peer tutoring as a teaching strategy. McMillian and Schumacher (1997) note that "analysis often identifies the themes by individual cases (people or incidents) and then synthesizes the themes across cases" (p. 533). The researcher carefully monitored patterns, indicating systematic data analysis, and utilized these patterns to construct an overall meaning of the themes.

Ethical and Political Considerations

Confidentiality and ethical practices were maintained throughout the study. Ethical guidelines implemented at the beginning of the study were modeled after guidelines by Zeni (1998) and Hopkins (1994). Privacy of the participants, the information gathered, and subsequent theme analyses were maintained throughout the

69

study. Participants' personal information was guarded by the use of codes, and each

participant was assigned a numeric code at the beginning of the study, which was used in

all related interviews, transcription, theme analyses, and related presentation. Details of

the coding system or the storage of personal information were not provided to anyone

involved in the study. All personal information, interview tapes, transcripts, and field

notes were securely kept in an office in a locked file cabinet. All information pertaining

to the study was destroyed at the end of the study. Copies of these items were not

reproduced in any form.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to explore middle school teachers' perceptions of peer tutoring in multi-ability classrooms in a private and a public middle school setting. Nine teachers from a local private school and ten teachers from a local public school were selected as participants in this study. Qualitative research methods were employed in the current study in the form of interviews and focus group sessions.

In preparation for this study, the researcher made three hypotheses: (1) both private and public middle school teachers would have similar beliefs toward the philosophy of peer tutoring as an instructional strategy, (2) peer tutoring was being implemented on a limited basis within the public and private school, and (3) the private school setting would utilize peer tutoring more often than their public school counterparts based on perceptions of private schools academic rigor.

The study was designed to provide more insight into the perceptions that middle school teachers hold in regard to the use of peer tutoring as a teaching tool in the multi-ability classroom and the potential success of this strategy.

Three types of data were used in the study. Formal interviews were conducted, described by Holly et al. (2005) as "interviews that have set, standard questions that are asked of all interviewees and are often recorded using a predesigned coding scheme" (p. 157). All interview questions and the sequence of the questions were predetermined. Interview questions were patterned after Merriam's (1998) four types of questions that can be utilized during an interview: (1) hypothetical questions, (2) devil's advocate questions, (3) ideal position questions, and (4) interpretive questions. To provide

additional insight and for clarification of teacher responses, "probing" questions were asked.

The research questions for this study were created after a careful investigation of the literature expressing the value of the subject matter. Cooper (1984) notes, "the value of any single study is derived as much from how it fits with and expands on previous work as from the study's intrinsic properties" (p. 9). Research questions were used to explore the teachers' perceptions of peer tutoring with regard to changes in preparation (Kail, 1983), ease and confidence in the process of implementation, the belief that peer tutoring is an effective teaching strategy (Samway et al., 1995), and the effect on community in the classroom. Using the research questions as a foundation, interview questions were crafted, and all of the teacher participants were asked each interview question. Both the private and public school teachers were asked the same interview questions in the same order. To control the variation that may have arisen from the interview process, there was continuity in the order, delivery, and setting of the interviews for both public and private school teacher participants. This continuity was a benefit when comparing the study sites.

The second form of data used included insight from focus group sessions. The sessions were open to all teachers who participated in the study. These focus group sessions were held in a comfortable, centralized location that was large enough to contain all teachers.

The third form of data used included field notes taken during the study. These notes were made during the interview process and served to note any change of facial

72

expressions, body movements or any other action that could serve enhance the interviews of those participants.

The Public Middle School

The public middle school selected for the study is located in a large urban area of the selected county. Fifty percent of the classrooms at this school were identified as multi-ability classrooms, in which one or more students in the class was consider to be a grade level below the majority of the class. Teachers were encouraged by the administration to utilize innovative and creative instructional strategies in the classroom, which included the use of peer tutoring. The data collected from the ten public school participants was centered on each teacher's perception of peer tutoring and its use in multi-ability classrooms. The following are the teacher responses to the four initial research questions through the eight interview questions.

Research Questions and Responses

Question 1. The first research question was, "What are the perceptions of middle school teachers in regard to how multi-ability classrooms modify the preparation?"

The first corresponding interview question was, "Some administrators say that peer tutoring can't be successful in today's educational classrooms, what would you say?"

Seven of the 10 teachers interviewed believed that peer tutoring could be successful in today's classrooms. Teacher participants expressed a strong support for peer tutoring, all stating that they used peer tutoring frequently and even two teachers saying that they utilize peer tutoring on a daily basis. Taylor, who quickly responded in favor of

peer tutoring, expressed her frequent use of peer tutoring. When asked about peer

tutoring, she stated:

> …That is not true. It is very effective. We use it daily with our students.
> We pair those who are very knowledgeable and have shown some levels
> of excellence and expertise throughout the school year with those who are
> below grade level, and even some on grade level. The advantage of having
> peer tutoring is the fact that they are able to reach, sometimes, those kids
> that are in their own grouping, as far as age is concerned, a lot more
> effective than the teacher. They have a connection with them. They
> counsel, solidify, and support them emotionally, and they do not feel as
> though the child that's being tutored is inadequate. They build them up.
> They don't criticize. They're not destructive. And they parallel their
> information with what's going on and make it more relevant to them.

Felicia, who has been teaching for over 15 years, expressed support for peer

tutoring; however, despite her many years of experience, she still does not believe that

peer tutoring is a tool that can be used all the time.

> …I would disagree. I would say in some respects I wouldn't always use peer
> tutoring. But I think in some it's good to do groupings where you have lower
> ability kids with higher ability kids, because a lot of times the kids, from a
> peer, they can deliver something in a different way that maybe is a little bit
> easier for them to understand from what I said. You know, just a matter of
> sitting down and putting it on their level. I think it can be a successful tool. I don't
> think it would be, I guess, the best thing to use in all situations.

Most teachers responded favorably and supported peer tutoring, although two

teachers indicated some skepticism, one of them being Nathan. In only his second year of

teaching, Nathan believed that peer tutoring could be successful but noted the "logistic

struggle" as a potential issue. Nathan stated:

> Its got challenges. I think it's hard for it to be logistically done. To me, I
> think in order for it to work well… If I were in charge of the whole thing I'd
> want the kid to be there for the whole class period and then find time outside
> of that class period to do the peer tutoring. I would hate for them to be pulled
> out of a regular classroom and miss something and they're already at risk
> anyways. So I think extra time elsewhere in the school day or after school; extra

time needs to be provided for that. So I think it could be done, it's just a matter of how it's done.

When Tameka, a 5th-grade science teacher, was asked about the success of peer tutoring, she did not dismiss the idea; however, she associated the success of peer tutoring with teacher preparation, or the ability of the teacher to manage a peer tutoring program in the classroom with the involvement of students.

> It does require considerable amount of preparation, first of all. You have to, of course, find students who are particularly good, knows particular subject areas. And once you find a student who can, or who's willing to, work with another student and they pretty much get along very well, then it does help the other student. They can help the other student, rather.

Teachers who supported peer tutoring used personal experiences as foundations for their responses. Generally, teachers who had over 15 years of classroom experience were the greatest advocates of peer tutoring. Tammy, who has been teaching middle school math for over 15 years, is an example of this.

> …I disagree, because I've seen it work. Sometimes things that I teach the children, the way I present it to the class, the children don't get it the first time, but another student speaking a language that's more traditionally what that child's used to hearing, or just rewording it in the way that they understood it, a student that understands it then presenting to another student, not only benefits the student who didn't get it the first time—they maybe hear it in a different way and understand it—but it also benefits that student who got it the first time. Saying it again helps them to internalize that.

As a result of teacher feedback, it was discovered that most of the teachers viewed peer tutoring as a successful strategy, with two teachers indicating that this success is dependent on the make-up of the class. These findings are supported by Topping (1988), who states that "It would be particularly unwise to mount a project involving many children where the maturity of the majority to cope with the procedure is in grave doubt" (p. 29).

The second corresponding interview question was, "Suppose you could create a peer tutoring program in your classroom. How would that affect your students who are behind?"

Eight of 10 teachers indicated that peer tutoring would have a positive effect on a student that was below grade level in the instance that it was utilized. The viewpoints expressed by the majority (eight of ten) suggested a benefit in the academic performance of the students that were below. One teacher believed that peer tutoring would produce a only a minor academic benefit but felt that the students being tutored would gain more confidence as a nonacademic benefit. The belief that peer tutoring has a positive effect on a struggling student that is below grade level is similar to findings by Bar-Eli, Bar-Eli, Tenenbaum, and Forlin (1998), which show peer tutoring to have a positive effect on both the tutor and the tutee.

Although the level of success varied with each teacher interviewed, one teacher mentioned that the student that lagged behind received great benefit from peer tutoring. Ellen, a resource teacher for the past 25 years, has observed great success in peer tutoring over the past few years and sees the academic benefit and an improvement in the learning environment. Ellen said:

> I think it helps them tremendously. Over the years we've worked peer tutoring in the classroom. We have a peer tutoring program in our school. For example, we have 8th graders, 7th and 8th graders, even down to 5th grade, that go down to kindergartners in the mornings and help them with AR reading. I've used 7th and 8th graders that come into my resource class and help my, let's say, multiplication facts. They bond with my kids. I've had groups that get so excited about it they will make games and bring in and get so involved with them. They actually would take their rehearse time or study hall, every day come in and work with them. So they get very involved with it, very excited about it.

76

Sarah, who teaches math and social studies took a moment to reflect on the second interview question before providing an answer; however, she supported the view of increased confidence within a peer tutoring program. Sarah stated:

> As far as really bringing them up to par, maybe just a little. But I think the confidence, I think for the person that knows what they're doing, I think that's a great leadership opportunity for them. I think for the student that needs to be tutored it's great that they can feel comfortable asking a question with their peer. And then I think it's the reinforcement that's given back as far as the confidence.

Likewise, Felicia noted that a benefit of peer tutoring to a student who was behind would be reflected in the tutee's confidence, a nonacademic area. As Felicia mentally processed the question, she finally noted that:

> I think it motivates them to do better. I think that it…I don't know, it kind of engages them more and it makes them… you know, when they say… I hate to say they make a comparison of what they know to what somebody else knows, but again, it gives them kind of that internal drive to say, "I got to get this. This is what I'm supposed to know." And the fact that you've got the peer influence, I still think the peer kind of leading you on and being a cheerleader for you and kind of helping you, I guess, through the process is an internal motivator.

Such findings support Ehly and Larsen (1976), who noted that the "…greatest benefits result from the emotional and psychological experiences of the participants" (p. 476). Though most teachers expressed that there were benefits to students that were behind, three experienced teachers stated that along with these benefits were obstacles that interfered with the implementation of peer tutoring.

Omi, a language arts teacher for 5 years, discussed challenges in the classroom along with the benefit to students being tutored, considering the students at higher and lower academic levels. Omi said:

77

I think it would be advantageous to the lower students, but not so much to the higher students. It depends on the teacher's management of the classroom. So if a teacher can manage different activities going on at the same time, then it could be successful.

Furthermore, when Omi was asked whether she felt that peer tutoring could have a potentially negative effect on the cognitive level in the classroom, she stated:

I feel when I'm teaching or when I'm directly working one-on-one with a student, I'm more in control of what they're learning, whereas, if I assign that to another student, I'm not in control of what that student is teaching and I don't know if they're giving it 100%. So for me it's a little bit more of a control issue

In a continuation of possible benefits for students on the higher levels, Sheri, a 3-year science teacher, noted that peer tutoring required additional supervision if there is a positive effect on the student who is behind. Sheri said:

I think it would be helpful. It really depends on the content. Like, you know, a lot of times what you have to really watch with peer tutoring is a student that kind of takes over and isn't allowing the student to kind of answer, but they're just giving them all the information. Definitely could be implemented.

According to the findings of the current study, those teachers who have utilized peer tutoring in the past support its use despite their concerns with the additional time and work involved. This is supported by Topping (1996), who stated that "Peer tutoring can have disadvantages, however. Establishing it does consume organizational time in designing and effecting appropriate peer selection and matching, and it may also necessitate some adaptation to curriculum materials" (p. 325).

Freeda, who has utilized peer tutoring for 6 years, was quick to reference the amount of time peer tutoring requires during the academic day.

78

I think it's positive when you have the right peers tutoring the right peers. You can have a mix of students and pair two people up and it's not going to work based on previous experience they have socially with each other. So, as a teacher, we have to be in tune with who gets along with whom and who has had history. Because if they feel in competition with, say, and the low learner feels in competition with the higher learner, they're not going to listen. So it takes a lot of time. We usually can't even do peer tutoring until about the third or fourth month or school is in session, because it won't work.

Freeda's response mirrors findings from Kail (1983) who suggests that additional work involved with peer tutoring creates two areas of concern: the creation and implementation of materials and the training and tutoring of students

Question 2. The second research question was, "What are the perceptions of middle school teachers regarding peer tutoring and its implementation in the classroom?" The first corresponding interview question 1 was, "In what ways do multi-ability classrooms affect your teaching style?"

All 10 teacher participants stated that multi-ability classrooms affect their teaching style in different ways. Two teachers indicated that multi-ability classrooms become a hindrance to higher ability students due to teachers creating lesson plans that are focused on students at lower cognitive levels and somewhat exclude the students at higher cognitive levels. The remaining eight teachers felt that the multi-ability classroom modified their traditional teaching style and necessitated the integration of differentiated instruction to teach all students in the classroom. As a result, additional time and work from the teacher was required. These findings are supported by Kohler and Grenwood (1990), who suggested that peer tutoring may require some modification in the amount of work assigned and targeted cognitive level of instruction in the curriculum being used. Two teachers expressed enjoyment of multi-ability classrooms, viewing this as something

79

that encourages positive pedagogical strategies. Freeda expressed some of the positive changes to her teaching style resulting from multi-ability classrooms:

> It affects it in such a positive way. I try to put in so many different ways of teaching the students, and that's just one more way that I can put in where I'm not the person that's standing in the middle of the room or trying to get one or two students to listen to what I have to say. And so much of that, if I can get the other students to help each other, then it helps everything that I teach, whether it's with technology…they buddy up… and I always say, 'Help your neighbor, help whichever.' That little bit is peer tutoring, even if it's for a moment.

Freeda was not the only teacher to express that multi-ability classrooms had a positive effect on their teaching style. Nathan also viewed the wide range of student abilities in his classroom as a welcomed addition to the class. As Nathan thought for a moment, he said:

> It challenges it, but also, I like it though. You've got different ability levels in there. You can pair up the kids heterogeneously or homogeneously based on the lesson. I like diversity in the classroom because teaching art, what I teach, everybody has a different outlook on things. So I think having that difference of opinion or difference of perspective I think really adds to a classroom environment.

One common factor mentioned by the teacher participants was that multi-ability classrooms require differentiated instruction to be successful. According to Tomlinson (2001), modified instruction can be, in part, due to the different ability levels of students in the classroom or the different learning styles that are present within the same classrooms.

Taylor, who described her classroom dynamics in terms of students' strengths and weaknesses, said:

> Wow. It affects me greatly because every lesson has to be organized to reach every student where they are at that particular time in my classroom. So therefore, I find myself having to do many, many hours of planning,

80

because I am very perceptive an aware when the child steps into my room where they are, because I have looked at all the data. So I know that child's weakness and I know the other kid's strength. So I know that it's my responsibility to make sure that every child has at least so many grades above where they are at the present time.

In addition, Taylor expressed her responsibility to make sure each student is taught the required material and brought up to the current grade level despite the work and time required. She added:

So, if I do have a child that is below grade level, it's my responsibility to get them to grade level by any means. If that means that I have to have the work paralleled to meet the needs of that child, then I will do so through hanging manipulatives. If I have to do an auditorial, because I do have some kids that are deaf, and they read my lips and their batteries have run out. But it's still my responsibility to reach that child. I have some kids who come in who cannot read at all, and them some who are the first, second, third grade level. I have autistic children as well. So we have the whole gamut of children.

Omi agreed that multi-ability classrooms influenced her teaching style and molded a different approach to teaching. She considered this modification to be focused on assessments and assignment portion of her daily teaching activities. Omi said:

I have to differentiate. I have to teach a lesson… I just do it at a regular grad level when I do the whole class. But then when I give graded papers, I give individual help to the lower students. And if higher students finish quickly, I give them a more challenging assignment. So it's more in the evaluation and assessment process that I have to differentiate more with my ability levels.

Six out of 10 teacher participants shared a common desire to do anything necessary to ensure student success. As Sarah, an 8th-grade social studies and math teacher was interviewed, she expressed her feeling of limitation as she considered her role in the educating of students in multi-ability classrooms. After a moment of reflection, she said:

81

You have to be aware of every student's needs, from either the highest end to the lowest. And you try to do things; I try to do as much as I can for the smarter ones. I try to do things to give them enrichment if possible; I try to do that as much as possible. But that's where they do come in as the peer tutoring, so that's where that does come in.

Sheri agreed that it is difficult to reach all levels of cognitive ability in the classroom. She also reiterated an important point described by four teachers, saying that it becomes a challenge to connect with lower level students while simultaneously keeping the higher level students motivated and challenged. Sheri said that:

I find the biggest challenge is still keeping the highest students challenged. That's where I find the biggest struggle—if you are constantly peer tutoring, where is that challenge coming in for the high level student? So sometimes I see that they kind of suffer a little bit. There does need to be a balance of them peer tutoring as well as separating, at times, to be pushed and challenged.

Such findings support the belief of Lotan (2006) that classrooms that contain multi-ability students will also contain individualized and differentiated instruction. Lotan also encouraged teachers to adapt, change, and mold their curriculum to meet these needs.

Corresponding interview question 2 for the second research question was, "Suppose you had a classroom where five students were at least one grade level behind in reading and or math. How would that change your daily teaching style and lesson plans?"

Out of the 10 teachers interviewed, 9 expressed that having 5 students cognitively "behind" would necessitate modifications of daily teaching styles and lesson plans. In addition to modification of teaching style, one teacher indicated that these modifications would be focused on the evaluation of students below grade level. Four teachers responded in reference to the previous year's classroom dynamic, while six teachers

responded that having five students behind in the classroom was often a reality. Four teachers felt that having a few students that were behind indeed changed their teaching style and lesson plans, which included going back to reteach basic skills during regular class time. One teacher stated that additional time outside of class was needed.

Freeda stated that she often has a multi-ability classroom. Laughing, she said:

Well, that's an everyday occurrence. At any given moment there will be five students who are at least a grade level behind. With my lesson plans and that sort of thing, I always have the basic lesson plan for the day. But you have to monitor and adjust, even if it's for individual students.

She also believed that the modifications in her daily lesson plans included modification of daily work and assignments.

And they know, from the front end, from the beginning, first day of school, that I may not give the same assignment to everybody. So they don't feel like they're different, because it happens to every single person sometime throughout the year.

Omi shared Freeda's philosophy of modifying assessment and evaluation tools to help students who are behind by modifying content and delivery and formative and summative assessments. Omi affirmed:

I really have that right now, so it wouldn't change what I do right now. I would say the same thing where I responded to the last question, where I teach at a grade level when I'm doing the direct teaching. But then when it's assessment time I give extra help and extra prompting to the lower students who need it.

Sarah, suggested that additional help is needed to manage a multi-ability classroom—help is needed to assist students that are below grade level as well as those at grade level. Thinking for a moment, Sarah asserted:

You have to be aware of every student's needs, from either the highest end to the lowest. And you try to do things; I try to do as much as I can for the smarter ones. I try to do things to give them enrichment if possible; I try to

83

do that as much as possible. But that's where they do come in as the peer tutoring, so that's where that does come in.

Interestingly, teachers with over 15 years of experience discussed the critical nature of additional remediation and instruction outside of class to manage the multi-ability classrooms. Such beliefs support the assertion of Legerts, McDill, and McPartland (1993) that:

> …in contrast, the middle and high school grades are more likely to schedule extra academic assistance during the summer months for helping students who are behind or failing to catch up, or to use peer tutors and technologies to provide additional instruction during the regular school year. These examples reflect strategies that seek to control the costs of providing extra help using student peers as an inexpensive source of individualized assistance. (p. 89)

Felicia, an 8th-grade math teacher who has been teaching for 16 years, reflected on her specific class, saying that:

> They're going to need a little bit more intervention, I guess, on things that they don't know that could help bring them up in a higher level. That could be intervention after school that could be a peer tutoring opportunity. And, you know, maybe to where you're working on your skill… I teach math, for instance, so whatever I'm working on that day, obviously they've got to meet that requirement of that skill. But also, I've got to go pick and pull some things that will help them kind of bridge that gap between where they're at and where they need to be. So I think you would have to incorporate more than just what the skill is for that day and whether that's being afterschool, an intervention class, or some peer grouping or peer tutoring. I think you would have to kind of vary how you would address things.

Nathan stated that the first step in dealing with a classroom of five students that are all at least one grade level behind was to discover each students' academic weakness. He also suggested that:

> It's just diagnostic work: see what skills they're lacking and then just provide extra practice necessary for those kids. I mean maybe it involves homework assignments for something or even in the class work

84

assignments too. I mean you can modify. ...modify is what you want to do. Change it to fit whatever the needs are.

Tameka supported Nathan's notion of intervention through modification, stating that :

Those students being behind, it drastically changes my plans because I'm going back having to re-teach material that possibly should've been covered as well as obtained in third and fourth grade. This year in particular we've had a lot of students who are still struggling with just learning basic multiplication facts and that's been challenging.

In summary, teachers noted having students below grade level would modify their lesson plans as well as their time management in the classroom. The challenge mentioned by teachers focused on keeping upper level students challenged and engaged during instruction.

Question 3. Research question 3 was, "What are the perceptions of middle school teachers with regard to peer tutoring as an effective teaching strategy in the multi-ability classroom?"

The first corresponding interview question was, "What influences your use or non-use of peer tutoring within your classroom?"

Five of 10 teacher participants discussed their classroom dynamics, which included male and females, diversity in cognition levels and student participation, and differences in students' willingness to be involved. Ellen mentioned that the overall behavior of students in the classroom plays a major part in the decision to use or not use peer tutoring. Ellen believed that students who were constantly off-task and disruptive substantially lowered the possibility of orderly peer tutoring interaction. Two 6th-grade

teachers alluded to personal experience in the classroom and trial and error as fostering

agents of the use peer tutoring.

Freeda, when asked what influenced her to use peer tutoring, reflected on her own

middle school years and her positive experiences as a tutor to other students. Freeda

remarked:

> I know the first thing that I always think about is when I was in first grade,
> and I came from a private preschool into the public system. Not saying
> that private versus public at all, but of the school that I was at, I had
> started reading so much earlier than the other students. So I remember my
> teacher putting me with a student that was just a little bit behind me in
> reading skills, and I would help them, even as I was six years old. I
> remember feeling so good about that myself that I realized that I know it
> helped my friend student that was learning from me also. But when you
> put it with the kids, you realize it not only helps that lower learner, but the
> higher one, too, that's doing the peer tutoring.

As a result of her experiences, Freeda believes the vestiges of peer tutoring have partly

impacted her teaching style today.

Interaction among colleagues and administrators was also of substantial influence

in the utilization of peer tutoring in the classrooms of the teacher participants. Ellen, a

resource teacher who utilizes different tools to reach students in her classroom, remarked

that the administration encourages the use of peer tutoring in the classroom. She reflected

on her first year of teaching when one student in the class was a sort of a "catalyst" for

peer tutoring. Ellen remarked:

> Well, we're certainly encouraged to use it. But I have so many different
> levels within the classroom. I had so many children at so many different
> levels…Actually, when I first started I needed extra hands in the room,
> and I thought I already had one little girl who was wanting to help. We
> have a Pals program. And I thought, "OK, they're wanting to help." And I
> started with those. And it just sort of grew from that. They were doing
> such a great job. I thought, "Man, I need these kids." And they were very
> responsible.

Sarah, a middle-school math teacher, shared Ellen's opinion that a school's administration, along with a person's colleagues, plays a significant role in the utilization of peer tutoring.

> Oh, wow. I guess maybe just colleagues, just in general. I guess that just goes back to the very, very beginning of teaching. And you always go to people for help. I mean I go to people for help. So I guess just colleagues. Although the administrators, they always suggest that. But I guess you go back to the very, very beginning of your teaching when you go to someone and you ask for help or suggestions. So I guess it'd be colleagues.

Tammy, a 6th-grade teacher with 20 years of teaching experience, was motivated by her previous experiences and even research in peer tutoring. She remarked:

> Well, there's a lot of research out there talking about the use of peer tutoring, so things that I have read. We hear it when we go to these in-services—peer tutoring works. Just experience, you know. And sometimes not using it, why I might not use it, sometimes you don't have a good mix within your classroom of kids that are going to work well together. I might not have, in that particular room, a group.

Four teachers, all with advanced degrees, stated that peer tutoring was covered in their graduate school programs although the way peer tutoring was taught varied by institution. Taylor, when referring to her graduate program, stated:

> Well, the administration had nothing to do with peer teaching at all. My exposure came from my graduate studies at the University of Memphis, as well as the University of Chicago. So having been with them during the, I guess, beginnings of that particular strategy, I enjoyed it, working at various chapels that was very, very, very, very low. And we went in as change agents with the teacher core program that they had back in 1974. And it was a challenge for us to change the kid's way of learning. So we started pairing kids who were on grade level, above grade level with those that were below. And because of the numbers of kids that we had below grade level, we found that it was an advantageous and great assistance to us to reach those children. This is why I was influenced by it.

Corresponding interview question 2 for the third research question was, "Why do some students respond more positively to a peer rather than a teacher in regards to learning?"

All teacher participants believed that students felt more comfortable with peers in one-on-one interaction and were intimidated by teachers in such situations. Taylor expressed that teachers represented authority, which caused discomfort:

> The teacher represents authority. Children feel challenged. At this age of being a middle school person, there is a lot to do with self-esteem. Nobody wants to be recognized as a child who does not know. So they are very distant from us at this particular age.

This perception is supported by Piaget (1926), who suggested that when children interact with other children, they assume the role of both a "giver" and a "receiver" of instruction. All participants believed students are more comfortable when learning remedially. Two teachers expressed that students respond better in a classroom when they sense the lack of critical judgment and criticism associated with direct teacher interaction. Tammy, with hesitancy, admitted:

> I think some kids are intimidated, I think. You hate to think that they might be, but I think that's true sometimes. Just they have a better rapport sometimes with kids. They feel more comfortable. They don't feel judged or that they're going to have the wrong answer.

Likewise, Ellen agreed with Tammy's admission that students can be intimidated by teachers. She explained:

> I think sometimes they're more intimidated with a teacher, maybe. And sometimes they just respond more with a peer. Now, the ones that I use, generally, are maybe one or two grade levels above. With some of my children that are more disabled, I have used their classroom peers. It's built a better understanding between the two. They have responded better because they see them in the classroom and its built friendships.

Tameka, supporting the notion of student-to-peer tutoring over personal teaching

tutoring and interaction, said:

> I think it's for some, and not for all, for some, I think a lot of them feel
> intimidated. I don't want my peers to see me necessarily as the teacher,
> because they may think that I don't understand or I'm not as intelligent or
> it's not socially "acceptable."

In addition, she reconsidered the question again and expanded her

response, adding that:

> …a lot of them are going through hormonal changes and their friends
> mean everything. I mean everything to them. So being that I have this peer
> over here who is my best friend and knows how to do this, I would rather
> my friend help me than my instructor because my friend and I, we have
> this relationship. So I just think they just tend to want to ask for assistance
> from their peer more so than their teacher.

Sheri believed that students' feelings in the classroom were important to self-

esteem. She also noted that students want teachers to view them favorably:

> Sometimes, it's just the interaction with someone who's your age; it's
> their understanding, maybe they're taking the time to show you. They
> don't feel as nervous, maybe, with their peer that they get the right answer
> as they do with the teacher, where they're more afraid of answering: "Am
> I going to get it right or wrong?" So maybe they're just more at ease and
> comfortable with their peer.

Nathan stated that students respond more effectively to peers than teachers due to

differences in the communication styles of peers and teachers. Nathan described

communication and its importance as:

> They can probably relate to that student better. I think that student may
> have a better way of explaining it than a teacher might, because the
> student has already mastered it. So they might have a more, I guess using
> their lingo or their frame of references, they might have a more relevant
> way of explaining it to someone than maybe we could.

Omi agreed with Nathan on communication issues, saying that:

> They may not feel as judged by another student as if a teacher says, 'Why
> don't you get it?' If another student can maybe explain it in more "kid"
> terms than a teacher can, they might respond better to that.

Omi's opinion is espoused by Lippitt (1976), who suggested that the relationship

existing between a student and a peer tutor is vastly different that of a student and a

teacher. The relationship between the student and peer comes in the form of friendship,

not a "teacher to student" academic relationship. That friendship between a student and

peer tutor is difficult for a student and teacher to replicate.

Sarah reported that students resist the correction of teachers and, in contrast,

welcome the admonition of peers. She continues to say that:

> I think that sometimes I think they're more open to their friends if they're
> comfortable, if they don't feel like they're being cut down by having that
> extra help. I just think sometimes it works better…I've noticed that
> sometimes students get frustrated, and if I try to help them, sometimes
> they become defiant or they'll look away and become rude. I try to help
> them and I can read their body language, and I'm sitting here working
> away, and I'm looking at them and they're all about what's going on in the
> classroom. That's not working.

In conclusion, 8 of 10 teachers, supported the belief that most students do respond

in a more positive manner to instruction from peers instead of teachers. Many reasons for

this were provided by teachers including a feeling that peers can relate to students in a

more friendly manner. It was also noted that peers can often explain subject matter in a

way that a teacher can't do.

Question 4. Research question 4 was, "What are the perceptions of middle school

teachers regarding peer tutoring and its effect on community in the classroom?"

Corresponding interview question 1 was, "Some teachers would say that being at least a grade level behind would not have an effect on whether a student feels a part of the class or not. What do you think?"

Four of 10 teacher participants indicated that a student being at least one grade level behind indeed has an effect on a student's sense of belonging. Four other participants felt that this would not have an effect on a student who was not on grade level. Two teachers stated they were not sure. The remaining the six teachers who did not think peer tutoring was successful, stated that environment in the classroom was a major factor in the students below grade level feeling detached from the class; they accepted the responsibility to help create an environment that made every student feel as if they belong. Tammy believed that being one grade level below contributed to the student's frustration and feelings of being overwhelmed in the classroom. Tammy uses a particular strategy to cultivate a positive environment in the classroom. She said:

> If they feel that coming in, "Oh, I'm going to be behind. I'm not going to be able to do this," hopefully, we make them feel comfortable enough to know that they can have success. I try to make sure everybody has some success every day. So you hope that they don't feel that way, but I think sometimes they feel that they are behind. But they shouldn't feel that way.

In addition, Felicia identified the importance of a positive environment for students who are below grade level. She indicated:

> I think a lot of times it adds to their frustration because they see the class progressing and they're not. I think they may feel overwhelmed—"I'm never going to catch up." So in that respect I would think yes they would. She also suggested that a positive environment in the classroom would

contain an acknowledgment of a student's success. She explained:

> …But again, if you've got a teacher there that is providing what they need, and that's, like I said, providing the intervention to kind of bridge that gap,

91

I think they do. And I think when they are successful they do feel like
they're a part of that class. I think it's important when the kids to
experience success, you make sure they know that they're being
successful, because that will make them feel like they're a part of what's
going on. If you don't congratulate them and let them know that they're
progressing as they should and, "Hey, I'm seeing some big gains here," I
don't think they'll feel as much…I think a lot of it is the teacher kind of
making them feel like they're a part of it as well.

Sheri stated that the area of reading is where students would suffer most from

being behind in the classroom. Sheri reported:

I would agree, because I have one right now who came to me reading at a
1st grade level in 6th grade from the city. 1.2 reading level. And he's very
much in there right now. He's pod casting with the rest of them. And now
he's probably on a 3rd grade level. He's raised almost two reading levels
this year, but he's still not where he needs to be. But no, I co-teach a class.
Sometimes certain activities it's a little bit more of a struggle. Certainly
reading out loud is a struggle. They don't want to read out loud, unless
they are in a very small group. But I have a lot of students who kind of just
induce that that's the situation, a struggling reader.

Nathan, who specializes in creative arts, noted that when a student is behind, he or

she can suffer in terms of self-esteem or social status.

There may be some feelings of inadequacy because he might see his peers
who are at grade level or above grade level succeeding. I've seen that in
some of the files I've worked with this year. And that can affect social
stuff, too. I think the self-esteem…and it factors into a lot of different
things. Or they might not care. It depends on the child, really.

Taylor noted that in her current classroom and school, there are high student

expectations and that these expectations can create a disconnect for a student who feels as

if he or she is shy of these expectations.

Being a grade level behind at this school has a great impact on our
students, because we are so highly challenged. We teach success.
Everybody has set high expectations for all the children. And when they
come in one grade level below, they feel a compulsion to work extremely
hard through all of the other activities that we have offered to help them in
assistance to get to be on grade level. Because it's the cool thing to be on

the honor roll. It's a great thing to be on the high honor roll. You are well respected. You are received by your peers. And with this being the age of come-uppance to them, they want to be on top. So therefore, when they do come in they are very insecure with themselves.

Ellen maintains that the responsibility of creating a positive environment or community rests with teachers as well as students. She explained:

I think maybe it depends on the teacher sometimes and whether or not they make them feel a part of the classroom. Maybe the teacher doesn't realize whether or not they're making them feel apart. But children know; they have that sense of feeling. Sometimes other children can make them feel not a part. And then a child knows if they're up to par. They realize it. And sometimes they feel intimidated.

Corresponding interview question 2 was, "How does the idea of community in the classroom influence the success of the students in the classroom?" All teacher participants expressed that community had a major effect on student success. Three teachers suggested that community in the classroom should model a family. Four teachers made reference to a lack of trust in classrooms that can inhibit a student's willingness to interact during classroom discussions. The perceived correlation between community and student success is supported by Lee and Burkam (2003), who indicate that, "we expect that schools typified by positive relationships between teachers and students are more likely to hold students than schools defined by a less positive culture" (p. 386).

Two teachers emphasized that a classroom's learning environment must be more student-centered than teacher centered.

Tammy noted that math instruction should be verbal so that students can grasp concepts; verbal interaction in the classroom can be hindered if students feel disconnected from the classroom community. She explained:

I think if they feel like they are a part of the group, that we are a family that they can say anything and they can answer. Whether they know the answer or not, they feel like they can step up and answer. But if they don't feel like they are a part of it or that someone is going to criticize them, then they're not as willing to jump in and be part of it. I know with math, the more they are involved in speaking out and telling what they know, the more they get it and it's remembered. And when they don't participate it's just harder for them to keep the skill.

Felicia shared that student buy-in is important to student success. Students could have difficulty supporting an environment that they feel isolated from. Felicia stated:

You know, they've all got to feel like they're a part of that classroom. If they don't, they're not going to buy into what you're doing. When you go in to develop a lesson or teach a lesson, like I said, you can't have the same thing occurring every day. You've got to change it up. You've got to excite the kids. You've got to get them involved. If the kids feel like they're involved in that community…a lot of times I'll say, "OK, we're a big family here." They'll say, "Well, do I have to do this?" "Yeah, we're all one big family here." They've got to feel like they're a part of that one group and that I'm there to address all their needs,

Ellen indicated that community in the classroom was important and that it affects a student's level of participation. According to Ellen:

If they don't feel part of the community, they're not going to want to participate and they're not going to want to learn in that community. If a student feels they're an active and important part of the community, they're going to be more receptive to the learning in that community.

Freeda suggested that trust is a component of community that influences success in the classroom. She said:

So the community feel in the classroom, they have to be able to trust each other that when people walk out in the hall, if there's been peer tutoring, just like we've talked about, that peer isn't going to go out and say, 'So and so doesn't know any of this.' But if they have that community feel and that trust issue, I think they are going to really open up and let themselves learn.

94

When Sheri was asked about the influence of community and how that specifically affected the students in her classroom, she offered an example from last year:

> We got some new students from the city, and this particular one skipped the 4th grade because he had a learning disability, was diagnosed with a learning disability. And then they decided to go ahead and skip him a grade to get him where he was supposed to be, because he had repeated early on. He's battled. But in that situation, this exact atmosphere, lots of peer tutoring has happened, lots of just sitting down, talking, discussing. But it has taken him a while to overcome his embarrassment of being behind. And it's taken the other kids time to realize that he was trying. It wasn't that he wasn't trying. He was trying and he was struggling. So through the process we've seen a lot of growth.

Taylor credited her school's professional learning community initiative to assist in community promotion, which she felt enhanced the learning environment of those below grade level. She maintained:

> Because we have this new professional learning community strategy where the child can say to us, "These are the types of questions that I like to respond to on a test. Can we have more of this?" Or if there is some type of special emphasis or enhancement that the kids want us to incorporate that they have found as an interactive tool on the websites, they'll bring that to our attention and we'll try to involve or include that into our planning. So it is a working situation constantly. So whatever is out there that's new, we all work together. So it does become more student than teacher-centered. And that's what we like about our school system.

Finally, it is noted, four teachers made reference to a lack of trust in classrooms that can inhibit a student's willingness to interact during classroom discussions. The perceived correlation between community and student success is supported by Lee and Burkam (2003), who indicate that, "we expect that schools typified by positive relationships between teachers and students are more likely to hold students than schools defined by a less positive culture" (p.3 86). The common theme of community and a sense of family served as a foundation to the responses of public school teachers.

The Private Middle School

The private middle school where fieldwork was conducted is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), is a member the Association of Christian Schools International, and is 1 of 32 private schools providing middle school education in the county.

The average tenure of teachers at the school is nine years. The middle school schedule includes seven periods, with some classes offered two days a week. Core classes are offered along with electives in choir, band, French, and critical thinking. The school is not required to adhere to the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP), the state examination for public school students in grades 3 through 8 that covers mathematics, language arts, and reading. A curriculum committee appointed by the Head of School makes recommendations and approves curriculum. Teachers utilize different teaching strategies, including lecture, individual and group work, and different forms of cooperative learning.

Research Questions and Responses

Question 1. The first research question was, "What are the perceptions of middle school teachers in regard to how multi-ability classrooms modify the preparation?"

The first corresponding interview question was, "Some administrators say that peer tutoring can't be successful in today's educational classrooms. What would you say?"

Three of the nine teacher participants believed that peer tutoring as a teaching strategy was successful, with six of these teachers believing that its success depends on classroom dynamics. Three of the nine participants support peer tutoring based on prior

use, with one teacher citing utilization of peer review and peer editing. One teacher

expressed concern with peer tutoring, saying that it may offer only limited success if

tutors provide answers to assignments and do not engage in instruction. Two teachers

mentioned the interaction between the tutor and tutee, concerned that students may lack a

supportive environment during the tutoring process. These concerns are similar to those

expressed by DePaulo et al. (1989), who maintained that a drawback of peer tutoring is

that students become increasingly "sensitive" to their social status and place in the

classroom and fear being singled out.

Elizabeth, a 30-year social studies teacher, expressed that she has supported peer

tutoring throughout her teaching career and often pairs higher ability students with lower

ability students. Elizabeth said:

> I would say it can be very successful in today's classrooms. I used peer
> tutoring quite a bit. I had all levels of students and would try to pair one of
> a lower level with a higher level, and it worked very successfully. It
> seemed like it helped them very much. It seemed like it gave them more of
> an incentive, to me, to do better than what they were doing.

Teri, an 8-year foreign language teacher, also supported the use of peer tutoring

and cited positive peer pressure as a benefit, mentioning that such benefit is evident in the

classroom where peer tutoring occurs. Teri said:

> It would encourage them. It would encourage their success, especially
> looking to an upper-classman to know that if they can do it, then the
> lower-classman could. So I think it would pave the way for an
> improvement. If not an A, they could definitely strive for a better grade
> and see that, well, if their friend could do it, then they could.

Thelma, who has been an 8th-grade math teacher for 10 years, alluded to the

importance of attitude of both the tutee and the tutor in the selection of students. She

stated:

It depends on the student. It depends on the seriousness of both the one tutoring and the one that's being tutored. They both have to want to do it. Also, I would recommend the same gender between them. It's a good use of peer pressure. Instead of peer pressuring them to do something wrong or that we don't want them to do, it's a peer pressure to get it right from somebody else that's their age. So it's a good use of peer pressure.

Sharon, who has been a 6th-grade teacher for 20 years, agreed that the attitudes of the participants of peer tutoring are important to the success of the tutoring relationship. Sharon stated:

I think it can be successful if you pick the right peer tutor. A student that's ahead may or may not be a good peer tutor. There has to be a little bit more to them, because in the 6th grade anyway, there's a tendency for a student to tell another student what to write down rather than going through the process of how do you get to this point? So you would have to be really careful who you select.

Fredrick, a health teacher for 30 years, agreed that success of peer tutoring depends on the student being tutored and not on the teacher or tutor. After pausing for a moment, he stated:

I'd say it depends. It depends on the individuals. I could see cases where it could be successful, and I sure could see where it could not be. Well, if the student wanted to make an honest effort, then I feel like they would use any help they could. If they wanted to make an honest effort, I don't think they would resent it or feel bad. If they maybe do not want to make an honest effort, then I could see where it would not work.

Nedra, an English teacher for 3 years, discussed the success of peer tutoring and the task of pairing students in such learning relationships. She expressed that:

You really have to know, if you are putting them in groups, who those kids are and where they are at. I mean, you're not going to know that right off the bat; it's going to be trial and error first, until you really get to know the kids. You'll have some kids that are so far advanced that if you really paid attention and you knew, "This one is way up in the grade level and this one is just way behind or more immature," and you pair them with the more mature students, kids know who the better students are.

Nedra also uses peer tutoring in her English classes by arranging peer criticism and critique for essay writing assignments. Nedra describes this process:

> You'll have some kids that are so far advanced that if you really paid attention and you knew, "This one is way up in the grade level and this one is just way behind or more immature," and you pair them with the more mature students, kids know who the better students are.
> In my class they peer edit essays. The kids know who gets the better grades. They try to go give them their essay for them to peer edit.

The use of peer criticism is supported by Bruffee (1980), who pointed to two major goals of peer criticism: (1) training students to be effective tutors and (2) respecting the opinions of those being tutored.

Corresponding interview question 2 was, "Suppose you could create a peer tutoring program in your classroom. How would that affect your students who are behind?"

Two of nine teacher participants referred to past experiences with peer tutoring, expressing positive results. Seven participants described how they perceived peer tutoring to be helpful based on prior knowledge and not experience. With some hesitation due to a perceived lack of practical experience with peer tutoring in the classroom, teachers overall supported the concept of peer tutoring. One teacher expressed support, but stated that peer tutoring would require extensive work. Two teachers believed that peer tutoring would affect students that were below grade level by providing additional instruction outside of the teacher's regular classroom instruction. One teacher discussed negative factors inhibiting the use of a peer tutoring relationship. Stacy, an art teacher for 27 years, expressed concern with the potential negative aspects of peer tutoring. Although she had used peer tutoring in the past, concerns were still present.

When Fredrick, a health teacher for 35 years, was asked how peer tutoring would

help a student that was below grade level, he pointed to a student's attitude as a

determining factor, stating that:

> Well, if the student wanted to make an honest effort, then I feel like they
> would use any help they could. If they wanted to make an honest effort, I
> don't think they would resent it or feel bad. If they maybe do not want to
> make an honest effort, then I could see where it would not work.

Ethan, an 8th-grade history teacher in his 1st year, asked that the question be

repeated and then asked for clarification. After thinking for a moment, he said:

> I think it would depend on the student. I have several students that some of
> them are maybe behind because of social abilities. So if I partner them up
> with a student that can help them, it just depends on that student's
> "behind." If they are behind socially also, it's going to be difficult. But I
> think if they are a student that can adapt to another student helping them, I
> think it can be beneficial. So I think it just depends on each student.

In conclusion, four teachers stated that peer tutoring would be beneficial to

students who were behind, yet they cited different reasons for their support than had been

those that were previously identified by their colleagues. These differences in support are

reflected in the findings of Mitchell (2004) who stated that "The reasons for using peer

tutoring are almost as many as the areas of the curriculum in which it is employed" (p.

234).

Thelma believed that the success of peer tutoring is due to students acquiring an

additional perspective of the material being taught. She explained:

> I think it would help bring them up. At least it would give them a
> different…their peers might say something a little better than I say it, or a
> little more understandable than I say it. So it never hurts to have a second
> person say it a different way.

In conclusion, most teachers in the private school provided support for the use of peer tutoring. This support was based on theory and not on the practice of peer tutoring within their classroom. Two of nine teachers supported peer tutoring through the use of this strategy in their classrooms. Success of peer tutoring hinged on the dynamics of the classroom. Teachers felt peer tutoring could be useful if the make up of the classroom provided students willing and able to serve in a peer tutoring relationship.

Question 2. The second research question was, "What are the perceptions of middle school teachers regarding peer tutoring and its implementation in the classroom?"

The first corresponding interview question was, "In what ways do multi-ability classrooms affect your teaching style?"

Seven of the nine teacher participants stated that multi-ability classrooms affects their teaching style; in contrast, two teachers expressed that there is no significant change in their teaching style. Three teachers reported that the multi-ability classroom necessitates a move from group-oriented direct instruction to more individualized and differentiated instruction. Three teachers said that multi-ability classrooms reduce the amount of time available for direct instruction. One teacher even cited a need for more effective time management to allow additional time for lower ability students.

Sharon, a 6th-grade teacher for 20 years, discussed the current dynamics of her multi-ability classrooms. She explained:

> I do have multi-ability in my classes because we don't place students by
> their ability in 6th grade, and I teach math especially. And that being a
> skill subject, you do have to address all these different levels.

In addition, she discussed the modification of her teaching style and strategies:

> So explanations come in different forms when you have multi-level and multi-learning styles, even if they're not behind. I do visual teaching and auditory, and then they have always hands-on practice. And sometimes things have to be explained two or three different ways until it's understood by different students.

Frank, a 4th-year junior high theology teacher, believes that multi-ability classrooms necessitate modifications in teaching strategies and additional modification based individual student needs. He thoughtfully indicated:

> The way it affects me would be I have to really plan to make sure that I had to find different kind of techniques to get to each student. I mean I guess depending on a disability, if they're behind I have to make sure that I get every part of the information in. One thing I try to do is teach in a way where if a student learns better by hearing or by seeing, I got to make sure I can do the best that I can to involve every type of technique in a class to benefit every student. I don't necessarily teach a class; I teach individual students, in a way.

Teachers discussed class-wide strategies for instruction; however, Elizabeth adopted an individualized approach to classroom instruction. She suggested that:

> It's more individualized when I have a multi-level than it would be otherwise. I would make it more individualized, again, so that everyone understood what I was trying to teach at that time. I modify that, because I may say, 'OK, today we're going to get to page so and so.' But I feel like they're not ready to go that far, then I stop and go to the point where I think they're ready to go.

Fredrick stated that multi-ability classrooms do not alter his teaching style due to his practice of not utilizing the information that identifies his students' cognitive abilities. His refusal to utilize this identifying information promotes his desire was to eliminate as many preconceived ideas or perceptions of students as possible. He explained:

102

I never wanted to know, going in, anything like that. Never wanted to know. My expectations were the same for all of them. And I didn't want to know and never looked at what level they were or anything like that. My expectations were the same for every student in that class.

Ethan, who began teaching last year to replace a teacher who retired in the middle of the school year, stated that multi-ability classrooms do not alter his teaching style. He went on to illustrate:

I've taught every kid the exact same. I've had teachers tell me so and so can't do this, so and so can't do this. But I've tried my way and I've found that they can do it. I've had teachers tell me, 'This student is not going to make it. She's going to fail.' And lo and behold, she's passed with a B! I teach them all the same. Now, there are several students that may be behind a grade that I do take a little bit more time with and I help them a little bit more. But for the most part, I teach them all the same.

Thelma stated that the greatest modification in her teaching style pertained to time management, stating that:

Well you definitely have to open up time. So it shortens what I would do. What would happen was that time they would be working on their own would just become the peer tutoring time. They would still have leadership from me to begin with, but instead of working independently then, they would spend the last of that class time together.

The second corresponding interview question was, "Suppose you had a classroom where five students were at least one grade level behind in reading or math. How would that change your daily teaching style?"

Three of nine teacher participants stated that having five students a grade level behind would not change their daily teaching styles or lesson plans. Five of these nine said that they would make some changes in their lesson plans, with four of the five mentioning that they would need additional time to work with students that are behind. Elizabeth explained that this would change her teaching style, altering the group-oriented

direct instruction that included class lecture to employ a more individualized approach, with daily lesson plans tailored to the needs of lower ability students. This changes (or lack thereof) in teaching styles bolster the findings of Bender (2007), who suggested that regardless of the approach, peer tutoring changes the process of learning and tends to emphasize relationships between students that emerge as a result of the tutoring process. For these reasons, the differentiated class should be "characterized by variations in instructional grouping" (p. 126). Nedra indicated that she reduces the amount of material covered to compensate for the slower pace needed for students below grade level. Teri stated the need for repetition in lesson delivery to ensure the comprehension of lower ability students.

Teri described interaction with four students at the proper grade level and one student who was a grade behind:

> I've got one now. I've got four students, who are progressive, one student, in the resource program, very severely learning deficient. The students are great. They wait patiently while I go through steps with her to build on. Like, we start with a foundation and we do that. The students are good to work with me and be patient.

Teri further described potential reactions of students when extra help was given. She explained:

> And it's hard at times, but it's good to see that they don't get as bored waiting, because boredom could creep in. They could either start becoming disruptive or just totally tune me out. And so I have to focus on all of that. It's a difficult situation sometimes, but other times it's easy. So I've made adjustments through that.

Thelma felt that extra time was needed when there were students in a classroom below grade level. Her present teaching style and lesson plans incorporated additional time for personal instruction during the normal class period. Thelma said:

I don't know that it would change it so much, because I start by
instruction. I start by going through examples, having them work with me,
that kind of thing. And at the end of my class, I generally open it up for
them to start working on their own. What would happen was that time they
would be working on their own would just become the peer tutoring time.
They would still have leadership from me to begin with, but instead of
working independently then, they would spend the last of that class time
together.

Frank did not modify his teaching style to accommodate additional students who

are below grade level. According to Frank:

I would probably definitely continue what I'm doing with the rest of the
class, keep them going. I would try to find time, maybe in a tutoring
session during class. What I would do is I would teach the next lesson,
which usually is about 15 minutes for the chapter. We may discuss or
lecture depending on what we're doing that day.

Sharon suggested that the modification of teaching style to include peer tutoring

should be confined to the end of class and not during regular instruction, going on to say:

OK, my teaching style. I would have to teach my lessons as they come,
OK? But I have work time at the end of every lesson. They would
probably be a group that I focused on during that work time rather than
waiting for them to come and talk to me.

Another teacher, Stacy, expressed that is fine to allow students to struggle during

regular instruction time and then to compensate for this at other times during class. Stacy

stated:

I would have to have a special session with those five. Let them just
struggle along while you're teaching the rest of the class and then give the
rest of the class something to do while you worked with these five.

Finally, teachers explained having students below grade level would change their

teaching style, altering the group-oriented direct instruction that included class lecture to

employ a more individualized approach, with daily lesson plans tailored to the needs of

lower ability students. This changes (or lack thereof) in teaching styles bolster the

findings of Bender (2007), who suggested that regardless of the approach, peer tutoring changes the process of learning and tends to emphasize relationships between students that emerge as a result of the tutoring process.

Question 3. The third research question was, "What are the perceptions of middle school teachers with regard to peer tutoring as an effective teaching strategy in the multi-ability classroom?"

The first corresponding interview question 1 was, "What influences your use or non-use of peer tutoring within your classroom?"

Four of nine teacher participants suggested classroom dynamics influenced their use of peer tutoring. These teachers believed that if a class interacted well and maintained good behavior, then peer tutoring is a viable instructional option. However, two teachers expressed students' needs as their influence in the decision to use peer tutoring.

Two teachers shared that their use of peer tutoring stems from their personal experience with peer tutoring. One teacher was exposed to the concept of peer tutoring in graduate school while another teacher referenced attendance at a peer tutoring seminar as motivation for the use of peer tutoring.

Elizabeth, who reported that her use of peer tutoring was motivated by personal experience and a peer tutoring seminar, reflected on saying:

> It was personal experience and it was also you. Remember the time that you came and you did the peer tutoring seminar? I went to that session. And after that I thought, 'Hey, my class would be a great class to try this in.' And I tried it. It worked!

Stacy, who did not receive instruction concerning peer tutoring in her college

program, cited trial and error as her motivation for the use of peer tutoring. She continued

with:

> It was just something I did. I don't ever remember being taught. But as
> I'm helping other students, this one over here needs help and I'm busy
> trying to get around to everybody, so I ask someone else who knows it if
> they would help that one. That usually works out well.

Knowing that peer tutoring is not always successful, she went on to suggest a potential

scenario where peer tutoring would not be a favorable strategy, stating that:

> The first thing I thought of was this thing that we had to deal with—
> bullying. And there is that potential there. Because as soon as you have
> someone help this child, that points that child out as slow, not smart, not
> up with the rest of them. You really have to guard against the bullying
> concept there.

> Sharon, who cited that her exposure to peer tutoring came during a college

methods course, shared:

> Well, in college that was one of the methods that were taught to us. When
> I was in school, they would call it peer tutoring now, we called it helping
> each other. You know, 'Would you help so and so with this or that?' But
> as far as another teacher coming to me and suggesting it, I don't think
> that's ever happened before.

She waited for a moment and then noted the needs and attitudes of students as another

source of motivation for the use of peer tutoring:

> Just the need of the students, really, and their behavior. If it becomes a
> situation where a student who needs help is helped by another student and
> that becomes just a time to chit-chat, and socializes, and play around, then
> it has to stop, and it has to be me and that student. And that's happened.

> As with Sharon, Fredrick reported that students' desire and willingness was the

motivation for the use of peer tutoring. After a moment of reflection, he explained:

If I feel like a person needs help I determine that. And if I felt like it would work I wouldn't hesitate to use that, especially if I felt like I had somebody that would be willing to do the tutoring. Then, to me, if both parties were willing to do that, I think it could work.

Frank relied on the dynamics of the classroom to mold his decision on the use peer tutoring. Classroom dynamics include grade, gender, student ability, student attitude, and layout of classroom. He declared:

It probably depends on the dynamics and the personalities of the students. Some classes can handle it well and some just can't; it just depends on your student. Behavior-wise, if they're out of control, then what I'll do, usually, is I probably won't let it happen, depending on the students. It would probably be behavior, maybe.

Likewise, Nedra, an 8th-grade English teacher, supported the belief that classroom dynamics influenced her decision to use peer tutoring.

The maturity of the class as a whole, I think. Some classes you might have a greater number of very mature, conscientious students, and then you might another class where you might have one and the rest are not at all. So it really depends on the maturity of the class as a whole to me.

The second corresponding interview question was, "Why do some students respond more positively to a peer rather than a teacher in regard to learning?"

Four of nine teacher participants expressed the belief that students respond better to peers than teachers due to intimidation and they feel more comfortable with peers than teachers. Frank noted that students view the teacher as an enemy and do not respond positively to teachers at times due to that perception. Stacy remarked that students naturally are more comfortable interacting with someone their own age as opposed to an older individual, such as a teacher. All teacher participants believed that students respond in a more favorable manner with a peer as opposed to a teacher. All teacher participants stated that a student would more often respond positively to a peer instead of a teacher,

108

based on the relationships between peers and students. These opinions are similar to those

expressed by Sabin (1976), who indicated that before a peer tutor is valued as someone

that can help the student academically, the tutor is valued as a friend. This type of

relationship is often exclusive to peers and students and does not pertain to those with

teacher.

Fredrick, with views that differ from those of his colleagues, stated students

respond better to their peers because they respond to different types of leadership and that

this is not due to intimidation or a generation gap. He felt that peers have a different style

than teachers have, saying:

> To me, people respond to all kinds of leadership. It may be a classmate, it
> may be a teacher, and it may be a youth pastor or somebody. But people
> respond to different types of leadership. And I think the teacher can figure
> out that, and then they can help the student. They may do that, and they
> may respond better if you talk them privately. They may respond better…
> Some of them don't feel like you like them until you get on them. You
> know what I'm saying. So it's different with the individuals.
> Elizabeth expressed that students seem to be intimidated by teachers and that this

can foster negative relationships between students and teachers. Elizabeth reported:

> I think that a lot of times, students are intimidated by the teacher. If the
> teacher comes over there and says, 'No, this is not right. You need to do it
> this way,' that's one thing. But if you have a student that says, 'Hey man,
> look at this. This is all you have to do,' they respond better to that
> sometimes than the teacher.

In addition, Sharon, after considering the question, stated that students are

intimidated by teachers and are labeled enemies. She described the source of the

intimidation as:

> Fear. A lot of students are afraid to come and talk to the teacher.
> Sometimes they've had teachers in the past that don't want them to ask
> questions. They don't want them to come for help. Sometimes they are
> embarrassed because 'it makes me look dumb if I have to go and talk to

the teacher,' where if they are talking to another student, the threat factor is not there.

In a time of reflection, Sharon described a personal in-class experience with a former student to illustrate the apprehension of some students:

> …and I've had some students before; they would become physically ill if they had to work one-on-one with a teacher. They have that much fear, where they would work with a student. So it can be extreme, where, 'I cannot help you one-on-one.'

Nedra expressed a student's hesitation with teachers as emanating from the association that students make between punishment, correction, and teachers. She said:

> Well, I really think because teachers are also considered an authority figure, and they also deal out punishment and things like that that sometimes they are afraid to talk openly with them on some points.

Frank believed that the feelings that students have toward teachers are greater than those expressed by his colleagues, saying that the feeling is more than simple intimidation, but alienation. Frank shared:

> I would probably say is a lot of times they say the teacher is their enemy. They think it's us against them. Now, if it's a peer, they think, 'Well, they're kind of on our side. I mean they're probably here to help me.' A lot of times, at least when I was a kid, we viewed a teacher as someone who just wants to make you work and doesn't care, I mean sometimes. It always depends on the teacher. But I think a peer; they are less intimidating, probably.

Stacy did not ascribe fault to teachers for strained teacher-student relationships, but she suggested that the mental and emotional make-up of middle school students are factors. Stacy said:

> I think that's just kids. I think that's just their nature. They hear teachers all day, every day. And yet, when one of their peers says the same thing that you would say, it's just different. They do relate to kids better than adults.

110

Teri described that the lack of interaction between students and teachers can also

be observed in the interaction between students and their parents. She explained:

> Well it's the same old adage—kids aren't going to listen to their parents
> and they're always with their teachers, and kids are more alike in their
> thinking and they respect some students, especially if they see that they
> have put forth the effort, they have been a good example as to what a
> student needs to be; they look up to them, I feel, for that and they think,
> 'Well if they can do it, so can I.'

Teachers indicated that students related to peers in a more positive manner than

they related to teachers, which can be observed in the performance of students in a peer

tutoring relationship. This reflects findings by Geiser (1969) as well as Landrum and

Martin (1970), which showed marked increase in performance in the classroom due to

students being tutored by peers based on the relationships that existed between students

and peers. This increase in performance should not attributed exclusively to peer tutoring

or the influence of peers; yet, it shows the lack of a negative effect on student

performance when a tutoring relationship does not involve a teacher.

Question 4. Research question 4 was, "What are the perceptions of middle school

teachers regarding peer tutoring and its effect on community in the classroom?

The first corresponding interview question was, "Some teachers would say that

being at least a grade level behind would not have an effect on whether a student feels a

part of the class or not. What do you think?"

Eight of the teacher participants disagreed with the statement that "being at least a

grade level behind would not have an effect on whether a student feels a part of the class

or not" and felt that a student would not feel as if he or she is part of the classroom

community, causing difficulties in class. These findings support beliefs by Anderman and

111

Leake (2005), who noted that teachers "also need to understand that promoting positive interpersonal relationships and classroom climate are important not only for increasing students' sense of well-being and enjoyment of school, but also for engagement with learning" (p. 193). Two participants believed that whether the student felt a part of the classroom community depended on the subject being taught. Fredrick agreed with this statement, saying it is a teacher's responsibility to make sure students feel like they are part of the overall classroom community regardless of how far behind the student is.

Teri believed that a student one grade level behind *would* feel like he or she is part of the community of the classroom. She thoughtfully explained:

> I wouldn't agree with that. I think they feel comfortable. They don't seem to have any shame being in a resource class versus AP class. AP students discuss more about the workload. Resource, I think they kind of like it because they know that they don't have as much work as the others. I don't think they feel inhibited being in a class with a mixed group of learners. I think they are comfortable.

Fredrick believed that a teacher effectively managing the classroom environment would assist students in feeling like they are all part of the classroom community. He explained:

> Well, I think part of that is the responsibility of the teacher to make that situation work. If I'm a teacher, I'm never going to belittle anybody. We're not going to make fun of anybody. Even though we've got people with different abilities, we're going to try to find what will work for all of them.

He insisted that it is the teacher's responsibility to create a desirable atmosphere in the classroom and that if a child did not feel like he or she belonged, then the failure is the teacher's own. Two teachers said that it depends on the subject a student is deficient in as to whether or not they felt like a part of the classroom community.

112

Thelma agreed that a student could disconnected from the classroom community

if he or she student was behind in math or a subject that built upon previous knowledge:

> …depends on the subject. If you are teaching history, it's not necessarily,
> it can be, but it's not necessarily dependent upon what you did or didn't
> learn last year. Math is. So it depends on the subject. In a math classroom
> they are much more likely to feel behind than they do in a classroom that's
> not dependent upon it.

Likewise, Sharon, as a math and science teacher, noted that a student below grade

level in math would most likely feel a disconnect in the classroom. She said:

> I say it will affect a student if you are a whole year behind. I teach math
> and I teach science, and I don't see that in science, because it's a subject
> area. But in math, everything is built on what you already know. And if
> their skills are a year behind, it is so hard to catch them up. And they come
> into the room with the idea: "I can't do math".

Frank indicated that the comfort level of a student in the classroom along with his

or her self-esteem depends on the student. He maintained:

> It probably depends on the student. I would say that it can because also, if
> they have, maybe, a self-esteem issue, they could feel left out. And it
> could be embarrassing if they have someone tutoring them in class,
> depending on them.

When further questioned, he elaborated on the potential for embarrassment of a

student below grade level. He indicated:

> Perhaps after we're done with a lecture, if we have a student come and
> tutor them and they know other students are watching, they could feel a
> little bit embarrassed. So it is possible.

Elizabeth recounted a previous experience in the classroom concerning students

being behind and their feeling of community, saying that:

> It definitely has an effect. I can remember one student that was like two
> grade levels behind in one of my classes. And he always felt like he was
> "dumb," that he could not master the material.

The second corresponding interview question was, "How does the idea of community in the classroom influence the success of the students in the classroom?"

All teacher participants believed that community is important to the success of students in the classroom and expressed how damaging a negative learning environment could be in the classroom. A prevailing comment among six participants was centered on a safe learning environment and what it consists of: freedom from harassment or students being made fun.

Fredrick, having taught for 35 years, believes that it is important to have a community where all students have some amount of success in the classroom regardless of the size of the success. Elizabeth expressed a belief that community in the classroom contributes to the success or failure of learning. Frank indicated that it is a family atmosphere within the community of learners in the classroom that created success. This is aligned with Fox (1991), who suggested that tutors provide an atmosphere where there is a "safety net" in place during the interaction or working through the process of learning.

Stacey responded that community has a large effect on learning and is important even though time is required to foster a sense community in the classroom. Community cannot be created within the first few days of school. Stacey noted:

> I think it has a big effect on them. It takes a while to develop that. From the beginning of the year when the kids come in, you've got to give them a sense of oneness. So I think that sense of community is very important. If someone who talked down to that other student, embarrassed him, exclaimed how dumb he was, that he couldn't get this or something, you could see how that would be a negative effect.

114

Stacey also shared some of her own class experiences and strategies that assisted

in the creation of a positive learning community. She goes on to explain:

> In my art classes, they're not allowed to ridicule each other's work at all. They can correct them or say how they could make it better, but they cannot put down anybody else. As you have someone help this child, that points that child out as slow, not smart, not up with the rest of them. You really have to guard against the bullying concept there. I teach art as well as art history and you have to guard against a negative learning community, even in those classes.

These findings support the belief by Ryan and Patrick (2001) that:

> …being in an environment where students' ideas and efforts are respected, with minimal threat of being embarrassed or teased, boosts students' confidence in their ability to learn, and suggests they devote more cognitive resources to engaging with the tasks in hand. (p. 455)

Thelma reported that community is necessary in the classroom and believed that if

a struggling student is alone academically, then they will continue to struggle, remarking:

> If a student is struggling and he's alone, he's probably just going to continue to struggle. But if he's with a group and we're all working on something together, he's more likely to try. He's more likely to want to get help. He's more likely to feel comfortable in asking for help, either me or one of his peers.
>
> So yeah, it's all about his comfort level, really. If we're comfortable and we're struggling, we're so much more likely to reach out and get help and then, therefore, not be behind anymore. If we're alone and we're struggling, we just feel alone and the problem doesn't get better.

Likewise, Nedra expressed the effects of a negative element in a classroom

community when she stated:

> Yes. I would definitely think so, because the negative atmosphere, nobody wants to be in there, nobody wants to learn. They have to have some type of interest or feel connected in some way for them to feel like they want to learn what you've got to present them.

Teri said that she observes the negative influence in a classroom community on a

regular basis, stating that students are influenced by each other and a negative student can

greatly hinder the sense of community and the other students in the class. Teri stated:

> You've got bad attitudes; you've got good attitudes. You've got some that
> feed off of each other all of the time. You've got some students that are
> stronger than others that whatever the pessimist next to them is saying
> they won't even listen to. They think they're ridiculous. Then you've got
> some other students that are very weak and they follow the dominant

Frank believes that classroom community should model a family, saying that a

safe and nurturing family atmosphere is vital in the classroom. He responded:

> I think it's very important. What I like to do when I come into class is try
> and make it feel like a family. I mean I want everyone to feel like they are
> safe and welcome in that class. Because I feel like if you are afraid, then
> the chances of your learning have gone down dramatically. I feel like if
> you come into a classroom and know that the teacher is going to keep you
> safe, know that the students are going to accept you, then your chances of
> learning increase dramatically, I guess. It's just a much better chance. If
> they feel welcome, it's safe, they're going to learn.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Using existing literature, data collected from interviews and focus groups, and the research questions as a foundation, several themes emerged during analysis from both data sets. Individual themes were determined by terms, concepts, and categories the researcher interpreted while examining the frequency of the data. Each theme was designed to answer the research question and to be neither static nor mutually exclusive. Themes were developed and merged to assist in answering the research questions posed in the study.

Findings

As a result, the researcher identified three common themes common for public and private school teachers as well as one theme exclusive to the public school. Themes shared by both bound groups were: (1) *differentiated instruction*. (2) Peer tutoring was perceived as beneficial among lower achieving students as a teaching strategy. Lower achieving students were classified as those "below present grade level" regardless of the cause of the deficiency. (3) Students respond to peer instruction in a more positive manner because of possible peer intimidation by teachers in the classroom. Based on participant feedback and responses, there was one theme different between the public and private school; only one theme emerged exclusive from the public school teachers. (4) Community in the classroom, which seemed to create a "family" atmosphere, is perceived as an essential element for the success of peer tutoring. While both groups of teachers expressed the importance of community, the public school teachers felt that the atmosphere created a "family" feeling, which is what made the idea of community

117

important in regard to peer tutoring. The characteristics of a "family" type community included security and belonging for all members of the community.

Theme 1: Differentiated instruction. The first theme identified during data analysis was, "Educators find that multi-ability classrooms require differentiated instruction to be successful in teaching students below grade level." Both public and private school teachers experience multi-ability classrooms each year. Over 25% of the teacher participants gave personal accounts of the wide range of abilities in their classrooms. As expressed in this theme, both sets of participants expressed the difficulty involved with multi-ability classrooms and the frustration of balancing the students' educational needs, e.g., weekly academic goals, school requirements, and state testing requirements of lower achieving students at while simultaneously keeping higher achieving students motivated. Teachers expressed this balance as a major challenge for them in the classroom. The responsibility that public and private school teachers have to effectively instruct all students in the class becomes an ongoing task. Fredrick, a private school teacher, explained that teachers must do whatever they can to reach each student regardless of their ability. He stated:

> Well, I think part of that is the responsibility of the teacher to make that
> situation work. If I'm a teacher, I'm never going to belittle anybody. So if
> I do have a child that is below grade level, it's my responsibility to get
> them to grade level by any means.

This challenge was evident in the comments made by both groups of teachers.

Fourteen teachers stated that the ability level within their classrooms had a dramatic effect on their teaching style; also, teachers in general believed multi-ability classrooms required additional amounts of preparation and instruction time. Not only was

118

their teaching style modified due to the additional time required, but it also changed as a result of the differences in teaching strategies.

Both public and private school teachers agreed that group lecture and instruction was generally not successful in providing instruction when classroom dynamics reflect a large difference in upper and lower ability students. Three teachers adapted their teaching styles as well as the types of assessments given. Tests were modified to accommodate the needs of the lower ability students, as well as supplemental work developed for higher ability students. Fifteen teachers identified a pedagogical shift from traditional small- and large- group planning to differentiated instruction because of multi-ability classrooms. According to Tomlinson (2000), "at its most basic level, differentiation consists of the efforts of teachers to respond to variance among learners in the classroom" (p. 1). Differentiated instruction includes ability groups, manipulatives, student pretests, and other methods of increasing student comprehension. Along with differentiated instruction, teacher participants utilized individualized modifications for lower achieving students that are considered below grade level in one or more subjects and are not necessarily students who are presently covered by Individualized Education Plans, section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, or other modifications.

Taylor, a public school teacher, explained the effects of multi-ability classrooms, explaining:

> It affects me greatly because every lesson has to be organized to reach every student where they are at that particular time in my classroom. So therefore, I find myself having to do many, many hours of planning because I am very perceptive and aware when the child steps into my room where they are because I have looked at all the data. So I know that child's weakness and I know the other kid's strength. So I know that it's my responsibility to make sure that every child has at least so many grades

above where they are at the present time. And then I have those who are
three or four grade levels high. They are only 11-years-old and here they
are taking high school math. So it's then my responsibility to challenge
that student.

This response, along with some of the others, reflects Tomlinson's (2001) belief

that differentiated instruction is important because future knowledge is based on past

knowledge and not all students in a classroom have the same level of understanding. The

importance of differentiated instruction is observed by Gregory and Chapman (2002),

who state, "they don't all learn the same thing in the same way on the same day. As

educators we need to consider each child within the learning community based on his/her

needs based on readiness, preferences, and interests" (p. 11). In addition to students who

are below grade level due to lower cognitive abilities, both public and private school

teachers discussed students at different levels of achievement due to physical differences.

According to Kemp, Segal, and Cutter (2011), "physical differences may include:

dyslexia, the difficulty processing language, dyscalculia, difficulty with math,

dysgraphia, difficulty with writing, dyspraxia, difficulty in fine motor skills and auditory

processing difficulty, difficulty hearing differences between sounds and visual processing

disorder, and difficulty interpreting visual information" (p. 1). Teacher participants stated

that their teaching style and instructional delivery was modified in even greater ways to

help compensate for students who are on different levels of classroom achievement

because of a need for visual and or auditory modifications.

As the researcher began, one hypothesis was that both public and private schools

would utilize peer tutoring. It was believed that this strategy, having existed in the

classrooms for years, would be used by teachers in both the public and private schools on

120

an ongoing basis. It was also believed that due to the perceived academic rigor of private schools, the use of peer tutoring would be greater than in public schools. In the current study, it was no surprise that teachers in both the public and private schools utilized the multi-ability classroom concept; however, the scope and degree of variance in reading comprehension levels, math scores, and grade-level standards within classrooms was somewhat alarming. Thirteen teachers stated that they had a multi-ability classroom last school year, two teachers in the public school each shared that they had at least one student that was two grades behind, with one teacher having a student three grade levels behind in reading. It is believed (by the researcher) that the effects of multi-ability classrooms will become more noticeable in the future due to social promotion, the increased mobilization of students, and the increase of students who are behind being "mainstreamed" into regular classrooms.

Theme 2: Peer tutoring perceived as beneficial among lower achieving students. The second theme identified during data analysis was, "The perception of the effectiveness of peer tutoring in the classroom, while viewed as successful, was limited to public school teachers." Both public and private school teachers agreed that peer tutoring is perceived as potentially a beneficial teaching strategy among lower ability students. Teachers from both public and private schools indicated a familiarity with peer tutoring and having students on different levels of achievement within the same classrooms. In addition, public and private school teachers viewed the need for the implementation of peer tutoring due to multi-ability classrooms. However, public school teachers favored the use of peer tutoring based on its use in past school years. Six of nine private school teachers supported the use of peer tutoring, with three teachers reporting that they used

peer tutoring in their classroom in the previous school year. Public school teachers

evaluating peer tutoring discussed that supplemental work was needed for organization

and that additional time was needed to implement peer tutoring. Private school teachers

supported the theory of peer tutoring yet questioned its potential success based on present

classroom dynamics. Only two private school teachers that have utilized peer tutoring in

the past supported its use in the classroom.

One noted difference in the responses of public school teachers and private school

teachers was the lack of personal experience with peer tutoring among those in the

private school. A perception, primarily exclusive of private school teachers, was that the

use of peer tutoring was based on the quality of students available in the classroom. Three

teachers indicated that a lack of capable students would inhibit the utilization and success

of peer tutoring. Frank, a private school teacher with a degree in psychology, stated:

> It probably depends on the dynamics and the personalities of the students.
> Some classes can handle it well and some just can't; it just depends on
> your student. Behavior-wise, if they're out of control, then what I'll do
> usually is I probably won't let it happen, depending on the students. It
> would probably be behavior, maybe.

In contrast, public school teachers stated that peer tutoring could be a successful

strategy regardless of the others students' capability to serve as tutors; they believed

students could be trained to be peer tutors.

Tameka, a public school teacher, was supportive of peer tutoring and described

the ways she uses peer tutoring on a regular basis. When asked about the potential lack of

success of peer tutoring for students who were a grade level behind, she said:

> It is very effective. We use it daily with our students. We pair those who
> are very knowledgeable and have shown some levels of excellence and
> expertise throughout the school year with those who are below grade level,

122

and even some on grade level. The advantage of having peer tutoring is the fact that they are able to reach, sometimes, those kids that are in their own grouping, as far as age is concerned, a lot more effective than the teacher. They have a connection with them. They counsel, solidify, and support them emotionally, and they do not feel as though the child that's being tutored is inadequate. They build them up. They don't criticize.

Five public school teachers stated that the school's administration and other personnel discuss and promote peer tutoring. In contrast, none of the private school teachers attributed their use of peer tutoring to the influence of administrators or school personnel. Only one private school teacher expressed any reservation in the utilization of peer tutoring. Nathan, a public school teacher, was skeptical of peer tutoring and expressed some hesitancy due to the logistics of implementation. He went on to state that he is a fairly new teacher and did not have the experience of utilizing peer tutoring as a teaching strategy but would provide remedial help using other strategies.

It was no surprise that a majority of the teacher participants commented positively regarding the use of peer tutoring. Oftentimes, teachers will give a favorable review of a teaching strategy even if they have never utilized the strategy in their own classrooms. Both the public and private school teachers supported peer tutoring and stated that they consider the strategy very successful; however, there was an unexpected finding centered on the lack of experience in the utilization of peer tutoring among private school teachers. Nine of ten public school teacher participants discussed experience with peer tutoring or, when questioned further, that they had used peer tutoring in the past. In contrast, only one private school teacher had used peer tutoring in the past. The researcher observed a potential correlation between the administration's support of peer tutoring and its use by the teachers. This belief is supported by Thelen (1969), who stated that the success of

peer tutoring does not depend on the student or subject but on whether the school

recognizes the importance of the peer tutoring relationship.

Theme 3: Positive student response to peer instruction. The third theme

identified during data analysis was, "Students respond in a more positive manner to peer

instruction because of the possible intimidation by teachers." Teachers from both the

public and private school expressed this belief. Both male and female teachers from the

public and private school suggested that students were often intimidated by and had

difficulty interacting with teachers.

The perceived intimidation of students by teachers was associated with two

causes. First, students felt intimidated because of their perceptions that the teacher was an

enemy and was not comfortable with them. Sharon, a 6th-grade math teacher, discussed

that the idea of students considering teachers "enemies" or "adversaries" may originate

from a past negative experience in the classroom. She stated:

> Fear. A lot of students are afraid to come and talk to the teacher.
> Sometimes they've had teachers in the past that don't want them to ask
> questions. They don't want them to come for help. Sometimes they are
> embarrassed because it makes me look dumb if I have to go and talk to the
> teacher. Where if they are talking to another student, the threat factor is
> not there.

Second, students did not feel comfortable around a teacher due to an apprehension

of students with school. A fear of school or things associated with school is noted by

Walker (2006), who indicated:

> …left untreated, school phobia can have negative consequences for a child's
> present and future. A child who is anxious and scared about some aspect of school
> cannot and will not learn that piece of the curriculum. Equally worrisome is that
> the child also learns that he can't learn. Self-esteem and motivation plummet.
> (p. 3)

Private school teachers said that students were intimidated by teachers, even stating that students viewed the teacher as an adversary that they must avoid. Two public school teachers described this fear of the teacher as being produced by a student's apprehension of not being able to respond correctly when called on in class. Tammy, a 6th-grade math teacher, noted:

> I think some kids are intimidated, I think. You hate to think that they might be, but I think that's true sometimes. Just they have a better rapport sometimes with kids. They feel more comfortable. They don't feel judged or that they're going to have the wrong answer. Some of them just like being with their friends. So if they have a chance to do that, then they're not going to mess that up.

The fear of performing academically in front of teachers and classmates can be observed in middle school. Teachers from both schools said that students feel more comfortable and relaxed around peers, as a peer is viewed as a friend and not an instructor in the peer tutoring relationship. Teachers also suggested that students could relate to a peer more effectively than a teacher.

Sarah, a public school teacher experienced with peer tutoring, stated:

> I think that sometimes I think they're more open to their friends if they're comfortable, if they don't feel like they're being cut down by having that extra help. I just think sometimes it works better… I've noticed that sometimes students get frustrated, and if I try to help them, sometimes they become defiant or they'll look away and become rude. I try to help them and I can read their body language, and I'm sitting here working away, and I'm looking at them and they're all about what's going on in the classroom. That's not working. So I think that sometimes they turn me off and they respond more to a student.

The feelings shared by Sarah and some of the other teachers mirror findings by Holt (1989), which suggested that teachers can impede student learning instead of helping students learn due to the strained relationship that often results in students no

longer listening to teachers. In addition, Smith (1983) notes, "the first lesson that students learn from adult teachers is don't think, do as I tell you" (p. 2). This thought process can inhibit learning and stifle a student's desire to be an active participant in the learning process. A previous incident in the classroom involving a teacher speaking harshly or abruptly that leads to a student having a negative attitude toward a teacher can linger and affect future learning.

One possible reason (according to the researcher) that a student performs more successfully with a peer rather than with a teacher is a synthesis of both ideas. Dipardo and Freeman (1988) reported that a group of students tutored by a peer did just as well as students tutored or taught by a teacher. It is also believed that a student tutored by a peer is often more comfortable with and can more naturally interact with a peer tutor due to similarity in age and more shared life experiences. The natural hesitation of middle school−aged students when in the presence of adults is not exclusive to the educational process but is also present in society. Children often feel more comfortable when among friends and peers in many parts of their daily lives, not just in the classroom. This does not mean that all teachers have a negative effect on students in the classroom when the interaction of a student or peer is involved, but it does suggest that a potential negative effect may be present.

Theme 4: Importance of community to the success of peer tutoring in the classroom: Public schools. The fourth theme identified in the current study was, "Community in the classroom, which creates a "family" atmosphere, is a key element in the success of peer tutoring." Teachers in both the public and private school identified a perceived sense of community as a valuable component of students' success in the

126

classroom; 15 of the teacher participants agreed with this, saying that a lack of

community could impede or even prohibit learning. A community of success was

reiterated by participants, where a teacher's goal for students was to have small successes

along the way to encourage them. Private school teachers felt that a positive learning

environment was the catalyst for successful learning, but they were unclear on the

specific elements or characteristics. It is believed that this ambiguity, in terms of specific

elements or characteristics, is due to the lack of experience in the implementation of peer

tutoring found in the private school teachers as well as a lack of exposure to the concepts

of creating an effective learning community often discussed in the college programs of

the public school teachers.

Public school teachers identified community's importance in student success,

stating that this community relationship for students should take on the form of a family.

The concept of family was the common theme among the public school teachers

regarding community. Teachers' description of a family atmosphere included a learning

environment where students felt that they were safe to seek additional help and to answer

questions without the fear of humiliation. Teachers from both the public and private

settings believed that when students feel safe in the classroom, they have no problems

with asking for help and have the potential to achieve greater levels of knowledge.

Freeda, a geography teacher from the public school, described the facets of family

and community as:

> And, in fact, I'm teaching community right now. I'm teaching the
> Holocaust and all that in my classroom, and it is huge. They have to trust
> each other. I teach them community is a family. It's a family whether it's
> their peers, whether it's their family at home, whether it's their best
> friends. If you don't feel trust, they are not going to put all of themselves

out there. So the community feel in the classroom, they have to be able to trust each other that when people walk out in the hall, if there's been peer tutoring, just like we've talked about, that peer isn't going to go out and say, 'So and so doesn't know any of this.' But if they have that community feel and that trust issue, I think they are going to really open up and let themselves learn.

The expression of family and community, as expressed by Freeda, is valuable in all levels of education but especially during the middle school years. According to Wormeli (2011), it is during the 10- to 15-year-old time frame that the "prefrontal cortex" is not developed and is the area that controls decision-making, abstract thought, planning, words, and actions. This stage of development is crucial in conjunction with a safe, family-like atmosphere in the middle school years. It is also during this time that academic performance in the classroom may lack consistency on behalf of the student. As noted by Santrock (2001), "a 14-year-old adolescent might reason at the formal operational level when analyzing algebraic equations but not do so with verbal problem solving or when reasoning about interpersonal relations" (p. 106). This inconsistency may cause a student to lack confidence in the classroom.

Ethan, an art teacher from the public school, recognized the importance of middle school years, stating that:

I think that I try to make everybody feel a part of and be a part of the learning process and learning environment. And some kids feed off that and some kids don't. But I try to include everybody. Even the students who may be a grade level behind, I don't single them out because they already know they're a grade level behind. So I try to include everybody. And I think that for the most part that helps most students, including everybody.

While the difference between responses from public and private school teachers rests on personal experiences with peer tutoring that these teachers brought into the

classroom, it is believed that private school teachers also see the significance of community, but more so based on theory and not on experience. Public school teachers' ideas concerning community were acquired from a practical knowledge of community and its parameters that include family characteristics.

Conclusions and Implications

Throughout the study, teachers from both schools noted different perceptions of multi-ability classrooms and peer tutoring. Both groups expressed that multi-ability classrooms did, to some extent, cause them to modify their teaching strategies and the ways they organized and presented lesson plans, along with using peer tutoring as an effective teaching strategy. In addition, middle school teachers from both the public and private school utilized differentiated instructional strategies during the course of the year due, in part, to multi-ability classrooms. Such modifications required additional time and effort to meet the needs of students at all cognitive levels in the classroom. Academic challenges arising from multi-ability classrooms, as well as the influence of administration and colleagues, were all factors in the use or nonuse of peer tutoring by public school teachers. Seven of ten public school teachers and two private school teachers, when asked about the source of the influence of peer tutoring, said that peer tutoring was discussed in their college education programs. Seven of nine private school teachers' perceptions of multi-ability classrooms and peer tutoring were based on perceived theory and not on practical experience.

Using extant literature as a foundation and probing the research questions that guided the current study (stated in Chapter 3), it is observed that teachers consider multi-ability classrooms, which require additional time, resources, and modifications to

teaching strategies, common in today's middle schools. Teachers expressed both frustration and success with the responsibility of teaching students at lower ability levels and higher ability levels in a classroom in same instructional time. The additional manpower needed to teach students at all ability levels simultaneously is another challenge for the teachers.

Thomas and Loxley (2001), Jacobson, Mulick, and Schwartz (1995), and Gallagher (2004) support the belief of both public and private school teachers that students who are below grade level in multi-ability classrooms have a more difficult time mastering current grade-level material in contrast to those presently on grade level due to the amount of material needed to be covered. Teachers carry the responsibility of educating all students in their classrooms regardless of the students' cognitive levels. With pressure and responsibility, teachers continue to explore new strategies and tools to bring all students up to grade level. As the variance between higher and lower ability students continues to expand due to social promotion, increased mobility of students from one school to another, and inclusion of students with special needs in regular classrooms, differentiated instruction continues to be an integral part of the educational plans of teachers of today.

It is believed (by the researcher) that a key to student success is the sense of community in the classroom. Students who feel vulnerable, unsafe, or isolated from the class have potentially greater difficulty attaining academic success than those who feel as if they are part of a community. This belief is supported by Bickart, Jablon, and Dodge (1999), who state that:

130

When basic needs have not been met, children may have great difficulty learning and relating positively to others. Creating a caring community in the classroom is one of the most effective strategies for addressing children's basic needs for physical and emotional comfort so that they can be open to learning, feel hopeful about the future, and reach their full potential for knowledge and understanding, order and beauty. (p. 48)

The learning community within multi-ability classrooms is often overlooked, yet peer tutoring may be a plausible approach toward teaching students at various cognitive levels and with different learning styles. Thus, the learning community within the multi-ability classroom must foster an environment where students are willing and able to ask questions and seek teacher guidance and support. A learning environment/community in which students have no fear of being "singled out" or humiliated adds to the academic advancement of students who are below grade level. This belief (of the researcher) is supported by Bredekamp and Rosegrant (1992), as they report:

A community is a place where individuals share common values, goals, and activities. It is a place where each member takes on roles to provide sufficient services so that the community's goals are reached. In communities, everyone does not do the same thing at the same time, but groups work together to achieve common goals. A community is a place where social bonds are established and individuals can flourish. (p. 81)

Based on existing literature and the current study's findings, the implications of not utilizing strategies to effectively manage diverse multi-ability classrooms can be detrimental for both students and teachers. From conducting this study, it is believed that students can be brought up to grade level through the use of peer tutoring without the higher level learners feeling neglected.

Further, educators should continue to evaluate peer tutoring as an effective teaching strategy available to teachers in multi-ability classrooms. Peer tutoring should be

considered a viable solution for students who are below grade level and for those who are on grade level as a learning strategy to enhance the learning process.

Likewise, educators in the current study who considered peer tutoring an effective tool were exposed to this strategy during their undergraduate or graduate studies, in contrast to teachers who were not exposed to peer tutoring through their collegiate studies. Teachers not exposed to the concept of peer tutoring may hold some preconceived notions that hinder them from utilizing this strategy but should at least consider peer tutoring to help manage classrooms regardless of students' ability levels or cognitive differences.

In efforts of education systems to simply "get teachers," many states are instituting plans to certify teachers based on work experience or degrees in specific fields. Yet, a teacher is not effective simply due to the expertise in a specific subject presently taught in school, but an effective teacher is one that can use their knowledge of the subject and apply proven teaching strategies to impart that knowledge in the classroom. Strategies such as peer tutoring, which were covered in most undergraduate or graduate education programs that the public school teachers attended, were not covered in the general educational programs of the private school teachers. The current study illustrates the importance of undergraduate and graduate education programs. Although expertise in the subject matter is vital, it is useless if the information is not presented to students in a way that allows them to actually learn it.

Directions for Future Research

As with any study, the findings in the current study are only a micro representation, in this case representing public and private middle school teachers. Care

132

was taken to make sure that the information gathered was a true and accurate representation of each teacher participant and that the themes that emerged were a solid representation of the data collected. Additional qualitative and quantitative research is needed to refute, support, or enhance the findings of this study.

As a result of this study, several possibilities for future research arose. First, this study identified that multi-ability classrooms did modify or alter teachers' lesson plans. Participants expressed their awareness of these modifications and the additional time needed to make these adjustments. However, additional quantitative research should be conducted to determine the amount of additional time needed to manage the multi-ability classroom. The teacher participants in the current study spoke in somewhat general terms; therefore, a quantitative study could identify specific ways that teaching styles are modified in multi-ability classrooms.

Secondly, the researcher has assumed that one reason private school teachers do not utilize peer tutoring in their classrooms is the lack of exposure in their degree programs (at the Bachelor's and/or Master's level). This assumption is based on the data collected in the current study via interviews, random questioning, and also voluntary discussion among the public school teachers when talking about their respective degree programs. An additional qualitative study should be conducted evaluating teachers' undergraduate and/or graduate programs to observe the amount of attention given to peer tutoring and how that correlates with their use of peer tutoring in their classrooms. The researcher's assumptions about lack of exposure to peer tutoring in collegiate programs may not be a major factor at all, which further study could probe in more depth.

Finally, one of the perceptions of peer tutoring is that teachers believe students do better with peers because they are not intimidated as they are with teachers. This idea emanated from participants' comments about students' thought processes. Future research can investigate how students who lag behind academically feel about teachers and if these feelings in fact hinder students' academic performance. Evaluating the possible reasons that students learn better when tutored by a peer in contrast to a teacher may provide some insight that can be utilized by teachers to make them more effective in one-on-one student interaction. Future research should include an evaluation of the extent or limit of improvement in the academic progress of a below grade level student that can be realized through the assistance of a peer tutor. The current study rested on the perceptions of the participating middle school teachers, which is subject to variations in accuracy.

In the current study, data were carefully gathered and evaluated to determine the effects of multi-ability classrooms on today's teachers, which can be neither underestimated nor ignored. With the numbers of multi-ability classrooms increasing, along with the responsibility of instructing these students as the cognitive levels within these classrooms becomes more diverse, a careful strategy should be developed to sufficiently address and combat these issues. In addition, the decreasing number of teachers and teachers' aides can be factor contributing to the increased challenges of the multi-ability classroom.

As peer tutoring flourishes in schools and college education programs, it may be beneficial for teachers, administrators, and parents to seek and promote strategies that have been effective and successful in the past to help students below grade level in

134

modern-day classrooms who are struggling in classes with higher achieving students

reach their full academic potential.

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138

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Appendix A:

Research Questions

1. Some administrators say that peer tutoring can't be successful in today's educational classrooms, what would you say?

2. Suppose you could create a peer tutoring program in your classroom, how would that affect your students who are behind?

3. In what ways do multi-ability classrooms affect your teaching style?

4. Suppose you had a classroom where five students were at least one grade behind in reading or math, how would that change your daily teaching style and lesson plans?

5. What influences your use or non-use of peer tutoring within your classroom?

6. Why do some students respond more positively to a peer rather than a teacher in regards to learning?

7. Some teachers would say that being at least a grade level behind would not have an effect on whether a student feels a part of the class or not. What do you think?

8. How does the idea of community in the classroom influence the success of the students in the classroom?

Appendix B:

Consent Form

May   , 2011

Dear, _____

   In this letter, I Eddie Thompson, a graduate student of the University of Memphis, am requesting your consent to participate in my research project entitled "Middle school teacher's perceptions of peer tutoring in multi-ability classrooms".

   The use of peer tutoring has been perceived as an effective tool among educators for decades. It's use within the classroom has declined over the past forty years, especially among middle school teachers. With an increasing amount of pressure placed upon teachers to perform within the classroom in such a way that all kids reach a prescribed level, you as a middle school teacher can bring some understanding on why peer tutoring has begun to decline. The interview will only take thirty minutes. Your identity will remain completely confidential in the presentation of the findings of this study. You will be given a pseudonym and all identifying names and details will be changed. The interview will be recorded and these recordings will be transcribed. You will be given a copy of the transcribed interview and asked to approve the interview before it is used in any form. All notes, recordings and transcribed interviews, along with pseudonym codes will be stored in a locked cabinet when not in use. The cabinet is located in a locked office away from public access. Tapes, transcripts and other notes will be destroyed upon completion of this study.

   There are no perceived risks in this study. Your participation in this study will help other teachers, administration look at peer tutoring and evaluate whether this needs to be included in teacher education or covered within in-service training. Permission has been granted by the school board and the head of school and principal for teachers to participate in this study. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please call Research Support Services at 678-2533.

If you agree to participate in this study, please sign below.

Sincerely,

Eddie Thompson
Graduate Student
University of Memphis.

I hereby agree to participate in the research described above. I fully understand my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time.

_____

Teacher Signature   Date

Appendix C:

Transcripts

Eddie: Let me just give you a real quick basis of what our study is. Our study is the

perceptions of the utilization of peer tutoring in multi-ability classrooms. And our

definition of a multi-ability classroom is a classroom where you have maybe a student

who is on grade level and maybe a student who is below grade level, or maybe even one

to two grade levels below. So that's kind of our definition.

The first question that I would like to ask is some administrators say that peer tutoring

can't be successful in today's classroom. What would you say?

Participant #1: I wouldn't say can't totally. It depends on the teacher's management of

the classroom. So if a teacher can manage different activities going on at the same time, I

think it could be successful.

Eddie: OK. Good. Suppose you could create a peer tutoring program in your classroom.

How do you think that would affect your students that are presently behind the remainder

of the classroom?

Participant #1: I think it would be advantageous to the lower students, but not so much to

the higher students.

Eddie: Do you think it could possibly be a negative to the students that maybe are ahead?

Participant #1: Possibly.

Eddie: OK. In what ways does a multi-ability classroom affect your teaching style?

Participant #1: I have to differentiate. I have to teach a lesson…I just do it at a regular

grad level when I do the whole class. But then when I give graded papers, I give

individual help to the lower students. And if higher students finish quickly, I give them a

more challenging assignment. So it's more in the evaluation and assessment process that I have to differentiate more with my ability levels.

Eddie: OK. Do you think that multi-ability classrooms, the greater the differentiation the more difficult it becomes for you as a teacher?

Participant #1: Yes.

[laughter]

Participant #1: Very much so.

Eddie: OK. Suppose you had a classroom where you had five students that were at least one grade level behind, maybe in reading, math—one of the two core subjects. How would that change your daily teaching style? Remember, the key there is one grade below. How would that change your teaching style?

Participant #1: I really have that right now, so it wouldn't change what I do right now. I would say the same thing where I responded to the last question, where I teach at a grade level when I'm doing the direct teaching. But then when it's assessment time I give extra help and extra prompting to the lower students who need it.

Eddie: OK. What influences your use or non-use of peer tutoring in your classroom?

Participant #1: Classroom behavior I think is the big thing. If I have students off task, then I don't feel peer tutoring is going to be effective. If the lower students are going to get off task even if they are with a higher student that is peer tutoring them, I don't think it would be effective at all.

Eddie: OK. Have you ever used peer tutoring types of relationships in any of your classrooms?

Participant #1: Mm-hmm. When I taught middle school I did. This year I haven't so much. I teach fifth grade this year.

Eddie: OK. In your opinion, why do some students respond more positively to a peer working with them than the teacher of the classroom?

Participant #1: They may not feel as judged by another student as if a teacher says, "Why don't you get it?" If another student can maybe explain it in more "kid" terms than a teacher can, they might respond better to that.

Eddie: OK, so it's more of a friendlier environment?

Participant #1: Mm-hmm. Sometimes as adults we talk down to children or condescend to the children, and they may not respond well to that. Whereas if they are sitting with a friend who can talk on their level, that may be more beneficial for them.

Eddie: OK. Some teachers would say that being at least a grade level behind will not have any effect on whether a student feels a part of the classroom or not. We're talking about community; a student that's a grade level behind. Some teachers would say that has nothing to do with how they feel as part of the classroom community.

Participant #1: I feel it's all about the environment the teacher creates in the classroom. If she includes the student and doesn't talk down to him, and doesn't point out the fact that he's below, he may not even know he's below. And so, it's all about the environment the teacher creates in the classroom.

Eddie: OK. Final question: How does the idea of community in classroom influence the success of the students in your classroom? We can use, also, the term, instead of community, "learning environment".

Participant #1: If a student feels they're an active and important part of the community, they're going to be more receptive to the learning in that community. They're going to be able to raise their hand more and participate if they are comfortable talking to the peers in the community.

Eddie: OK. So would you agree or disagree that if a child comes into a classroom and he knows he's behind, he feels like he's behind, and he doesn't feel a part of the classroom, would that become a negative for him…

Participant #1: Definitely. If they don't feel part of the community, they're not going to want to participate and they're not going to want to learn in that community.

Eddie: OK. Last question: what grade level do you think the utilization of peer tutoring would be the most beneficial? I know that you said when you were middle school you did it. Now that you are fifth grade you don't do it as much. Where in the K-12, what area do you think, as an educator, peer tutoring would be best utilized?

Participant #1: I would say middle school and high school. The problem I've run into in fifth grade is they're not mature enough yet. The higher peers are not mature enough to sit down and say, "OK, I'm teaching you this or I'm helping you with this." They still want to play. So that's the problem I've run into in fifth grade. Whereas in seventh grade, I could give a student a task, like, "Help this person with these vocabulary words", and they could do it. Whereas I fifth grade, they just don't have the leadership to do that.

Eddie: OK. How do you think that peer tutoring affects your time in the classroom? Is it beneficial for the time that you invest in that? Do you feel it's too much time? What would you say?

Participant #1: I feel when I'm teaching or when I'm directly working one-on-one with a student, I'm more in control of what they're learning. Whereas if I assign that to another student, I'm not in control of what that student is teaching and I don't know if they're giving it 100%. So for me it's a little bit more of a control issue.

Eddie: Sure. Well that's OK, though, because I think what you're saying is…And again, it's the time. If I can teach them, then I can follow up as I go along. If I give it to a student, then I've got to go back and I've got to make sure that it's correct.

So maybe, in your opinion, peer tutoring can be effective, but maybe more time consuming than beneficial.

Participant #1: Mm-hmm. I think small groups worked better for me, where I have one thing I do is give a graded paper, and if I have a group of six that have failed it, the next day when the students are working on something totally different, I pull those six and we just have a small group; just sit in the floor together in a circle and have a small group to review that skill, where the other students in the class who have mastered it have moved on to something else.

Eddie: OK. Wonderful!

Participant #1: That's not really peer tutoring!

Eddie: No, that's important because that's kind of what we're looking at, because peer tutoring was utilized, actually, in the early days of education where you had a teacher that had second graders, third graders, fourth graders, fifth graders all in one classroom, and they used it dramatically. Now we've seen it pretty much fall off in today's classrooms. And that's kind of the perception of where middle school teachers are at and why they think, "Yes, it's good," "No, it's not." Why do you use it, why do you not use it? But you've got some great comments. I appreciate it so much.

Participant #1: No problem!

Eddie: We are finished.

Eddie: Again, what we're talking about is the idea of peer tutoring. Just very quickly, as far as background, obviously peer tutoring was used in the early days of education, one room schoolhouse, one teacher; third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grade all in one classroom. She used peer tutoring a lot.

Fast forward to 2011. There's not a lot of it being used. What we're trying to figure out is why is that? So I've got eight interview questions that I'm going to ask you. You feel free to say whatever you want to say, and then when we get through you will go, "Oh, this was wonderful. This was so energetic."

Some administrators say that peer tutoring can't be successful in today's classrooms. What would you say?

Participant #2: I would say that's not true. It does require considerable amount of preparation, first of all. You have to, of course, find students who are particularly good, knows particular subject areas. And once you find a student who can, or who's willing to, work with another student and they pretty much get along very well, then it does help the other student. They can help the other student, rather.

And I use it in my class a lot because I do have some students who have issues with certain skills. And being that those students do have problems, I'm able to pull other students who are a little bit…who could probably better explain it more so than I can to other students.

Eddie: Sure. OK. Excellent.

Participant #2: And I would say, going back to your original question, yes. I do believe that it can be used and I don't necessarily agree with everything that an administrator would say about that.

157

Eddie: OK. Excellent. Question #2: Suppose you could create a peer tutoring program, or obviously you have, so how does that peer tutoring relationship that you already have in your classroom, how does that affect the students that are behind? Is it positive?

Participant #2: It's a very positive experience. And those students, usually the ones who find it more challenging to reach a particular goal or achieve a particular skill, they really feel more comfortable going to the student more so than coming to me.

And I think that is really, really good because it helps with that work relationship, that team effort. Being that that person is usually around their same age, probably have some of the same thought process, things going on, they would rather…not so much would rather, but they feel more comfortable going to their peers saying, "Hey, I cannot figure this out. Can you help me?"

See, I teach fifth grade math, so it's much easier for them to say, "Can you help me with this math problem? Because I'm not really getting it." And they usually do and they're able to get the help that's needed.

Eddie: Fantastic. Third question: In what way does a multi-ability classroom affect your teaching style? And again, multi, the idea of someone, especially in math, someone that gets it and then someone that's so very below everybody else. How does that affect your teaching style?

Participant #2: Well, that's been a challenge I can definitely say this year. Being that, yes, you do have all ranges of students in your classroom; you have your higher, your middle, and your lower group. And it has affected my teaching style greatly this year because I feel I've really taught to the middle and the low and I wasn't able to push the ones that are higher as much as I felt I possibly could have.

Now, I did use supplemental material, and I don't know if we can say…

158

Eddie: Oh, you say whatever you were going to say.

Participant #2: OK. I used supplemental material such as the program ALEKS Program. I know that the University of Memphis also uses that program—or it could be one of their programs. But we use ALEKS to supplement for that.

However, I feel if I was able to reach my higher students, per se, actually being able to teach them—personally teach them—they would've probably gone much, much, much higher.

However, being that I really shot for that lower and that middle to pull them up—it's my personal thing—I think the ones that are a little bit higher I kind of missed it right there.

Eddie: OK. All right. And you've answered some of this, but let's just say in your classroom today you've got five students that are at least one grade level behind in math. In your lesson plans for the week, how does that…those five students being behind one grade level, how does that change your lesson plans?

Participant #2: Those students being behind, it drastically changes my plans because I'm going back having to re-teach material that possibly should've been covered as well as obtained in third and fourth grade.

This year in particular we've had a lot of students who are still struggling with just learning basic multiplication facts, and that's been challenging when you're in fifth grade and you're trying to get them where they should be for fifth grade alone and push them on where they should be. It's been very challenging.

I think the most discouraging part—and I'm using that word kind of, eh—is knowing that the best answer that most people have been able to give me is just give them a calculator. For some reason, I'm having a hard time dealing with that, but that's a personal issue.

Eddie: Sure. I understand. I understand totally. Let me ask you another question. What influences your use or nonuse of peer tutoring in your classroom? And let me clarify. For some, it's their peers are not supportive. For some schools its administration are not supportive of it. You as a teacher in the classroom, what influences—obviously, you use it—what influences that?

Participant #2: For me, what influences is just knowing that if I can't grab your attention and I see that it's another student in here that can possibly work with this student and get them from where they are to where they should be, I'd gladly accept that.

So I'm very open and I just look for whatever means necessary to get that child to move them from point A to point B or where we're trying to go. I need you to get there. So I'll try any avenue to get you where you should be.

Eddie: OK. This is one question that's not on here that I wanted to ask. You said you worked your master's from…you got your master's at Ole Miss?

Participant #2: Ole Miss. Yes, sir.

Eddie: In your program, did they ever talk about peer tutoring?

Participant #2: Yes. In a lot of my reading courses with Dr. Fannie Mae Love, she did a drill and kill on that. How to better assist other students by using—even the low student can help a high student. It's just a mutual relationship.

Also, Dr. Rock, who was one of my math instructors at Ole Miss, he also was very, very, very instrumental in teaching us how to better use students, even in the math classes. If this student is particularly good in the subject area or in this particular skill, use him. There is an instructor in the classroom; however, you may not be able to reach every student.

So if that's the case, use your other little mini teachers in the classroom and let them help, and that means you've hit mostly everybody. And the initial instructor can go back behind them and once you got that "aha" moment, it's OK. We can move on.

Eddie: Which moves me right into question six. Why do some students respond more positively to a peer than to a teacher?

Participant #2: I think it's, for some, and not for all, for some, I think a lot of them feel intimidated. I don't want my peers to see me necessarily as the teacher, because they may think that I don't understand or I'm not as intelligent or it's not socially "acceptable." Fifth grade especially, a lot of them are going through hormonal changes and their friends mean everything. I mean, everything to them. So being that I have this peer over here who is my best friend and knows how to do this, I would rather my friend help me than my instructor because my friend and I, we have this relationship. So I just think they just tend to want to ask for assistance from their peer more so than their teacher.

And then, too, you always have the situation how comfortable are you with your teacher? Does your teacher, or does every teacher, allow the relationship between teacher and student to be just as positive as peers?

So I try to make it real comfortable in my classroom where they are willing to come to me. And they may not always come to me, but they're willing.

Eddie: OK. Wonderful. Two more questions and then we will be done. Some teachers would say that being at least a grade level behind would not affect whether a student feels a part of the class or not. What would you say?

Participant #2: I would disagree with that. This year I have a lot of kids who leave my room for additional assistance in the special ed department. Those students feel just as part of the classroom as the other students. I try to make an environment where when

they leave it's not like they're leaving because they don't know. It's a situation where they're leaving because they just need an extra push and I don't advertise it. I don't make them feel ostracized by no means.

And if there is something we've done in the classroom that they didn't quite understand, I'll say, "Hey, take this with you and if you still don't understand it, we can stay during lunch or recess. We'll find a way to get that answer."

I try not to make it where it's noticeable. I have them when they leave out, they ease out. You don't even know they're gone. And they ease right back in. You don't even know that they've come back. It's like a disappearing act.

Eddie: Sure. OK. Final question. And this is, again, you have your responses have just flowed perfectly. How does the idea of community in the classroom influence the success of students in that classroom?

Participant #2: Well, being that Riverdale is a school that the community is always here, which is awesome. The kids need to see that. In my class, we have a lot of parent volunteers that come up and assist along with I have my students, we take about two or three days out of the school year, which is, that's not a whole lot, but we usually talk about different careers that involve these math skills. I'm a math teacher. In order for you to be an engineer, you need to know this. In order for you to work at the bank, you need to know this.

So I try to not only have people or parents and people in the community come into the classroom to tell us about wonderful career opportunities, but I also try to let them know, "Hey, you got to know how to do this in order for you to have this particular job or to become an engineer at this."

162

So I just think just knowing that we can go out to the community and seek people to come in to share as well as we pique their interest—what do you really want to do in life? I think the two go hand in hand and it's been a very beautiful relationship here at Riverdale.

Eddie: Well, and I think also, too, what I sense you've got is that the kids see the community brought into the classroom, and then obviously it sounds like that you have tried to create the community atmosphere that they see out in the community also in your classroom as well.

Participant #2: Yes. Definitely, definitely. And by doing that, a lot of kids are like, "Hmmm. So Ms. Blanks, being an engineer, I should know this? Well, what about this?" And I say, "Well, let's go to the library and lets research and see what being an engineer encounters. Better yet, let's go online and look at the curriculum. What do you have to have if you go to this college or this college?" And they're like, "Wow. OK. So I need to be doing this."

It just starts getting them motivated, getting their mind right to "This is what I need to focus on. I really see how important learning this multiplication is, because if I don't, I won't be able to possibly have this career if I don't tighten up in this particular area." So I think it's helpful.

Eddie: Sure. Let me just ask you…and this is not one of our questions. It's interesting you talk about kids being a grade level behind. Two years ago, we did a pilot study and the idea was this. And eventually, we'd like to develop an entire curriculum also utilizing some software that would help a teacher to identify 20, or however many, key concepts that the teacher says, "If this child is…" not total mastery, but, "If this child is not

familiar enough with these 20 key concepts within the first six weeks of this classroom, they're not going to be able to make it."

And what we did is we took that, helped the teacher identify, "OK. Well yeah, they've got to know this and they've got to know this." And then we took that and then we can incorporate peer tutoring in those first six weeks with the theory that a lot of the higher-level teaching is going to happen after this first six weeks.

Participant #2: Exactly.

Eddie: And then we took this list and we gave everybody in the class a pre-test on the 20 concepts. We looked at them and we said, "OK." An A student, then we're going to allow you, if you want to, as a peer tutor. A C student, as long as they had a C and above, they were fine. A D, we would send a letter home and say, "You know what, mom and dad? Listen. I don't think your son or your daughter has acquired these concepts at this point. Would you encourage them to stay after school or whatever? Would you allow them to be involved in this peer tutoring program in the first six weeks?"

If they failed the pre-test, then we sent a letter home saying to the parents, "This is a requirement." And then after the six weeks, we had all the students again take a post-test on the same elements, and it was amazing because we had kids that were 50's and 60's after six weeks—they didn't go from a 50 to 100, but they were a 50 to a 70 and 75.

Just from your point of view—and again, this is totally different from this—would something like that be helpful to teachers across the board?

Participant #2: Definitely beneficial. We had, if I'm not mistaken, it was this past Tuesday. It was called Move Up Night where parents from, just say fourth grade parents, had an opportunity to come meet all the fifth grade teachers to see what we were doing, what we will be doing this upcoming school year.

And it was amazing that even when we talk with their parents, "OK. What should they know in math for next year? What can we do to better prepare them?"

And it was so encouraging that, first of all, they would ask that question. And second of all, a lot of them wanted to know were there any particular programs or things that they could do to better assist them.

And I even had some parents of kids who probably were struggling the entire fourth grade year. They really wanted to know, "Hey, Ms. Blanks, do you have anything to give them? Do you have a book? Can I take a book home?" They really were motivated to help.

And I think if we had that—and I know we're not living in utopia by no means. If we could have a program set in place that would say these are the things that we're going to be hitting, and we're going to hit them hard, but I need to know do you have the basic foundation, it would be so beneficial.

Eddie: OK. How this whole thing got started is I used to teach at First Assembly Christian School. I taught theology. Well, you know as well as I do a child coming in may have a very strong Biblical background and there may be a child that walks in and goes, "I have no clue."

Participant #2: Exactly.

Eddie: So we had to figure out really quick to be able to understand this, they've got to master this. And so within that six weeks, we were slowly building them up so that once that first six weeks are out of the way, then they're at least on the same level where everybody else was.

That's kind of what we're looking at in the next couple of years to try to help teachers identify, OK, they've got to know this, this, this. Here's a tool to be able to assess that. Here's how to be able to set up a peer tutoring program. Here's how to utilize it.

Participant #2: Oh wow. I would be glad to know about that.

Eddie: Well, I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll certainly…because we'll be trying to do that. We've done a couple of pilots in a couple of schools, but I'll certainly stay in touch with you.

Participant #2: Please do. I would love it.

Eddie: You have been wonderful. Thank you so much. Would you go have a cup of coffee on me?

Participant #2: I sure will. Thank you. I appreciate it. Thank you.

Eddie: Thank you so much. You have a great Friday.

Participant #2: You, too. Enjoy. Thank you.

Eddie: And don't let Mr. Carlisle's superstition of Friday the 13th bother you.

Participant #2: I will not.

Eddie: He told me last week. He said, "Do you know where that came from?" and he told me the history of Friday the 13th.

Participant #2: That doesn't spook me. There's only one person I fear, and that's Him alone.

Eddie: Have a great day.

Eddie: Just give you the very basic. The whole study we're doing is called "The perceptions of middle school teachers involving peer tutoring of a multi-ability classroom". The definition of multi-ability is we have students that are on grade level and we've got some students that are looking up beneath grade level.

So I'm going to ask you eight questions. You feel free to respond however you want to respond. Some administrators say that peer tutoring cannot be successful in today's classrooms. What would you say?

Participant #3: That is not true. It is very effective. We use it daily with our students. We pair those who are very knowledgeable and have shown some levels of excellence and expertise throughout the school year with those who are below grade level, and even some on grade level.

The advantage of having peer tutoring is the fact that they are able to reach, sometimes, those kids that are in their own grouping, as far as age is concerned, a lot more effective than the teacher. They have a connection with them. They counsel, solidify, and support them emotionally, and they do not feel as though the child that's being tutored is inadequate. They build them up. They don't criticize. They're not destructive. And they parallel their information with what's going on and make it more relevant to them.

Eddie: OK. So what would you say is the effect of peer tutoring…?

Participant #3: It's very positive.

Eddie: Very positive?

Participant #3: Very positive.

Eddie: OK. In what ways do multi-ability classrooms affect your teaching style?

Participant #3: Wow. It affects me greatly because every lesson has to be organized to reach every student where they are at that particular time in my classroom. So therefore, I

find myself having to do many, many hours of planning, because I am very perceptive an

aware when the child steps into my room where they are, because I have looked at all the

data. So I know that child's weakness and I know the other kid's strength. So I know that

it's my responsibility to make sure that every child has at least so many grades above

where they are at the present time.

So if I do have a child that is below grade level, it's my responsibility to get them to

grade level by any means. If that means that I have to have the work paralleled to meet

the needs of that child, then I will do so through hanging manipulatives. If I have to do an

auditorial, because I do have some kids that are deaf, and they read my lips and their

batteries have run out. But it's still my responsibility to reach that child. I have some kids

who come in who cannot read at all, and them some who are the first, second, third grade

level. I have autistic children as well. So we have the whole gamut of children.

And then I have those who are three or four grade levels high. They are only 11 years old

and here they are taking high school math. So it's then my responsibility to challenge that

student. So my work is laid out for me and I have to look at all three of those different

situations—What do I do to meet this child's need who is below? What kind of plans do

I have in my…how do I reach the child that is on grade level? Then what do I do for the

child that is considered above grade level in my planning?

Eddie: OK. Let me ask you a question. What has influenced your use of peer tutoring?

Let me explain. Do you use peer tutoring because your colleagues have suggested it,

because administration has suggested it, because you've become familiar with peer

tutoring through classes, education? What influenced your decision to use peer tutoring?

Participant #3: Well, the administration had nothing to do with peer teaching at all. My

exposure came from my graduate studies at the University of Memphis, as well as the

University of Chicago. So having been with them during the, I guess, beginnings of that particular strategy, I enjoyed it, working at various chapels that was very, very, very, very low. And we went in as change agents with the teacher core program that they had back in 1974.

And it was a challenge for us to change the kid's way of learning. So we started pairing kids who were on grade level, above grade level with those that were below. And because of the numbers of kids that we had below grade level, we found that it was an advantageous and great assistance to us to reach those children. This is why I was influenced by it.

Eddie: Wonderful. Why do some students respond more positively to a peer than to a teacher when it comes to…?

Participant #3: The teacher represents authority. Children feel challenged. At this age of being a middle school person, there is a lot to do with self esteem. Nobody wants to be recognized as a child who does not know. So they are very distant from us at this particular age.

Whereas, when they are with a peer they are relaxed. It's not a big thing that I don't know, because still, they see them as another child. So there's an even ground; water seeks its own level. So they are able to have a camaraderie with that person and feel very calm and at ease.

But when an authoritative figure stands before them, there's a bit of intimidation there. So they are not as comfortable with our presence in presenting, sometimes, the same material, because they feel that they must have the right answer. But with a peer, I can make a mistake and I'm still cool.

Eddie: I got ya. Two more questions. Some teachers would say that being at least a grade level behind would not have an effect on whether a student feels a part of the class. What would you say?

Participant #3: Being a grade level behind at this school has a great impact on our students, because we are so highly challenged. We teach success. Everybody has set high expectations for all the children. And when they come in one grade level below, they feel a compulsion to work extremely hard through all of the other activities that we have offered to help them in assistance to get to be on grade level. Because it's the cool thing to be on the honor roll. It's a great thing to be on the high honor roll. You are well respected. You are received by your peers.

And with this being the age of come-uppance to them, they want to be on top. So therefore, when they do come in they are very insecure with themselves. So they seek us and ask, "May I come to school at seven o'clock? Or may I stay after school with you? Or may I see you at recess?" So whatever avenue is open at that particular time to assist them to become better, they are willing to do it, and we are willing to sacrifice.

Eddie: OK. That brings me to my final question. When I use the word "community", I'm talking about the learning environment in the community of the classroom. How does the idea of community or the learning environment in the classroom influence the success of the students in the classroom?

Participant #3: We have a team concept; we're a family. Therefore, when you hurt or when you lack something, we all feel the same pain. The kids understand this. We interact, we plan together. And this is a good thing, too, because not only do the teachers plan with each other to assist in all kids' arenas, weaknesses, or strengths, but also the kids plan.

Because we have this new professional learning community strategy where the child can say to us, "These are the types of questions that I like to respond to on a test. Can we have more of this?" Or if there is some type of special emphasis or enhancement that the kids want us to incorporate that they have found as an interactive tool on the websites, they'll bring that to our attention and we'll try to involve or include that into our planning.

So it is a working situation constantly. So whatever is out there that's new, we all work together. So it does become more student than teacher-centered. And that's what we like about our school system.

Eddie: OK, great.

Eddie: OK. Again, the student is called "Investigative perceptions of middle school teachers" as far as peer tutoring is concerned in multi-ability classrooms. Again, the definition of multi-ability is a student that may be on grade level and then a student that is, you know, down there, certainly not on grade level.

First question I want to ask is some administrators say that peer tutoring can't be successful in today's classrooms. What would you say?

Participant #4: I would disagree with that. I know in my classroom we use peer tutoring all the time because of the different abilities of the students and the different scopes that we go, from a low learner to a high learner. And, in fact, in my classes, that's what my classes are made up of, every single class. And so many, if I can pair them off on different ability levels, they listen to each other, a lot of times, more than they listen to me.

Eddie: OK. How do you think that that peer tutoring program affects the students that are behind? Do you think it's very positive?

Participant #4: I think it's positive when you have the right peers tutoring the right peers. You can have a mix of students and pair two people up and it's not going to work based on previous experience they have socially with each other.

So, as a teacher, we have to be in tune with who gets along with whom and who has had history. Because if they feel in competition with, say, the low learner feels in competition with the higher learner, they're not going to listen.

So it takes a lot of…we usually can't even do peer tutoring until about the third or fourth month or school is in session, because it won't work.

Eddie: OK. In what ways do multi-ability classrooms affect your teaching style?

Participant #4: It affects it in such a positive way. I try to put in so many different ways of teaching the students, and that's just one more way that I can put in where I'm not the person that's standing in the middle of the room or trying to get one or two students to listen to what I have to say. And so much of that, if I can get the other students to help each other, then it helps everything that I teach, whether it's with technology…they buddy up…and I always say, "Help your neighbor, help whichever." That little bit is peer tutoring, even if it's for a moment.

Eddie: Let's just say that you're walking into a classroom and you know that you have five students already off the bat that are at least one grade below where they need to be. How's that going to affect your lesson plan for that period of time?

Participant #4: Well, that's an everyday occurrence.

[laughter]

Participant #4: At any given moment there will be five students who are at least a grade level behind. With my lesson plans and that sort of thing, I always have the basic lesson plan for the day. But you have to monitor and adjust, even if it's for individual students. So, whereas I may give an assignment for the majority of the class to do, however, there may be groups of students, and they are used to this, to where I will tell them separately: "This is what I need you to do. This is what I need you to do." And they know, from the frontend, from the beginning, first day of school, that I may not give the same assignment to everybody. So they don't feel like they're different, because it happens to every single person sometime throughout the year.

Eddie: OK. What has influenced your use of peer tutoring? Let me clarify. Is it because you have colleagues that use peer tutoring? Where you exposed in your educational program in college? What has influenced your use of peer tutoring?

Participant #4: Probably all those things. I know the first thing that I always think about is when I was in first grade, and I came from a private preschool into the public system. Not saying that private versus public at all, but of the school that I was at, I had started reading so much earlier than the other students. So I remember my teacher putting me with a student that was just a little bit behind me in reading skills, and I would help them, even as I was six years old.

I remember feeling so good about that myself that I realized that I know it helped my friend student that was learning from me also. But when you put it with the kids, you realize it not only helps that lower learner, but the higher one, too, that's doing the peer tutoring.

My colleagues use it; we all just bounce off ideas because there's different ways of doing it. But I mean everything has influenced that.

Eddie: Were you exposed to peer tutoring in your college program?

Participant #4: Yes.

Eddie: Where did you go to school?

Participant #4: Well, I got my certification for University of Central Arkansas, so from UCA in Conway. We were in the schools every single day out there. And yes, I was exposed to that thoroughly.

Eddie: It is interesting when you talk to different people from different programs. Some programs mentioned a lot. Some don't even mention it at all, so it's really interesting. Why do some students respond more positively to a peer than a teacher when they're behind?

Participant #4: I think because with a teacher they are so much on a performance mindset that they have to prove that they know it; they have to prove that sort of thing. With

174

another student they can relax and they're just themselves. And that student isn't going to judge them on whether they're doing great, doing poorly, or whichever. They don't have the other student's grades sitting in their minds.

And I think that's what students feel towards a teacher sometimes. I mean we know we're there to help them; that's all we're doing—we're teaching them. But I think they think since we're the final call on their abilities, sometimes they are intimidated by that. And they only want us, as teachers, to see their best. And that's not showing their best.

Eddie: Good comment. Some teachers would say that being at least a grade level behind would not have an effect on a student whether he feels part of the class or not. What would you say?

Participant #4: I think it would have an effect on them. I really do. A grade level behind, that is…I mean if they are just reading sentences out loud, they are not going to get some of those words that other students are going to get. I think their comfort level. Now, it depends on the classroom they are in, of course. But I think any child that is behind the average is going to feel some impact and it's going to affect what they do.

Eddie: OK. My final question goes right into this. And when I say the word "community", I'm talking about the community in the classroom. How does the idea of community in the classroom influence the success of the students in that classroom?

Participant #4: Oh, huge. And, in fact, I'm teaching community right now. I'm teaching the Holocaust and all that in my classroom, and it is huge. They have to trust each other. I teach them community is a family. It's a family whether it's their peers, whether it's their family at home, whether it's their best friends. If you don't feel trust, they are not going to put all of themselves out there.

So the community feel in the classroom, they have to be able to trust each other that when people walk out in the hall, if there's been peer tutoring, just like we've talked about, that peer isn't going to go out and say, "So and so doesn't know any of this." But if they have that community feel and that trust issue, I think they are going to really open up and let themselves learn.

Eddie: Excellent! Thank you so much! You have got some wonderful comments!

Eddie: I'm going to ask you eight questions. The good thing about it, they are leading questions. And again, we're talking about peer tutoring. And again, the definition of multi-ability classrooms are a classroom where a child is here on grade level and the child is certainly under grade level.

Some administrators say that peer tutoring can't be successful in today's classrooms. What would you say?

Participant #5: I would disagree. I would say in some respects I wouldn't always use peer tutoring. But I think in some it's good to do groupings where you have lower ability kids with higher ability kids, because a lot of times the kids, from a peer, they can deliver something in a different way that maybe is a little bit easier for them to understand from what I said. You know, just a matter of sitting down and putting it on their level.

I think it can be a successful tool. I don't think it would be, I guess, the best thing to use in all situations.

Eddie: OK. So do you use peer tutoring now in your classroom?

Participant #5: I do some, yes.

Eddie: How does that use of peer tutoring in your classroom affect the students that are behind?

Participant #5: I think it motivates them to do better. I think that it…I don't know, it kind of engages them more and it makes them…you know, when they say…I hate to say they make a comparison of what they know to what somebody else knows, but again, it gives them kind of that internal drive to say, "I gotta get this. This is what I'm supposed to know." And the fact that you've got the peer influence, I still think the peer kinda leading you on and being a cheerleader for you and kind of helping you, I guess, through the process is an internal motivator.

Eddie: Sure. That's a good comment. In what way or ways do multi-ability classrooms affect your teaching style?

Participant #5: I think the biggest thing it does, as a teacher I've got to vary the way that I deliver instructions because along with different ability levels you've also got different learning styles within that classroom too. So where one thing may work for one kid, it may not work for another. So you've got to vary. You can't give notes every single day because a kid's not going to respond.

So I think as a teacher it's made me concentrate more on finding ways to meet everybody in the classroom and not just, "What's my favorite thing to do?" but what's going to work best for the kids.

Eddie: OK. Suppose you have a classroom where five students were at least on grade level behind, say, in a core class—maybe reading, math, but a core subject. How would you change your daily teaching style and lesson plans?

Participant #5: So if I've got…

Eddie: You've got five that are at least one grade level below.

Participant #5: OK, so not a majority of the class. In that respect I think I would…Obviously we've got our standards that we've got to go by, and every kid has to meet the certain amount of standards. But those kids are going to need a little bit more one-on-one. They're going to need a little bit more intervention, I guess, on things that they don't know that could help bring them up in a higher level. That could be intervention after school, that could be a peer tutoring opportunity. And, you know, maybe to where you're working on your skill…I teach math, for instance, so whatever I'm working on that day, obviously they've got to meet that requirement of that skill. But

also, I've got to go pick and pull some things that will help them kind of bridge that gap between where they're at and where they need to be.

So I think you would have to incorporate more than just what the skill is for that day and whether that's being afterschool, an intervention class, or some peer grouping or peer tutoring. I think you would have to kind of vary how you would address things.

Eddie: OK. What influences your use or nonuse of peer tutoring? Maybe I need to clarify. Is your influence colleagues? Is it administration saying, "We want you to use this, we don't want you to use this"? Is it exposure in your Master's program? What influences you to use peer tutoring or not use it?

Participant #5: I think probably what influences me the most at this point is just my experience, because I've taught…this is my 16th year. So through the years you try this, you try that. You see what works. You modify and address; you know, "Yes, this works. No, this doesn't." I mean I've seen success in that peer grouping. Kids have a variety of needs.

And like I said, sometimes it's just that having that peer there as, I guess, an extra…I don't know what word I'm looking for…an extra motivator. Here I'm trying to be a cheerleader and a coach in teaching, but I guess my experience I've seen in work, but I've seen it not work.

So I don't want the peer experience to be, "OK, here, copy the answers down. Hurry up and get done so we can move on and do something else." But if it's used in the correct way it can be beneficial, I think.

Eddie: Was peer tutoring discussed in your Master's program?

Participant #5: Yes and no. We talked about different strategies within the classroom because we had to take elementary curriculum, middle school curriculum, high school

179

curriculum. So you looked at a lot of different things. I don't think specifically, but it was in general just as teaching strategies in general, because a lot of things were addressed-what works, what doesn't.

Eddie: Why do some students respond more positively to a peer than a teacher when they are behind?

Participant #5: I think maybe sometimes they may feel a little intimidated by the teacher. I try to create an environment in my class that they won't, but sometimes they're just afraid to say, "I don't get it." I think there's times to where they may feel more comfortable addressing it with a peer than they would be to say, "I know you've gone over this for a week, but I still don't get it." It's time to move on, so they're, "OK look, she's gone over this a week. I need some help." They may be a little bit more comfortable in that respect than with the teacher.

Eddie: OK. Some teachers would say that being at least a grade level behind does not affect whether a student feels a part of the class or not. What would you say?

Participant #5: Again, yes and no. Yes, because I think a lot of times it adds to their frustration because they see the class progressing and they're not. I think they may feel overwhelmed—"I'm never going to catch up." So in that respect I would think yes they would.

But again, if you've got a teacher there that is providing what they need, and that's, like I said, providing the intervention to kind of bridge that gap, I think they do. And I think when they are successful they do feel like they're a part of that class. I think it's important when the kids to experience success, you make sure they know that they're being successful, because that will make them feel like they're a part of what's going on. If you don't congratulate them and let them know that they're progressing as they should

and, "Hey, I'm seeing some big gains here," I don't think they'll feel as much…I think a

lot of it is the teacher kind of making them feel like they're a part of it as well.

Eddie: Which brings me to my final question, and that is this. When I talk about the idea

of community I'm talking in the classroom, in the learning environment. How does the

idea of community in the classroom influence the success of the student in the classroom?

Participant #5: You know, they've all got to feel like they're a part of that classroom. If

they don't, they're not going to buy into what you're doing. When you go in to develop a

lesson or teach a lesson, like I said, you can't have the same thing occurring every day.

You've got to change it up. You've got to excite the kids. You've got to get them

involved. If the kids feel like they're involved in that community…a lot of times I'll say,

"OK, we're a big family here." They'll say, "Well, do I have to do this?" "Yeah, we're

all one big family here." They've got to feel like they're a part of that one group and that

I'm there to address all their needs, and not just, "OK, I'm going to work these kids

because they're on grade level, but you're behind, so I'll get to you later." They've got to

feel like, "OK, I'm going to address it and I'm going to cover it all with everybody." So I

think it's very important that they feel like they're all a part of the class community.

Eddie: Good. One of the things I've noticed, obviously you try to develop theories, but if

you have a child that comes in, so many times we look at the idea of social promotion

and let's move them on, and if he didn't get it in the 9th grade, "Well, let's move him to

the 10th grade."

But obviously, in your theory of how important community is, if we move that child from

9th to 10th and he's already behind, and he doesn't feel a part of the community, then ever

getting him back to where he needs to be is almost impossible, because he's not feeling a

part. He knows he's behind. And if we never try to incorporate him into that community,

181

he's never going to get ahead. And then he's going to move from the 10th grade to the

11th grade.

Participant #5: I think it affects their confidence too, because a lot of it…if they start to

build that confidence in themselves, I think their drive and their want to do better, and

their want to learn more, and their want to try to…I say catch up; I don't know that catch

up is a correct term, but to take in as much as they can to try to get to where they are

grade level. I think confidence has a lot to do with that. If the kids don't have confidence

in their abilities, they're never going to get there. They've got to say, "I can do this." If

they don't have a peer leader from the classroom that is telling them, "Look, you can do

this," they're not going to get there.

Eddie: And if they don't have a safe community…

Participant #5: Exactly.

Eddie: OK! Wonderful! Thank you so much! See, that was painless, wasn't it?

Participant #5: Yes, it was!

Eddie: The name of the study is called "The perceptions of middle school teachers in relation to peer tutoring within the multi-ability classroom". Our definition of multi-ability classroom is where you have students that are on grade level, and then you have students also in the same classroom, for whatever reason, that are at least one grade level behind. So that's the context that we're talking about today.

First question is some administrators have said that peer tutoring cannot be successful in today's classrooms. What would you say?

Participant #6: I think it's very successful. I think a lot of times when I'm teaching and a student raises their hand and they don't understand, it's so funny; another student will come out and raise their hand and say…sometimes they hear it in a different way what the child's asking me. And so I've found through my years of teaching that yeah, we break away a lot of times and go to the board and help this person with this problem. But sometimes….the child is asking, they're asking this, and then they'll actually turn and say, "This is what you're supposed to do." And it just amazes me that sometimes that goes on.

I can only take so many students at my desk at one time, and so then I get some of the, "Go over there and help this person." As long as they're taking it serious, and yes, sometimes they'll start giggling, but usually that kinda gets nipped in the bud at the beginning of the school year when you talk about the responsibility and how important this is. But I think it's great. Necessary, yes.

Eddie: When you utilize peer tutoring your classroom, how does that affect students that are behind?

Participant #6: As far as really bringing them up to par, maybe just a little. But I think the confidence, I think for the person that knows what they're doing, I think that's a great

leadership opportunity for them. I think for the student that needs to be tutored it's great that they can feel comfortable asking a question with their peer. And then I think it's the reinforcement that's given back as far as the confidence.

But as far…they do tell me, though, "Oh, I do understand that now." So I guess, then, if I reinforce, or I pull them back up, or two days later I go, "Remember this is what you did?" "Oh, yeah!" So I guess it's somewhat successful as long as I'm able to reinforce it, and if it's particular students that are helping. I think it depends on the student. But they will tell me, "You have to remember that's what she did." So yes, I think it's somewhat successful.

Eddie: In what ways do multi-ability classrooms affect your teaching style?

Participant #6: You have to be aware of every student's needs, from either the highest end to the lowest. And you try to do things; I try to do as much as I can for the smarter ones. I try to do things to give them enrichment if possible; I try to do that as much as possible. But that's where they do come in as the peer tutoring, so that's where that does come in.

But you have to also teach small groups to the other students. So my expectations, I expect just as much from the lower students. But sometimes when I do that one-on-one…today we did something and I actually went through, and it was the circumference of a circle with diameter and radius, and so I made them tell me…they were all mixed up on a sheet, so I made them go through and we wrote the formula for each one because they were getting confused if it's the radius or the diameter, although they could tell me this one's the radius and that one's the diameter. But it would be so confusing to pick out which formula.

So we went through…I went through with some of the lower ones one-on-one and made them write the formula down that they were using, where the other students were able to do it by themselves.

Eddie: OK. Wonderful. Let's just suppose you had a classroom where you had five students that were at least one grade level behind. How would that change your daily lesson plan?

Participant #6: Well, I still have to teach. I still have to teach the standards. I still have to teach the whole class. My lesson plans would have to change because with the students that were more lower, the five, I would have to probably bring in different types of manipulatives or do something special with them. That's where I'd have to get outside help. That's where the peer tutoring would come in. That's where if I needed to go to another teacher for suggestions, which I do a lot. Maybe there's a website….

Sometimes literally, honestly, some of the students who are lower, I bring them up. We have something called Brain Pop Jr. Most of the students have seen…the time 8th grade comes around they've seen a lot of the Brain Pop. So I'll bring some of them over just separately and we'll do the Brain Pop just together as a small group. Because if I do it with the whole class, "Oh, we've seen this before Ms. Hughes!" Or I may pull up…I'll go to the internet and pull up something that explains it to them in a different way.

Eddie: What or who has influenced your use or nonuse of peer tutoring? Would you say colleagues, administration? You were exposed to peer tutoring maybe in college? What has influenced you?

Participant #6: Oh, wow. I guess maybe just colleagues, just in general. I guess that just goes back to the very, very beginning of teaching. And you always go to people for help. I mean I go to people for help. So I guess just colleagues.

Although the administrators, they always suggest that. But I guess you go back to the very, very beginning of your teaching when you go to someone and you ask for help or suggestions. So I guess it'd be colleagues.

Eddie: It's interesting. I found some of the teachers that have graduated from certain schools, as far as peer tutoring is concerned, they will say, "I've never heard of that." And then other students will say, "Well, our program, we taught semesters on it." So it's interesting to see where that influence…

Participant #6: If you're a teacher, I just think that would be a normal…I don't even know if anyone ever told me. I think that would just be a normal thing that you would have someone else work with this student for a few…I just think that's…

Eddie: You'd be surprised, though, how many schools are not even utilizing it.

Participant #6: Oh, really?

Eddie: Oh yeah.

Participant #6: Oh, my goodness.

Eddie: It's interesting. And it's kind of one of the reasons that I was doing this was because there's so many teachers, they know that it was very involved in the one room school houses, but then somewhere we've lost it and it's not…probably the majority of the schools are not using it.

Participant #6: Here in Memphis? You're kidding! I just can't imagine.

Eddie: So that's what we're trying to figure out—is it a perception of time? Is it a perception of too much effort? Is it a perception that it's not going to work? That's what we're trying to look at.

Participant #6: I think an ideal situation would be if you had a younger grade, if it was a K-5 school, having the 5th graders come in and maybe help a third grader. But that would

be hard to get the time in, for like a 6th grader to go down and help 3rd graders. But that would be great.

Eddie: It's interesting, a lot of teachers talk about, "I've got to teach for the test," which becomes…

Participant #6: Life.

Eddie: Yeah. Why do some students respond more positively to a peer than in a teacher in regards to when they're behind?

Participant #6: I think that sometimes I think they're more open to their friends if they're comfortable, if they don't feel like they're being cut down by having that extra help. I just think sometimes it works better…I've noticed that sometimes students get frustrated, and if I try to help them, sometimes they become defiant or they'll look away and become rude. I try to help them and I can read their body language, and I'm sitting here working away, and I'm looking at them and they're all about what's going on in the classroom. That's not working.

So I think that sometimes they turn me off and they respond more to a student. That's not every student. That could be…you're going to have maybe two students…I can think of two students now out of the several kids that I teach that would possibly respond better because sometimes they are frustrated or, in general, they are mad. Maybe I didn't let them go to the restroom, and so sometimes…

Eddie: More of a personality thing…

Participant #6: Yeah.

Eddie: Got ya.

Participant #6: Two more questions. Some teachers would say that being at least a grade level behind does not affect whether a student feels a part of the classroom or not. Would you agree? What do you think?

Participant #6: I don't make a big deal out of if they're behind. I guess that would affect them, but I'm always building them up and saying, "You're so smart. You can do this." I'm always telling them, "Maybe you are struggling, but you can do this."

So that would be a factor, but I think that when I pull them over to my desk, because when I give them a worksheet and they go, "I don't know what I'm doing. I can't do this" I go, "OK, this is what I want you to do. This one, this one." I break it down and maybe we'll do five. "Do three of them and come back to me. Oh, this is great. Way to go."

So I think that if you keep building their confidence. But I think they do struggle a little bit…

Eddie: I think what you're saying is maybe it does affect them. The way you try to create your class minimizes that. But if you were not doing that, then it would be…

Participant #6: Yeah, I would never make someone feel uncomfortable about that. And sometimes we may zero in on one or two, and then let's go down and do three at the bottom because they're always harder. And it's like, "Way to go! Yay!" I clap for them and praise them.

Eddie: Final question. And when I use the word "community", I'm talking about the community inside the classroom and how they interact. How does the idea of community in the classroom influence the success of students in your classroom?

Participant #6: OK, that's important. We're all in this together and we have to all work together. So that's very important that the community is all positive, that they feel everyone gets along well. We're a whole family.

When I taught just elementary, we were a family because we were one group all day long. And so, in middle school you can do the same thing. We're like a family and everybody has to work together. Can't be any name calling or putting down, or laughing when somebody makes a mistake. So we are a community. We do all work together and respect one another like a family.

Eddie: So if a student is behind and he's struggling, that feeling of community is very valuable.

Participant #6: Definitely, yeah. That's where the peers come in. People help one another. That's important, yeah.

Eddie: Fantastic! See, that was painless, wasn't it!

Eddie: This is a copy of what I've just given you. That's my office number and that is my email address.

Participant #7: You look familiar to me. You are FACS?

Eddie: Yeah.

Participant #7: Do you do some things at FACS with the rec?

Eddie: Yes!

Participant #7: Troy is real good friends with, I think his name is, John. You may know him. My husband teaches at Victory, formerly Kriton [sp]. I think his name was John…You just look familiar.

Eddie: In what area?

Participant #7: Like with the rec ministry.

Eddie: You're not talking about John Grant are you?

Participant #7: Yeah.

Eddie: OK. That is now my new son-in-law.

Participant #7: Well Dr. Miller is one of his…We've had them over at our house…

Eddie: OK, yeah. See, Genie and I have been…John's mother-in-law Genie, we've been dating for 14 years, so we got married in December. So now John is my son-in-law. They were just down last week.

Participant #7: Yeah, because they're up in Boston, right?

Eddie: Well no, now they've moved. He's actually at Reform Theological Seminary in Jackson, in his last year there.

Participant #7: Well ask him about Dr. Miller because he's good friends.

Eddie: I would love to do that! Good deal! I've got eight questions I'm going to ask you. Again, the scenario that we're looking at is the two definitions of, obviously, peer tutoring within the multi-ability classroom. And the idea of multi-ability classroom is a classroom where you have people that are on grade level and you've got some that are not even…

190

Participant #7: I have a co-teach class so it's…multi, yes, definitely.

Eddie: I'm going to ask you just eight questions, and just answer however you feel necessary. Some administrators say that peer tutoring can't be successful in today's classrooms. What would you say?

Participant #7: I think it can in certain instances. I think when you have kids that are willing…it has to be the right character of kid for peer tutors. I don't think it can just be the ability of them to do it, certainly, but their willingness as well. There's certain readymade teachers, already in the making, in the classroom. And they love to help out. And sometimes you have the kid that can learn better from their peer than they can from the teacher. Maybe the way the teacher is explaining it isn't quite sinking in to them. But the way the student is able to relate the information is on level with how they can perceive.

I think when you can give the kids as many opportunities to have the information presented to them in different ways that you'll tap into the way they can learn.

Eddie: OK. Suppose you created a peer tutoring program for your specific classroom. How do you think that would affect the students that are behind? Do you think it would be helpful?

Participant #7: I think it would be helpful. It really depends on the content. Like, you know, a lot of times what you have to really watch with peer tutoring is a student that kinda takes over and isn't allowing the student to kind of answer, but they're just giving them all the information. Definitely could be implemented, could be successful, but it has to be monitored closely by the teacher, I think.

Eddie: I think you're right. You get some of these kids that want to be the motherly figure…

Participant #7: Right. And they don't really allow the child the opportunity. I think teachers can do the same thing ad not allow the child the opportunity to answer what they know and allow them to draw it out. Facilitate it, but try to get out of them what they know and not just kind of facilitate what you want them to answer.

Eddie: OK. In what ways do multi-ability classrooms affect your personal teaching style?

Participant #7: Well, I think I have a pretty wide range of students that I teach. Sometimes I pair students up based on ability. I put my high kids here, give them an enriched, challenging, you know. So I do all sorts of things. Sometimes if I'm doing a more difficult think like a technology project or whatnot, I pair them up with someone who is strong or able to kind of lead in the activity. So I always have them in difference groups. And I keep different groups set based on what I want them to do within mind who I would pair up.

But I feel like it can be very successful. I find the biggest challenge is still keeping the highest students challenged. That's where I find the biggest struggle—if you are constantly peer tutoring, where is that challenge coming in for the high level student? So sometimes I see that they kinda suffer a little bit. There does need to be a balance of them peer tutoring as well as separating, at times, to be pushed and challenged.

Eddie: What influences your use or nonuse of peer tutoring? Whether it be colleagues, administration, your personal experience, what influences you?

Participant #7: Mostly time, time constraints, and probably students' willingness. You know, those two things. We have a lot of support from administration to do whatever we think will be effective in the classroom. We don't have a lot of, "You need to do this, this, this." They definitely want to see groups, cooperative learning because kids need to

192

learn how to work together. And that's always mixed up together because sometimes they get to choose and sometimes they don't. In life you don't always get to choose who you work with! And you've got to learn how to value and listen to other people's opinions. But time constraints this year; 90 minutes language arts, so we've got a lot more time. But in the middle school structure, sometimes they don't use groups as much. I still try to do quite a bit with groups.

Eddie: In your college program did you talk about peer tutoring much?

Participant #7: Yeah. I've been out for five years. I went to Kriton. I went back to school as an adult learner and I was a physical therapist for 12 years, and then I went back and got my certification to teach.

Eddie: That's interesting, because I'm finding that there's some programs that really talk about it, and there are other programs that don't even mention it.

Participant #7: Well I know my 4th grader here specifically, he's a peer tutor for the younger grades. He goes two mornings a week to 1st grade and he tutors. In the morning we have a slot, like 20 minutes that's reading, but he's a fast reader so he's already caught up on his reading. So they use some of those kids to go down to the lower grades. And teachers will have just worksheets or whatever that the kids can kind of use as reinforcement. He'll do math; he'll do different things with the younger ones.

Last year when he was in 3rd he did kindergarten. He signs a thing that he wants to do that and that he'd be willing even if it means giving up his recess one day a week. So he does it.

Eddie: Wow! I know you're proud of him!

Participant #7: Yeah! But I think it's been good for him. Not necessarily that he's learned more, but for interaction and for leadership skills.

Eddie: That's one of the things that I did notice in a lot of the research is that not only did the kids being tutored benefit, but actually, the kid who is tutoring gets a tremendous amount of benefit.

Participant #7: And I think they do really well with that from 4th grade and under here at this school. We could probably stand to look into a little bit more of that for the 5-8 of ways to do that, bring it down to different grade levels. Not only peer tutoring in that you're tutoring someone in your class, but that you're maybe working with someone after school as like a volunteer kind of program. Because that's why I said time constraint was the biggest one, to get that meaningful block of time that you can have students work together.

Eddie: Why do some students respond more positively to a peer than a teacher in regards to learning?

Participant #7: Hmm. Sometimes they do and sometimes they don't. Sometimes it's just the interaction with someone who's your age; it's their understanding, maybe they're taking the time to show you. They don't feel as nervous, maybe, with their peer that they get the right answer as they do with the teacher, where they're more afraid of answering: "Am I going to get it right or wrong?" So maybe they're just more at ease and comfortable with their peer.

Eddie: I know most teachers I interviewed today said the same thing. It's that authority figure; that your students always want to look the best for you, and to say, "I don't understand or I don't know…"

Participant #7: Some are afraid to be wrong. They're afraid to be wrong. I'm amazed at how many kids just won't ask for help if they don't understand something. So it's really a

big thing. The kids just don't ask for help. Some don't know what to ask for help with if they don't understand. But some just don't want to say, "I don't understand."

Eddie: It's that fear. Yeah, exactly. Two more questions and we will be done. Some teachers would say that being at least a grade level behind would not have an effect on whether a student feels a part of the class or not. What would you say?

Participant #7: I would agree, because I have one right now who came to me reading at a 1st grade level in 6th grade from the city. 1.2 reading level. And he's very much in there right now. He's podcasting with the rest of them. And now he's probably on a 3rd grade level. He's raised almost two reading levels this year, but he's still not where he needs to be.

But no, I co-teach a class. Sometimes certain activities it's a little bit more of a struggle. Certainly reading out loud is a struggle. They don't want to read out loud, unless they are in a very small group. But I have a lot of students who kind of just induce that that's the situation, a struggling reader. I have found that sometimes even when I'm working with another student, he has certain students he feels more comfortable saying, "What's this word?" And he'll just ask another student. Whereas before he didn't want to ask anybody because he didn't want anybody to know. But as the year's gone on he's developed people he feels comfortable with.

Eddie: Which moves me to my last question. How does the idea of community in the classroom, and again, learning environment, how does the idea of community in the classroom influence the success of students in that classroom?

Participant #7: Crucial! Kids have to feel safe in the classroom. They have to feel like they can ask questions. They have to feel like they can try and be wrong and learn from it. As I always say, the dumbest question is the one that's not asked. They have to feel

like the classroom, in order to learn, they have to feel like they can share and that they can listen. I'm very strict about hearing everybody's opinions and not laughing at anybody, that kind of stuff. So they hear that from me a lot.

They have to feel like the classroom is a safe place. Otherwise, it makes learning very difficult for them. The kids that learn very easily may learn, but those that are hard to reach, they won't learn.

Eddie: I think a lot of times some teachers don't realize that if the child is already behind and already feels that he's not a part of the community, then his success rate is not very great at all.

Participant #7: Well this has been a very interesting year because we got some new students from the city, and this particular one [xx 12:46] skipped the 4th grade because he had a learning disability, was diagnosed with a learning disability. And then they decided to go ahead and skip him a grade to get him where he was supposed to be, because he had repeated early on. He's battled.

But in that situation, this exact atmosphere, lots of peer tutoring has happened, lots of just sitting down, talking, discussing. But it has taken him a while to overcome his embarrassment of being behind. And it's taken the other kids time to realize that he was trying. It wasn't that he wasn't trying. He was trying and he was struggling. So through the process we've seen a lot of growth.

Eddie: Well, it's interesting, because it sounds like every teacher that I've talked to today, the idea of not only this school, but all the classrooms, one teacher said that, "My mentality is we're family. We're in this thing together."

Participant #7: Yeah. I wish you could go in there right now because they're doing a podcasting thing. They're working in groups and they're creating a podcast basically

196

using Garageband. So when it comes to technology it's like those barriers kinda fall away because a lot of the kids know so much about technology, and they just get it and go with it. They don't realize they're learning. And they're teaching me! I'm like, "Oh, But you know, when you do those kind of activities, the reading and whatnot, even when they have to read for directions and stuff it just kinda falls…and they're in a group and they're all working together. They're supposed to be creating something about all that they've learned this year in language arts for next year's students to watch at the beginning of the year. [laughs]

Eddie: Wow! That's awesome!

Participant #7: So we'll see.

Eddie: Well you guys are doing a phenomenal job here.

Participant #7: Thank you. We have a lot of technology available to us. We realize we're spoiled.

Eddie: That's good.

Participant #7: There's a lot of schools, though, that have it. I student taught at Larose and they've got a lot of resources through Title I and stuff, they're just not used.

Eddie: Good deal!

Eddie: Some administrators would say that peer tutoring can't be successful in today's education classrooms. What would you say?

Participant #8: I disagree.

Eddie: Suppose you could create a peer tutoring program, or you may already have a peer tutoring program, in your classroom. How does that affect the students who are behind?

Participant #8: I think it helps them tremendously. Over the years we've worked peer tutoring in the classroom. We have a peer tutoring program in Riverdale. For example, we have 8th graders, 7th and 8th graders, even down to 5th grade, that go down to kindergartners in the mornings and help them with AR reading. I've used 7th and 8th graders that come into my resource class and help my, let's say, multiplication facts. They bond with my kids. I've had groups that get so excited about it they will make games and bring in and get so involved with them. They actually would take their rehearse time or study hall, every day come in and work with them. So they get very involved with it, very excited about it.

Eddie: Wonderful. In what ways do multi-ability classrooms affect your teaching style?

Participant #8: I think it can be very helpful. Now, mine's a resource class, so I have many different levels and abilities. So I have to use, certainly, different levels of curriculum, many different curriculums, and I have to adjust my teaching for each child. I have, certainly, a variety of teaching methods. So I do a lot of testing to see what will fit to each particular child's needs.

Eddie: OK. What was your influence to begin to use peer tutoring? Is it colleagues, trial and error?

Participant #8: Well, we're certainly encouraged to use it. But I have so many different levels within the classroom. I had so many children at so many different levels…Actually, when I first started I needed extra hands in the room, and I thought I already had one little girl who was wanting to help. We have a Pals program. And I thought, "OK, they're wanting to help." And I started with those.

And it just sort of grew from that. They were doing such a great job. I thought, "Man, I need these kids." And they were very responsible.

Eddie: Excellent. In your opinion, why do some students respond more positively to a peer than a teacher?

Participant #8: I think sometimes they're more intimidated with a teacher, maybe. And sometimes they just respond more with a peer. Now, the ones that I use, generally, are maybe one or two grade levels above. With some of my children that are more disabled, I have used their classroom peers. It's built a better understanding between the two. They have responded better because they see them in the classroom and it's built friendships.

Eddie: OK, good. Some teachers would say that being at least a grade level behind does not have an effect on whether a student feels a part of the classroom or not. What would you say?

Participant #8: I think maybe it depends on the teacher sometimes and whether or not they make them feel a part of the classroom. Maybe the teacher doesn't realize whether or not they're making them feel apart. But children know; they have that sense of feeling. Sometimes other children can make them feel not a part. And then a child knows if they're up to par. They realize it. And sometimes they feel intimidated.

So being a year behind, yes they are aware.

Eddie: OK. That leads me into my final question. The word "community" here means the community in the classroom, the learning environment. How does the idea of community in the classroom influence the success of the students in that classroom?

Participant #8: If there's not a feeling of belonging, then I think it affects the overall atmosphere. I feel like if the children feel that they're a part, just like as a family, if the family is together as a whole, then the family, I think, is more successful. And the same thing in a classroom—if they feel like they belong together in a community or as a whole, they do better. They work together better. They help each other.

So if you're helping each other as a community, then you're working together to help

those that aren't up to par or helping those that you want everybody to succeed, so you

help each other.

Eddie: Good.

Eddie: And again, we're talking about the utilization of peer tutoring within multi-ability

classrooms. That's kind of the setting as far as in the middle school. Some administrators

say that peer tutoring can't be successful in today's classrooms. What would you say?

Participant #9: It's got challenges. I think it's hard for it to be logistically done. To me, I

think in order for it to work well…If I were in charge of the whole thing I'd want the kid

to be there for the whole class period and then find time outside of that class period to do

the peer tutoring. I would hate for them to be pulled out of a regular classroom and miss

something, and they're already at risk anyways.

So I think extra time elsewhere in the school day or after school; extra time needs to be provided for that. So I think it could be done, it's just a matter of how it's done.

Eddie: It's logistically challenging.

Participant #9: Right, exactly.

Eddie: Suppose you could create a peer tutoring program in your classroom. How would that affect those students that are a grade level behind? Do you think it would be beneficial to them? Do you think it would not have a lot of effect on them?

Participant #9: I would probably be very beneficial. They would have the extra resources there. We have things here like…what's it called? Like Think Quick, Discovery Ed; we have a lot of diagnostic computer programs here at the school that we use.

And so what the tutor would have to do is look at their Think Quick scores, look at the particular skills that they have to zero in on. And if they approach it that way, if they give them the instruction that they need, then I think we'll be OK. So they just have to zero in on what they actually need.

Eddie: OK. In what way does a multi-ability classroom affect your teaching style?

Participant #9: It challenges it, but also, I like it though. You've got different ability levels in there. You can pair up the kids heterogeneously or homogeneously based on the lesson. I like diversity in the classroom because teaching art, what I teach, everybody has a different outlook on things. So I think having that difference of opinion or difference of perspective I think really adds to a classroom environment.

Eddie: OK. Let's say that you are starting a new class and you've got five students that are at least one skill level or grade level behind everybody else. How would that change your lesson plan for that week?

Participant #9: Let's see. Well, like I said, just diagnostic work, see what skills they're lacking, and then just provide extra practice necessary for those kids. I mean maybe it involves homework assignments for something, or even in the class work assignments too. I mean you can modify…modify is what you want to do. Change it to fit whatever the needs are.

Eddie: The framework of what you're going to do for that week, you would not modify that…

Participant #9: Not tremendously, I mean because whether it's art, math, whatever, we all have curriculums we have to teach. We have standards the kids have to meet. I don't want to adjust it so drastically so that standards are being left out or content is not being taught.

My first goal is to make sure that every child accomplishes the standard, but I want them to accomplish that standard on the continuum where their ability level is. That's how I want them to do that, so wherever they are.

For SSAR standards, the math standards too, they've got the standard that the kid has to complete. There's like level one, level two, level three; here's what you look for for level one mastery, here's what you look for for level two. I mean obviously they want the kids to go up to level three.

But I would focus on the standards and make sure the standards are taught, and then just modify assignments based on where they are in that continuum.

Eddie: OK. What or who has influenced your use or nonuse of peer tutoring in your classroom?

Participant #9: Well, right now I'm an art teacher. That's why I want to do regular ed's; there's more things I can do with my children that I can't do in an art classroom, where I

have them for 50 minutes once a week. I have 500 kids I teach. So probably 40% of the school is what I teach. And I only have them for 50 minutes once a week. If I had a regular ed classroom I would definitely use it.

We have tutoring programs here at Riverdale that we offer for the kids. Usually the second or third week of school that those teachers who signed up to be after school tutors, they get referrals from classroom teachers for kids who need extra tutoring. We have those programs available here after school.

I don't know how effective they are. I've never worked in that aspect before. But I would definitely use it. I support the system that is in place. I would definitely offer it after school. Like I said, I think it's best…I want the kids there in the class the whole time they're in there. I don't want them pulled out of my class period to go to tutoring. That needs to be an extra thing outside of class.

Eddie: In your Master's program did they talk about peer tutoring at all?

Participant #9: Only briefly. Most of the experience I've had with it has been probably really this school year. We have a…they hired, technically she's a substitute teacher, but she has been pulled…I don't know if they got grant money for this or what, but there was extra funding in Shelby County schools where they hire a substitute teacher to function as a tutor within the school. Debbie has been great with that. She has a whole schedule. Every classroom teacher has given her a list of, say, four, five, or six kids. And she pulls them…I'm not sure if it's a daily basis or every other day, but I see her all around the school, whatever nook and cranny she can find to work with the groups of kids. And that's been good to see.

But that program's been initiated this year, with the knowledge I have of tutoring after school, and then…I'm on the S Team this year as part of a process of referring kids to

special education. So this year has been the most experience I've had with it, really, beyond graduate school or anything else.

Eddie: Let me ask you three quick questions. Why do some students respond more positively to a peer rather than a teacher when they're behind?

Participant #9: They can probably relate to that student better. I think that student may have a better way of explaining it than a teacher might, because the student has already mastered it. So they might have a more, I guess using their lingo or their frame of references, they might have a more relevant way of explaining it to someone than maybe we could.

Eddie: OK. Some teachers would say that being at least a grade level behind would not have an effect on whether a student feels a part of the class or not. What do you think?

Participant #9: Repeat that question for me?

Eddie: Some teachers would say that if a child is a grade level behind that will not affect whether he feels like he's a part of the class or not. Would you agree or disagree?

Participant #9: They're may be some feelings of inadequacy because he might see his peers who are at grade level or above grade level succeeding. I've seen that in some of the files I've worked with this year. And that can affect social stuff, too. I think the self-esteem…and it factors into a lot of different things. Or they might not care. It depends on the child, really.

But in my opinion, I think more often than not that would probably have an impact on friends or whatnot, jealousy of people who are succeeding or whatever, frustration, aggression; all that kinda comes with that kind of territory.

Eddie: Last question that just kinda pulls off of that. When I use the word "community" I'm talking about the learning environment within the classroom—the community in your

classroom. How does the idea of community in your classroom influence the success of the students in the classroom?

Participant #9: I think it has a big effect on it. I think the teachers need to be able to communicate with the kids. The kids should feel free to express stuff to the teacher. I think that has a big impact on it. Just an environment where it's not like a dictatorship or anything; a positive work environment, I think. Does that answer your question?

Eddie: Sure. So you think community is important?

Participant #9: Oh, I do. Yeah, absolutely. I feel that I have good community in my classroom. Even though I'm an art teacher right now, I do feel support and have a positive, friendly, approachable environment for the kids to work in.

Eddie: Sure. OK.

Eddie: Some administrators say that peer tutoring can't be successful in today's classrooms. What would you say?

Participant #10: I disagree, because I've seen it work. Sometimes things that I teach the children, the way I present it to the class, the children don't get it the first time, but another student speaking a language that's more traditionally what that child's used to hearing, or just rewording it in the way that they understood it, a student that understands it then presenting to another student, not only benefits the student who didn't get it the first time—they maybe hear it in a different way and understand it—but it also benefits that student who got it the first time. Saying it again helps them to internalize that.

Eddie: OK. Excellent. Suppose you could create a peer tutoring program in your classroom. How would that affect your students that are behind?

Participant #10: Well, I think it would just give them one more way to hear it. Not only another way of hearing the material, but also hearing it for a second time. I think the more that the kids are exposed to material the more likely they are to internalize that and to understand it. So whenever you give them more opportunities, it can only help.

Eddie: OK. In what way, or more than one way, does a multi-ability classroom affect your teaching style?

Participant #10: Well, you just have to be mindful that everyone is learning in a different format, that the way you present it that you are clear in your presentation, varying your ways of teaching using hands-on, or using the interactive whiteboard, or having them hear it on a tape recorder, or using another student, or going out for tutoring, or maybe a computer program.

You just have to be aware that you have to change your style of teaching…I mean not just your style, but the ways that you're presenting your information; that you have lots of information. And understand that some of those kids are going to need to hear it more than once. You might have to slow down your pace and change your presentation of your lesson.

Eddie: OK. Let's suppose you had a classroom where five students were at least one grade behind, say in a core class, maybe reading, math, or whatever. How would that change your lesson plans for that week?

Participant #10: Well, you need to go back and see, "OK, what are the precursor skills that you need to get this lesson?" I teach math. So if I'm teaching adding and subtracting fractions, they not only need to learn those skills, they might not have the addition facts learned. I need to be aware of that. Do they know how to find the common denominator? I might expect them already to know that coming in. But if they are behind a grade level,

I need to go back and say, "OK, I need these skills first." So I might have to do a mini lesson as a small group or even a whole group.

Eddie: OK. Good point. Fifth question. What or who influences your use or nonuse of peer tutoring in your classroom?

Participant #10: Say that again?

Eddie: What or who influences your use or nonuse of peer tutoring in your classroom? Let me clarify. Is it colleagues who are saying, "Yes, you need to use this"? Is it administration saying, "You need to use this in your classroom"? Does it come from trial and error? Does it come from experience? Some newer teachers may say, "Well, it was in a class that I took at the university." You as a teacher, what influences you to either use peer tutoring or not use it?

Participant #10: Well, there's a lot of research out there talking about the use of peer tutoring, so things that I have read. We here it when we go to these in-services—peer tutoring works. Just experience, you know. And sometimes not using it, why I might not use it, sometimes you don't have a good mix within your classroom of kids that are going to work well together. I might not have, in that particular room, a group.

In that case, sometimes I've had to pull kids from another room to peer tutor. It doesn't happen very often where you can't find somebody to work well with a student, but I have seen that sometimes.

But most of the time it works out. Really, we hear from everybody. [laughs] The only reason I would say nonuse would be just sometimes…

Eddie: Lack of resources or personnel.

Participant #10: Yeah.

Eddie: OK. Three more questions. Why do some students respond more positively to a peer than a teacher?

Participant #10: I think some kids are intimidated, I think. You hate to think that they might be, but I think that's true sometimes. Just they have a better rapport sometimes with kids. They feel more comfortable. They don't feel judged or that they're going to have the wrong answer. Some of them just like being with their friends. So if they have a chance to do that, then they're not going to mess that up. They're going to work hard for that.

Eddie: Well if it makes you feel any better, every teacher I've talked to today has said the same thing about that there may be a perception of intimidation. And one teacher said, "I think it's because my students want to make sure that everything they do in front of me is good. Everything they do is not to impress me, but they want me to always think good about them. So if they don't know the answer, they're not going to…"

Some teachers would say that being at least a grade level behind would not affect whether a student feels a part of the class or not. What would you say?

Participant #10: How the child feels about it?

Eddie: In other words, if I have a student that's in my classroom and he is at least a grade level behind, is that going to affect how he feels as a part of the classroom?

Participant #10: If they feel that coming in, "Oh, I'm going to be behind. I'm not going to be able to do this," hopefully we make them feel comfortable enough to know that they can have success. I try to make sure everybody has some success every day. So you hope that they don't feel that way, but I think sometimes they feel that they are behind. But they shouldn't feel that way.

Eddie: OK. And that moves right into my final question. When I use the word community, I'm talking about, obviously, in the classroom itself. How does the idea of community in the classroom influence the success of the students in your classroom?

Participant #10: I think if they feel like they are a part of the group, that we are a family, that they can say anything and they can answer. Whether they know the answer or not, they feel like they can step up and answer. But if they don't feel like they are a part of it or that someone is going to criticize them, then they're not as willing to jump in and be part of it. I know with math, the more they are involved in speaking out and telling what they know, the more they get it and it's remembered. And when they don't participate it's just harder for them to keep the skill.

So I like to make them feel, "Hey, you are part of this classroom. We're all part of this classroom. Everyone can say something in here."

Eddie: I think what's interesting, too, is the fact that every person that I've interviewed today has used the same terms—"We're a family. We're all in this thing together." I think that's so incredible, because a lot of schools you don't hear that.

Participant #10: Well, this is a family atmosphere. I will tell you that. My kids came all the way through. One in college, one going to college next year, and one is going to be a junior. So I think being part of this was a benefit.

Eddie: Where do you think that comes from?

Participant #10: The family feeling?

Eddie: Yeah.

Participant #10: Well, I think being in here from K-8, we've seen these kids from the beginning. Also, because our parents are allowed to be so involved and they're up here, we get to know the parents too. Kids know we know about them. "I remember your

brother!" Or you see the younger siblings in the hall and you say hello. They all just feel like we all belong. We have tutoring not only in the classroom, but we have kids going down to lower grade levels tutoring, reading with kindergartners or working with small groups. We just all get to know each other.

And just that feeling that a classroom is a safe place to be; we want it to be a safe place. I don't know. I guess we all have that same philosophy. It's installed in us, I guess, I don't know, lots of ways.

Eddie: That's exciting because you've heard that all day. You know, "We're a family and we're in this thing together." Every teacher said the same thing: "We're going to do everything we can to make sure that they learn."

I'm going to tell you, though, I wish that was a norm in education, but it's not. Just in all the stuff that I've done and the conferences I've gone to, it's amazing what Riverdale does as far as that family community.

Participant #10: Yeah. Well, it's a good place to work, it's a good place for kids to come to school. I think the parents appreciate that they can be involved and see what's going on. And, you know, like any place, some don't take advantage of that. But they do things in other ways. So it's just a good place!

Eddie: Well good deal!

Eddie: OK. Just to kind of give you a basis, the two phrases that I'm going to use, and I want you to make sure that you have a working definition of, is the name of our study is "The perceptions of teachers concerning peer tutoring within a multi-ability classroom". In other words, the definition of multi-ability is a classroom where you have some students that are on grade level and you have some students that may be a grade level below. I'm just going to ask you eight questions, and if you'll just respond in whatever with your answers.

Some administrators say that peer tutoring cannot be successful in today's classrooms. What would you say?

Participant #11: I would say it can be very successful in today's classrooms. I taught psychology and sociology and I used peer tutoring quite a bit in there. I had all levels of students and would try to pair one of a lower level with a higher level, and it worked very successfully.

Eddie: When you created that peer tutoring program in your classroom, how did that affect the students that were behind?

Participant #11: It seemed like it helped them very much. It seemed like it gave them more of an incentive, to me, to do better than what they were doing.

Eddie: In what way or ways does a multi-ability classroom affect your personal teaching style?

Participant #11: it's more individualized when I have a multi-level than it would be otherwise.

Eddie: OK. Let's just suppose you have a classroom where five students were at least one grade level behind. How would that change your daily teaching style and how you do your lesson plans?

Participant #11: I would make it more individualized, again, so that everyone understood what I was trying to teach at that time.

Eddie: When you do that, do you have a certain, like, "Here's my lesson plan for today", and then do you just modify that?

Participant #11: Exactly. I modify that, because I may say, "OK, today we're going to get to page so and so." But I feel like they're not ready to go that far, then I stop and go to the point where I think they're ready to go.

Eddie: OK. I may need to give you a clarification: what influences your use or, in the past, your use of peer tutoring? Was it administrators saying that you need to? Was it other colleagues talking about it? Or was it personal experience?

Participant #11: It was personal experience and it was also you.

[laughter]

Participant #11: Remember the time that you came and you did the peer tutoring? I went to that session. And after that I thought, "Hey, psychology/sociology would be a great class to try this in." And I tried it. It worked!

Eddie: Wonderful! I wasn't expecting that! That's great! Three more questions. Why do some students respond more positively to a peer than a teacher?

Participant #11: I think that a lot of times students are intimidated by the teacher. If the teacher comes over there and says, "No, this is not right. You need to do it this way," that's one thing. But if you have a student that says, "Hey man, look at this. This is all you have to do," they respond better to that sometimes than the teacher.

Eddie: OK. That's interesting, because every teacher that I've interviewed so far, that same thing comes up, is the intimidation factor of teachers. And also, too, I had one teacher say that it was the fact that she knew her students wanted to always show her their best. And if they didn't know, they were very apprehensive to look…

Participant #11: Exactly. They won't speak up! They will not.

Eddie: Two more questions. Some teachers would say that being at least a grade level behind would not have an effect on whether a student feels part of the classroom.

Participant #11: It definitely has an effect. I can remember one student that was like two grade levels behind in one of my classes. And he always felt like he was "dumb", that he could not master the material.

Eddie: OK. Final question, which kinda tails off of that one. The word "community" in this question deals with the community in your classroom. How does the idea of community in the classroom influence the success of students in your classroom?

Participant #11: I think that it influences them to where they want to be a part of the community. Whereas if they feel like they're left out, then you may have a hard time reaching them.

Eddie: So as a teacher is it important for you to try to create that atmosphere of community?

Participant #11: Exactly. I think it is. I think it really is.

Eddie: OK.

Eddie: OK. Let me just give you the name of the study: "Perceptions of teachers in regards to how the use of peer tutoring in multi-ability classrooms". Let me give you the definition of the two words. The first word is obviously peer tutoring. You are familiar with that. The second is multi-ability classroom. The definition I'm using for multi-ability is a classroom where a student is one grade level behind.

First question: Some administrators say that peer tutoring can't be successful in today's educational classrooms. What would you say?

Participant #12: I disagree.

Eddie: Why do you disagree?

Participant #12: It is helpful for their cognitive abilities and they feed off of each other.

Eddie: OK. Suppose in your classroom that you were going to create a peer tutoring

program. How do you think that would affect the students that are behind? Do you think

it would be beneficial?

Participant #12: It would encourage them. It would encourage their success, especially

looking to an upperclassman to know that if they can do it, then the lowerclassmen could.

So I think it would pave the way for an improvement. If not an A, they could definitely

strive for a better grade and see that, well, if their friend could do it, then they could.

Eddie: OK. Question #3: In what ways does a multi-ability classroom affect your

personal teaching style?

Participant #12: Well, you have to look at your time management for how to arrange

your lesson plans. You have some slower learners. You have different testing possibilities

to consider. You've got lots of facets. You've got constant interruptions. And having

multi-ability, you've got to be able to plan for some of those disruptions when they're

having a hard time struggling. You've got someone who is not as quick as someone else,

so to speak, and then you've got at least three disruptions during a class, you've got to be

able to know, "How can I keep them on task even being disturbed?"

Eddie: OK. Suppose you have a classroom where five students, not just one, but five

students were at least one grade level behind. How would that change your daily teaching

style?

Participant #12: I've got one now. I've got four students who are progressive, one

student, in the resource program, very severely learning deficient. The students are great.

They wait patiently while I go through steps with her to build on. Like, we start with a

foundation and we do that. The students are good to work with me and be patient.

And it's hard at times, but it's good to see that they don't get as bored waiting, because boredom could creep in. They could either start becoming disruptive or just totally tune me out. And so I have to focus on all of that. It's a difficult situation sometimes, but other times it's easy. So I've made adjustments through that.

But the retention with that other student, we could do one exercise…I was just talking with a teacher about this this morning. We could do one exercise, explain the whole process, I feel like she's got it. 10 minutes later we're on a new set of exercises, I'm going over it, and it's like I have never spoken that word to her in class before, and there it is. And we're having to start all over again.

And luckily, the other students around her don't sigh, they don't get impatient. They just wait. It's very interesting.

Eddie: What has influenced your use or nonuse of peer tutoring in your classroom?

Participant #12: Time. Class time, preparation.

Eddie: Do you think the use of that requires more time?

Participant #12: Yes. You have to allow, because at times you could easily go over assignments orally, then you can go through assignments where they write down the answers and then you review. And then, if you have them do something on their own in a group, well you are running the risk of having excessive talk: "Hey, what are you doing this weekend? Oh, did you see so and so today?" instead of staying focused.

So you've got to plan, because some groups are going to finish earlier if you have that.

Eddie: Why do you think some students respond more positively to a peer than a teacher?

Participant #12: Well it's the same old adage—kids aren't going to listen to their parents and they're always with their teachers, and kids are more alike in their thinking and they

respect some students, especially if they see that they have put forth the effort, they have been a good example as to what a student needs to be; they look up to them, I feel, for that and they think, "Well if they can do it, so can I."

Eddie: Just out of curiosity, a lot of teachers have said that one of the reasons that a student responds better to another student than a teacher is because some students feel intimidated by the teacher. What would you say?

Participant #12: I kinda disagree with that statement, meaning these days, I feel students feel very superior. No one can tell them that they could have done wrong or have done wrong. Students do not like it when teachers tell them that they have the wrong answer, so now we have to rephrase statements as to, "Well, that's a good answer, but let's think a little bit more beyond that."

Teachers are discouraged from using red pens to correct homework or tests. I mean it's gotten a little out of hand. So I think students aren't going to…They don't like it because we are an adult and we're like the same age as their parents or older, and they don't want to constantly…They know eight hours a day they are going to be with us, then they're going to go home and be with their parents. It's just a constant description of, "Do this, do that. Do this, do that." And sometimes they tune us out.

Now, in other classes, depending on the upbringing, I have better success with homeschooled children who come to the Christian environment or a private school, or any school, that is. They are more independent as a student and know how to get the job done. They don't question me. They don't say, "Why are you giving me so much…?" They don't question. They just say, "OK. This is what needs to be done" and they do it.

Eddie: Huh. Interesting. Two more questions and we'll be done. Some teachers would say that being at least a grade level behind would not have an effect on whether a student feels a part of the classroom or not. What would you say?

Participant #12: I wouldn't agree with that. I think they feel comfortable. They don't seem to have any shame being in a resource class versus AP class. AP students discuss more about the workload. Resource, I think they kinda like it because they know that they don't have as much work as the others. I don't think they feel inhibited being in a class with a mixed group of learners. I think they are comfortable.

Eddie: OK. Final question. It kind of dovetails off of that question before. How does the idea of community in the classroom, and that is the interaction in the learning environment, influence the success of the students in the classroom?

Participant #12: Greatly. Greatly! You've got bad attitudes, you've got good attitudes. You've got some that feed off of each other all of the time. You've got some students that are stronger than others that whatever the pessimist next to them is saying they won't even listen to. They think they're ridiculous. Then you've got some other students that are very weak and they follow the dominant opinion.

It happens more so in my wellness class than in my French. If there's lazy students, or they don't think that they have to do an exercise, or perform, or participate, then they will grumble. But for those that have been brought up either in an athletic frame of mind, or if they just know in general in a regular classroom that they've got to do the work, and they see both their parents as successful and they appreciate that, and depending on their upbringing, I think that they adapt better.

Eddie: Excellent!

Eddie: OK. Again, we're looking at perceptions of teachers in regards to how they look at peer tutoring in multi-ability classrooms.

Question #1: Some administrators say that the use of peer tutoring cannot be successful in the classroom of today. What would you say?

Participant #13: False.

Eddie: OK. Why is that?

Participant #13: It depends on the student. It depends on the seriousness of both the one

tutoring and the one that's being tutored. They both have to want to do it. Also, I would

recommend the same gender between them.

Eddie: OK. Suppose you were to create a peer tutoring program in your classroom. How

would that affect those students that are presently behind?

Participant #13: I think it would help bring them up. At least it would give them a

different…their peers might say something a little better than I say it, or a little more

understandable than I say it. So it never hurts to have a second person say it a different

way.

Eddie: Question #3: In what way or ways does a multi-ability classroom affect your

personal teaching style?

Participant #13: Well you definitely have to open up time. So it shortens what I would

do. And I would want to see some concrete data that it actually was effective.

Eddie: OK. Just suppose that you were getting ready to have a classroom where you

have five students that were at least one grade level behind. How would that change your

daily teaching style and lesson plans in preparation? Five students behind. How would

that change what you're going to do for that week?

Participant #13: I don't know that it would change it so much, because I start by

instruction. I start by going through examples, having them work with me, that kind of

thing. And at the end of my class, I generally open it up for them to start working on their

own.

What would happen was that time they would be working on their own would just

become the peer tutoring time. They would still have leadership from me to begin with,

but instead of working independently then, they would spend the last of that class time together.

Eddie: So already, the way you do the lesson plan, your structure is very peer tutoring friendly in the end?

Participant #13: Absolutely.

Eddie: Question #5: When I use the word "influence", is it colleagues, administration, your educational program, where you went to college, those types of things. What influences your use or nonuse of peer tutoring in your classroom?

Participant #13: Probably the college where I learned and the effect I see on kids.

Eddie: OK. Just out of curiosity, in your college program did they refer to peer tutoring?

Participant #13: Absolutely.

Eddie: Was it a part of your…?

Participant #13: Absolutely.

Eddie: Some of the programs that I've heard about from other teachers, some of those programs didn't even mention it, or it was mentioned in passing in a list of eight other different strategies.

Participant #13: Well, I won't say that they spent more time on that than anything else, but they spent some time on it, yes.

Eddie: OK, good. In your opinion, why do some students respond more positively to a peer than a teacher in regards to learning?

Participant #13: It's actually the opposite. It's a good use of peer pressure. Instead of peer pressuring them to do something wrong or that we don't want them to do, it's a peer pressure to get it right from somebody else that's their age. So it's a good use of peer pressure.

Eddie: OK. Let me ask you question #7. Some teachers would say that being at least a grade level behind would not have an effect on how a student feels in regards to being a part of the classroom. What would you say?

Participant #13: Depends on the subject. If you are teaching history, it's not necessarily, it can be, but it's not necessarily dependent upon what you did or didn't learn last year. Math is. So it depends on the subject. In a math classroom they are much more likely to feel behind than they do in a classroom that's not dependent upon it.

Eddie: OK. Final question. And obviously the word "community" is dealing with the learning environment in your classroom. How does the idea of community in the classroom influence the success of the students in that classroom?

Participant #13: Say it one more time.

Eddie: How does the idea of community in the classroom influence the success of the students in that classroom? In other words, is there a link between the community in the classroom and the success of the students in the classroom?

Participant #13: Absolutely. If a student is struggling and he's alone, he's probably just going to continue to struggle. But if he's with a group and we're all working on something together, he's more likely to try. He's more likely to want to get help. He's more likely to feel comfortable in asking for help, either me or one of his peers. So yeah, it's all about his comfort level, really. If we're comfortable and we're struggling, we're so much more likely to reach out and get help and then, therefore, not be behind anymore. If we're alone and we're struggling, we just feel alone and the problem doesn't get better.

Eddie: So in other words, you think it is important as a teacher to create a good idea of community?

Participant #13: Yes.

Eddie: OK.

Eddie: OK. Just to let you know again, the name of the study is "What are the

perceptions of teachers in regards to using peer tutoring with in a multi-ability

classroom". Obviously, peer tutoring is the pairing up of one student with another student

to help in the classroom. The definition of multi-ability is in a classroom where you have

a student, or maybe more than one student, that is maybe a grade level behind. Or where

there's not specific defining grade levels, where they're greatly behind in the subject matter.

Participant #14: It's not disabilities, though, right?

Eddie: It could be. First question: some administrators say that peer tutoring can't be successful in today's classrooms. What would you say?

Participant #14: I'd probably disagree. I think it can be. I guess it all really depends on the student. I believe when you have a responsible student, someone that does really care, I think it can really work and help a lot.

Eddie: Suppose you could create a peer tutoring program in your classroom that you have this year. How would that affect your students that are behind in your classroom?

Participant #14: I think it would probably catch them up, because what would happen is if I have kids that come into class every day and listen and work hard and pay attention, for those that may be struggling or miss class for a period of time, what they could do is maybe, and this would be inside the classroom during the class, while maybe, possibly, when we're doing an assignment, I can have them get together and have that student tutor them, catch them up, which would be great. It would help me have time to be able to help anyone else in the class.

Eddie: OK. In what way or ways does a multi-ability classroom affect your teaching style?

Participant #14: The way it affects me would be I have to really plan to make sure that I had to find different kind of techniques to get to each student. I mean I guess depending on a disability, if they're behind I have to make sure that I get every part of the information in.

One thing I try to do is teach in a way where if a student learns better by hearing or by seeing, I gotta make sure I can do the best that I can to involve every type of technique in a class to benefit every student.

I don't necessarily teach a class; I teach individual students, in a way.

Eddie: OK. Suppose you had a classroom where at least five students were at least one grade level behind. How would you change your lesson plans for that week?

Participant #14: For that week? Let's see. I would probably definitely continue what I'm doing with the rest of the class, keep the going. I would try to find time, maybe in a tutoring session, during class. What I would do is I would teach the next lesson, which usually is about 15 minutes for the chapter . We may discuss or lecture depending on what we're doing that day. Sometimes if it's a bible lesson, then we're reading the bible out loud and we discuss it for about 10 minutes. That can usually take about 20 at the most.

Then I can also…after that I can probably assign a worksheet for the class that is caught up, and I can have those individual students that are being the tutors, they can go in and get those other kids caught up from the previous lesson. So they've heard the lesson I've taught today, but they also get time to go work on the past lesson. That'd probably be my first instinct to do.

Eddie: OK. Sounds good. Next question: What influences your use or nonuse of peer tutoring in your classroom?

Participant #14: It probably depends on the dynamics and the personalities of the students. Some classes can handle it well and some just can't ; it just depends on your student. Behavior-wise, if they're out of control, then what I'll do, usually, is I probably won't let it happen, depending on the students. It would probably be behavior, maybe.

225

Eddie: Do you have other colleagues that use peer tutoring or have you had any instruction from, say, administration to either use it, not use it? Or is it just something that's come out of your…?

Participant #14: I haven't had any instruction. I don't know that any other teachers have done it. I haven't necessarily been told to do it. It's something probably I would try on my own.

Eddie: Why do some students respond more positively to a peer rather than a teacher in learning?

Participant #14: Well, what I would probably say is a lot of times they say the teacher is their enemy. They think it's us against them. Now, if it's a peer, they think, "Well, they're kinda on our side. I mean they're probably here to help me."

A lot of times, at least when I was a kid, we viewed a teacher as someone who just wants to make you work and doesn't care, I mean sometimes. It always depends on the teacher. But I think a peer, they are less intimidating, probably.

Eddie: OK. Last two. Some teachers would say that being at least a grade level behind would not affect whether a student feels a part of the class or not. What would you say?

Participant #14: It probably depends on the student. I would say that it can, because also, if they have, maybe, a self-esteem issue, they could feel left out. And it could be embarrassing if they have someone tutoring them in class, depending on them. Perhaps after we're done with a lecture, if we have a student come and tutor them and they know other students are watching, they could feel a little bit embarrassed. So it is possible.

Eddie: Final question. When I use the word "community", I'm talking about the learning environment in your classroom. How does the idea of community in your classroom influence the success of the students in that classroom?

Participant #14: I think it's very important. What I like to do when I come into class is try and make it feel like a family. I mean I want everyone to feel like they are safe and welcome in that class. Because I feel like if you are afraid, then the chances of your learning have gone down dramatically.

I feel like if you come into a classroom and know that the teacher is going to keep you safe, know that the students are going to accept you, then your chances of learning increase dramatically, I guess. It's just a much better chance. If they feel welcome, it's safe, they're going to learn.

Eddie: So you're saying that you make sure that you create a good…

Participant #14: I do my best. I set up classroom rules and expectations for them. I let them know in the very beginning of the year, "This is what I expect. These are things I do not want you to do." I don't do very much. I keep them very brief and simple. But I just say, "You don't ever, ever criticize someone in this class. The only thing I want you to do is encourage and uplift and help people." I try to let them know that that's the way it's going to be from the very beginning.

Eddie: And that's creating a very positive community.

Participant #14: Right. That's what I hope for. That's what I try.

Eddie: OK!

Eddie: Let me just tell you again, my whole study is based on this: What are the perceptions of teachers when it comes to peer tutoring, or using a peer to tutor a child that

is behind, in a classroom where you've got kids that are on different age levels. So maybe think back to Tennessee East or something like that.

Question #1: Some administrators say that using peer tutoring can't be successful in today's classrooms. What would you say?

Participant #15: I'd say it depends. It depends on the individuals. I could see cases where it could be successful, and I sure could see where it could not be.

Eddie: OK. So it depends on the individuals. Let's suppose that you were going to create a peer tutoring program in a classroom that you're teaching next year. How do you think that peer tutoring program would affect students that are behind in your classroom?

Participant #15: Well, if the student wanted to make an honest effort, then I feel like they would use any help they could. If they wanted to make an honest effort, I don't think they would resent it or feel bad. If they maybe do not want to make an honest effort, then I could see where it would not work.

Eddie: So it depends on their idea of what they want. OK. In what way or what ways does a multi-ability classroom, or, in other words, students that are on all different levels, how does that affect your teaching style?

Participant #15: I never wanted to know, going in, anything like that. Never wanted to know. My expectations were the same for all of them. And I didn't want to know and never looked at what level they were or anything like that. My expectations were the same for every student in that class.

Eddie: OK. Let's just say that you had a classroom where five students were at least one grade level behind. How would that change your lesson plans?

Participant #15: I always tried to determine pretty quick who was maybe the weakest students there. And I wanted to find ways to make them successful. One case, I had a boy

228

one time who basically, as an 8th grader, could not read. He had been passed along. When we would talk about things he would know answers. When we'd take the test, it's like he couldn't pass a test. I said, "What's going on here?" He said, "Coach, I just can't read. They passed me along." His family moved around a lot.

I ended up…He could draw pretty good. He knew the material because he would say it when you talked to him. But I would have him draw things, so he passed. He knew it.

Eddie: Question #5: What influences your decision whether you are going to use peer tutoring or not?

Participant #15: If I feel like a person needs help I determine that. And if I felt like it would work I wouldn't hesitate to use that, especially if I felt like I had somebody that would be willing to do the tutoring. Then, to me, if both parties were willing to do that, I think it could work.

Eddie: OK. Question #6: Why do some students respond more positively to a peer than a teacher in regards to learning?

Participant #15: To me, people respond to all kinds of leadership. It may be a classmate, it may be a teacher, it may be a youth pastor or somebody. But people respond to different types of leadership. And I think the teacher can figure out that, then they can help the student.

Eddie: So in other words, you are saying that maybe a student just responds better to a peer than he does to a teacher?

Participant #15: Right. They may do that, and they may respond better if you talk them privately. They may respond better…some of them don't feel like you like them until you get on them. You know what I'm saying. So it's different with the individuals.

Eddie: OK. Two last questions. Some teachers would say that being at least a grade level behind would not affect whether a student feels like he's a part of the class. What do you think?

Participant #15: Well, I think part of that is the responsibility of the teacher to make that situation work. If I'm a teacher, I'm never going to belittle anybody. We're not going to make fun of anybody. Even though we've got people with different abilities, we're going to try to find what will work for all of them.

Eddie: And that goes right into my final question. And when I use the word "community", I'm talking, obviously, about the community in the classroom. How does the idea of community in the classroom influence the success of the students in that classroom?

Participant #15: Students want to be a part of something. They don't want to be left out. They want to be a part…Again, I think teachers, part of their responsibility is to make things like that work. Like I said, maybe not academically, but the weakest person in that classroom, I want them to have success. The ones that are great at sports, great in their grades and stuff, they don't need a lot that way because they are going to do that anyway. But the person or two or three in there that need a lot of help, then I always try to make sure they were successful.

Eddie: OK.

Eddie: OK. The name of the study is called: "The perceptions of middle school teachers in regards to peer tutoring being used in a multi-ability classroom". The definition of multi-ability is a classroom where we have students that may be at least a grade level

behind. So when I say multi-ability, that is your classroom, but yet you've got a student or students that, in your opinion, are at least a grade level behind. That's the context of the questions that I'm asking.

Participant #16: And peer tutoring, your definition?

Eddie: The definition is where you set up a relationship where a peer tutors a student that may be behind in certain parts of the curriculum. In other words, if you say, "Mary, I want you to work over here with Sally. Sally is struggling with whatever her subject is." So that's the definition of our peer tutoring.

Question #1: Some administrators say that peer tutoring can't be successful in today's educational classrooms. What would you say?

Participant #16: I think it can be successful if you pick the right peer tutor. A student that's ahead may or may not be a good peer tutor. There has to be a little bit more to them, because in the 6th grade anyway, there's a tendency for a student to tell another student what to write down, rather than going through the process of how do you get to this point? So you would have to be really careful who you select.

Eddie: OK. Question #2: Suppose you could create a peer tutoring program in your classroom. How would that affect your students who are behind?

Participant #16: If I had a good peer tutor, I think it would allow a student who's behind to catch up in a way that doesn't really single them out. Like sometimes they don't want to come to the teacher for help because they're embarrassed, because, "Everybody else knows, but I don't." But you can set things up in a classroom where you can have students working together. And if you have a peer tutoring situation, it wouldn't look any different than, say, two students who are very good at what they are doing working together.

Eddie: OK. In what ways does a multi-ability classroom affect your teaching style?

Participant #16: I do have multi-ability in my classes, because we don't place students by their ability in 6th grade, and I teach math especially. And that being a skill subject, you do have to address all these different levels.

So explanations come in different forms when you have multi-level, and multi-learning styles, even if they're not behind. I do visual teaching and auditory, and then they have always hands-on practice. And sometimes things have to be explained two or three different ways until it's understood by different students.

We work on that at the beginning of the year to understand that they need to ask me until I explain it where they can understand it. And I may have to do it four or five different ways, not just one way over and over. Does that make sense?

Eddie: Yes. Question #4: Suppose you had a classroom where you had five students that were at least one grade level behind in math. How would that change your lesson plans?

Participant #16: My lesson plans?

Eddie: Or your teaching style.

Participant #16: OK, my teaching style. I would have to teach my lessons as they come, OK? But I have work time at the end of every lesson. They would probably be a group that I focused on during that work time rather than waiting for them to come and talk to me.

Eddie: OK. Question #5: What influences your use or nonuse of peer tutoring in your classroom?

Participant #16: Just the need of the students, really, and their behavior. If it becomes a situation where a student who needs help is helped by another student and that becomes

just a time to chit-chat, and socialize, and play around, then it has to stop, and it has to be me and that student. And that's happened.

[laughter]

Eddie: Is peer tutoring something that, as far as influence is concerned, have you had colleagues that suggest peer tutoring? Does your administration suggest? Maybe past educational classes that you have taken? Or has it just come out of necessity in your classroom?

Participant #16: Well, in college that was one of the methods that was taught to us. When I was in school, they would call it peer tutoring now, we called it helping each other. You know, "Would you help so and so with this or that?" But as far as another teacher coming to me and suggesting it, I don't think that's ever happened before.

Eddie: OK. Why do some students respond more positively to a peer than a teacher in regards to learning?

Participant #16: Fear. A lot of students are afraid to come and talk to the teacher. Sometimes they've had teachers in the past that don't want them to ask questions. They don't want them to come for help. Sometimes they are embarrassed because it makes me look dumb if I have to go and talk to the teacher. Where if they are talking to another student, the threat factor is not there.

On the other hand, I think there are some students that would resent you having another student come and help them. So you have to be careful. You have to make some judgment calls.

And I've had some students before, they would become physically ill if they had to work one-on-one with a teacher. They have that much fear, where they would work with a student. So it can be extreme, where, "I cannot help you one-on-one."

Eddie: Final two questions dealing with community in the classroom. Some teachers would say that being at least one grade level behind would not affect a student as far as feeling a part of the classroom. What would you say?

Participant #16: I say it will affect a student if you are a whole year behind. I teach math and I teach science, and I don't see that in science, because it's a subject area. But in math, everything is built on what you already know. And if their skills are a year behind, it is so hard to catch them up. And they come into the room with the idea: "I can't do math".

Eddie: Final question, and this kinda dovetails off of what we just talked about. How does the idea of community in the classroom, and that's the learning environment, influence the success of the students in that classroom?

Participant #16: I think every student, it helps them if they feel like they're a part of the class and they have the freedom to make mistakes. They have the freedom to fail from time to time, that they can learn from those mistakes. I think if they can feel like other people in the classroom support them when they make a mistake, like it's not the end of the world, they feel more freedom to learn.

This year I had a group that was really, really smart in math in here. But they were also very, very cutty to each other any time a mistake was made. And these were 15 kids. And it made it really hard for anybody who was below them to admit to any kind of mistake. This was an unusual group; I don't usually have this.

But it was a problem this year that I could not get a handle on. Yeah, that was a problem. So it was something I'm going to be working on next year. How many comments can be overlooked until they learn, " This is not what we do in here"? Because it wouldn't stop this year.

The other two classes I didn't have that kind of problem with. They did learn from their

mistakes. They felt free to ask questions about their mistakes in front of the class. Or, "I

got this answer. It's wrong. Why is it wrong?" "Well, let's look at it," because other

people learn from their mistakes."

But in this one particular class there was so much putdown among friends, who were very

smart and really did understand the math, about any error that was made that the ones

who had trouble never wanted to admit an error. They lost that freedom. Community

makes a lot of difference in a classroom setting.

Eddie: OK. We're going to ask you eight questions. And again, the name of the study is:

"What are the perceptions of teachers in regards to peer tutoring in a multi-ability

classroom?" Let me define two words for you. Obviously, the idea of peer tutoring

simply means you assigning or asking a peer to work with another student in the

classroom that is behind. The definition of multi-ability classrooms is a classroom that

you walk into that you are teaching and you know that there is at least one student that is

greatly behind the others. It maybe one grade level behind, it may be worse than that. But that's the two definitions that we're going to work from today.

Question #1: Some administrators say that peer tutoring can't be successful in today's classrooms. What would you say?

Participant #17: I would say in most cases it could be. There probably are some cases where there could be a conflict between personalities. Even though one child is really bright in doing his work, he might not be able to relate to other kids in that way. But the majority of the times I think it would work.

Eddie: OK. Suppose that you were going to create a peer tutoring program in your present classroom. How would that affect your students that are presently behind? Would it be positive? Do you think it would really help them?

Participant #17: I think it would depend on who you chose to help that student. I see it possible that if someone who talked down to that other student, embarrassed him, exclaimed how dumb he was, that he couldn't get this or something, you could see how that would be a negative effect.

Eddie: OK. In what way or ways does multi-ability classrooms affect your personal teaching style?

Participant #17: Well, if the teacher were to work with a child…If the teacher stopped every time she's teaching a new concept and went and helped that child, then all the other kids are losing time too. There are some bright kids who could move ahead who wouldn't be able to. So I think if she timed it right, the teacher could continue with the less while this child was helping someone else who was behind.

Eddie: OK. Let's just say that you have a classroom where you have five students that are at least one grade level behind in the subject that you teach. How would that change your lesson plans for that week?

Participant #17: So you are saying in a large group, five of that group…

Eddie: You've got five that are behind.

Participant #17: I would have to have a special session with those five. Let them just struggle along while you're teaching the rest of the class and then give the rest of the class something to do while you worked with these five.

Eddie: OK. Has it been your experience that when you have more than one student, maybe four or five students that are behind, that it affects the potential progress of your higher students?

Participant #17: Yes, I think it does. Now, I teach art, but I also teach art history and art appreciation. I can see…I try not to embarrass those kids, but it does slow the rest of them down. I try to pace it for them.

Eddie: What influences you with your use or nonuse of peer tutoring?

Participant #17: The first thing I thought of was this thing that we had to deal with— bullying. And there is that potential there. Because as soon as you have someone help this child, that points that child out as slow, not smart, not up with the rest of them. You really have to guard against the bullying concept there.

Eddie: OK. When you've used peer tutoring in the past, has that been because other colleagues use it? You were taught that in educational classes? Or is that just something you have used on your own?

Participant #17: It was just something I did. I don't ever remember being taught. But as I'm helping other students, this one over here needs help and I'm busy trying to get

around to everybody, so I ask someone else who knows it if they would help that one.

That usually works out well.

Eddie: OK. Why do some students respond more positively to a peer than a teacher?

Participant #17: I think that's just kids. I think that's just their nature. They hear teachers

all day, every day. And yet, when one of their peers says the same thing that you would

say, it's just different. They do relate to kids better than adults.

Eddie: OK. Some teachers would say that being at least a grade level behind would not

have an effect on whether a student feels a part of the class. What do you think?

Participant #17: Say that again.

Eddie: Some teachers feel like that even though a student is a grade level behind, that has

no effect on him of how if he feels a part of the class or not.

Participant #17: I don't think that's true. I think he would have a hard time relating to the

rest of the class. He would be well aware, I think, that he's behind.

Eddie: OK. Final question, which kind of dovetails off of this one. And when I say the

idea of community, I'm talking about the learning environment in your classroom. How

does the idea of community in the classroom influence the success of your students in

that classroom?

Participant #17: Meaning how they work with each other?

Eddie: The community that you've created, the community in that classroom, how does

that affect whether a student is going to be successful or not?

Participant #17: I think it has a big effect on them. It takes a while to develop that. From

the beginning of the year when the kids come in, you've got to give them a sense of

oneness. It my art classes they're not allowed to ridicule each other's work at all. They

can correct them or say how they could make it better, but they cannot put down anybody

else. So I think that sense of community is very important.

Eddie: OK.

Eddie: The study that we're doing is called: "The perceptions of peer tutoring among

middle school teachers when it comes to multi-ability classrooms". The two definitions,

so that you kind of know where we're at, obviously, the idea of peer tutoring, which

means that you are taking a peer in the class and having them help a student that is

behind. The definition of multi-ability classrooms is a classroom where you know that a

child very probably is maybe one grade level behind. He is that far behind in the classroom.

Question #1: Some administrators say that peer tutoring can't be successful in today's classrooms. What would you say?

Participant #18: I think it can.

Eddie: Let's just say that you were going to create a peer tutoring program in your classroom; that you were going to assign peer tutors to kids that were behind. How do you think that would affect your students that are behind in your class? Would it be beneficial?

Participant #18: I think it would depend on the student. I have several students that some of them are maybe behind because of social abilities. So if I partner them up with a student that can help them, it just depends on that student's "behind". If they are behind socially also, it's going to be difficult. But I think if they are a student that can adapt to another student helping them, I think it can be beneficial. So I think it just depends on each student.

Eddie: OK. Question #3: In what way does a multi-ability classroom, or in other words, having students that are so different in their abilities, how does that affect your teaching style?

Participant #18: I don't think it affects it too much. For the most part this semester, I've taught every kid the exact same. I've had teachers tell me so and so can't do this, so and so can't do this. But I've tried my way and I've found that they can do it.

I've had teachers tell me, "This student is not going to make it. She's going to fail." Blah, blah, blah. And lo and behold, she's passed with a B!

I teach them all the same. Now, there are several students that may be behind a grade that I do take a little bit more time with and I help them a little bit more. But for the most part I teach them all the same.

Eddie: OK. Suppose you had a classroom where you had five students behind. Would that change your teaching style or your lesson plans at all?

Participant #18: Maybe. If I had five students I may have to take more time with them and it may change my teaching style. Maybe.

Eddie: The idea of using students as tutors in your class. What influences your decision to either use kids in your classroom to tutor or not?

Participant #18: I think if a student is getting so far behind that I need to use one, I may have to do it then. Because I try to use my own style and teach them the same, but if I see a student that's not getting it, then I may have to say, "OK, I need some extra help here," because I can't alter my lesson plan and make all the kids suffer because of a couple of children.

Eddie: OK. Why do some students respond more positively to a peer working with them as opposed to a teacher?

Participant #18: I think that they respond positively because I think that children look at teachers up on this pedestal, that they can't relate to us. So that's why I think that working with a peer would help them more, because they're going through the same things together. And I think that's why they relate more positively with them.

Eddie: OK. Two other questions. Some teachers would say that having a student that's at least one grade level behind would not affect the way he feels in a classroom. You have a student that's one grade level behind. Some teachers would say that would have nothing

to do with him feeling a part of the classroom or not, even though he's one grade level behind.

Participant #18: I disagree. I think our kids aren't stupid. They know what smart kids can do. And if they know they're not with the smart kids, they're not going to feel a part of it. I've seen it. They're not there. I've had some students in my class that are probably a grade level behind and they're just hollow in the class and you just look like through them. And I think it's because they just feel that, "I'm in a class full of smart kids and I'm kind of an outcast." So yeah, I think that they would feel that way; that they're not part of it.

Eddie: OK. Final question, and it kinda dovetails off of the last question. When I use the word community I'm talking about the learning environment in your classroom. How does the idea of community or learning environment in your classroom influence the success of the students in that classroom?

Participant #18: I think that I try to make everybody feel a part of and be a part of the learning process and learning environment. And some kids feed off that and some kids don't. But I try to include everybody. Even the students who may be a grade level behind, I don't single them out, because they already know they're a grade level behind. So I try to include everybody.

And I think that for the most part that helps most students, including everybody.

Eddie: So in other words, you creating a very positive community in your classroom is important to you?

Participant #18: I agree. Yes, sir.

Eddie: OK.

242

Eddie: OK. The study is called "The Perceptions of School Teachers in regards to the Use of Peer Tutoring within Multi-Ability Classrooms". Let me tell you the definition of, obviously peer tutoring is the utilization of a peer helping a student that is behind in the classroom. And the Multi-Ability Classrooms, the definition we are using is a classroom where students may be at least one grade level behind.

So, some administrators would say that peer tutoring can't be successful in today's education classroom. What would you say to that?

Participant 19: I wouldn't totally agree. You really have to know, if you are putting them in groups, who those kids are and where they are at. I mean, you're not going to know that right off the bat; it's going to be trial and error first, until you really get to know the kids.

You'll have some kids that are so far advanced that if you really paid attention and you knew, "This one is way up in the grade level and this one is just way behind or more immature," and you pair them with the more mature students, kids know who the better students are.

Like in my class they peer edit essays. The kids know who gets the better grades. They try to go give them their essay for them to peer edit.

Eddie: Wonderful. Suppose you could create a peer tutoring program in your classroom. How do you think that program would affect the students that are behind?

Participant 19: I think it would help them. I mean it would take a lot of work to get that into place. But I think, a lot of times, when they are dealing with a teacher, they just feel overwhelmed or they feel like they can't talk openly about some of the stuff they don't understand, because, "Well, everybody else gets it. Why aren't I getting it?" And if they are just talking with somebody that's on their level they feel more comfortable. So I think it could be very beneficial.

Eddie: OK. In what way or ways do multi-ability classrooms affect your personal teaching style?

Participant 19: As far as me teaching, there are going to be students who get it right off the bat and have no problems. Then you have the students that really, really struggle with something, you know, Student A finds as easy as pie.

So I have to spend a whole lot more time going back over and going back over. And so, here you have Student A who's already done the assignment and they could take a test on it now and ace it, but I have to take class time, which I don't have much of to begin with, and I already have a lot to teach in that small amount of time. So it takes up your time, for the most part.

Eddie: OK. Now suppose you had a classroom where five students were at least one grade level behind. How would that change your daily teaching style and lesson plans?

Participant 19: We probably would not cover near as much information-wise, because you can't move on to the next thing, especially doing writing and reading comprehension, vocabulary—it all builds on everything, or grammar. If they don't get capitalization/punctuation, how are they going to go through and start doing the individual things like commas? I mean everything builds on everything. So it would take a lot more time.

Eddie: So let's say you are looking for a week of lesson plans. Would you have to modify and scale back, or would you simply say, "This is what we're going to cover, and if students do not get it, then I'll figure out how to deal with them later"?

Participant 19: I would have to modify it, because if they don't get it, they don't get it. I mean you just have to make sure they do.

Eddie: OK. Question #5: What influences your use or non-use of peer tutoring in your classroom?

Participant 19: The maturity of the class as a whole, I think. Some classes you might have a greater number of very mature, conscientious students, and then you might another class where you might have one and the rest are not at all. So it really depends on the maturity of the class as a whole to me.

Eddie: Speaking of the influences on you of using peer tutoring, have you had colleagues that have mentioned peer tutoring? Does the administration mention it? Have you been exposed to it in your educational college program?

Participant 19: I mean it's talked about, but I've not really ever seen it used a whole lot. But I know just from being in school myself, I have to have somebody look over it. I have to have somebody help me read through a paper or read through something I've done.

For me, I knew it was beneficial. So I figure if it was beneficial throughout my education, then it's gotta be beneficial for theirs.

Eddie: OK. Excellent. Why do some students respond more positively to a peer than a teacher in regards to learning?

Participant 19: Well, I really think because teachers are also considered an authority figure, and they also deal out punishment and things like that that sometimes they are afraid to talk openly with them on some points. And then, a lot of times, you see their classmate to the right have no problem, and they're like, "I shouldn't have any problem" and they look down on themselves. They would rather hide the fact that they're not good at something and try to play it off like they are than actually admit, "I'm having problems with this. Can you help me?"

Eddie: Two more questions. Some teachers would say that being at least a grade level behind would not have an effect on whether a student feels a part of the class or not. What do you think?

Participant 19: I don't totally agree with that. I think students, if they are struggling, they don't necessarily feel the same as their classmates. I feel like it kinda separates them a little bit. You'll notice that, especially with who they converse with outside of class or who they are friends with, because the ones, usually, that are more, I guess you could say, more advanced in the class, they tend to hang out with the kids that are more advanced in their classes. And the kids that seem to struggle kinda want to stay around those same kids that are like them. So I wouldn't totally agree.

Eddie: Final question, and this kinda dovetails off what we just talked about. When I use the word "community", the idea of community is the learning environment in your classroom. How does the idea of community in the classroom influence the success of the students in that classroom?

Participant 19: Do you mean just how they view it?

Eddie: In other words, the idea of community, of a learning environment, a feeling a part of the community…when you walk into your classroom, the feeling of community, the feeling in your classroom, how does that affect the success of those students?

Participant 19: Oh, if they come into a classroom and think that their opinion is not valued or every time they open their mouth their answers is wrong, it wouldn't matter if it's a kid that's 12 or an adult that's in a graduate level course. If they feel like they are wrong all the time, they are not going to share their opinions. Or if they always get negative feedback, they're not going to feel open to sharing anything that they think.

So it's important for them to know that when they step in this room, every opinion is valued. And if they feel like their opinion is valued, then they will be open to share whatever they think. And the more they share, the more they realize and they talk about it, and then tend to grasp onto the different topics and things like that.

Eddie: So would you say, then, that your desire to create a positive community in the classroom is very important?

Participant 19: Yes. I would definitely think so, because the negative atmosphere, nobody wants to be in there, nobody wants to learn. They have to have some type of interest or feel connected in some way for them to feel like they want to learn what you've got to present them.

Eddie: OK.