“I don’t want to be in a group with them.” How to improve student interactions in upper intermediate classrooms

A Teacher Inquiry

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Context

Andrea Stewart’s Classroom:

Ten girls and eight boys make up my fifth grade classroom. Two of my students come from lower socio-economic households. My class also consists of three lower achieving students and six higher achieving students. The higher achieving students are very involved in our school, and often help with all-school meetings and assist other students with their assignments. The lower achieving students lack motivation, and often do not complete their homework or turn in incomplete work. One student is a nonconformist and often challenges teachers and is frequently verbally inappropriate. About half of my class is made up of students whom are easily influenced by their peers. Approximately a quarter of the class demonstrates leadership skills in our classroom and within the entire fifth grade. A quarter of the class does not engage in large group social situations but has positive personal relationships with one or two other students. One student is not socially involved but has set goals to talk to more of her peers daily and has demonstrated progress in this area. Another student has low-level autism and occasionally disrupts lessons. He requires repeated verbal and non-verbal cues to regulate the volume of his voice and to reduce outbursts. He has been working towards self-regulation with a half-day TSS (Therapeutic Support Staff) who helps him to stay on-task.

Lindsay Baer’s Classroom:

My class is made up of twenty-three fifth grade students. There are thirteen male students and ten female students that range from the ages of ten to eleven. Four students see the guidance counselor once a week. About half of the class is very well behaved and eager to learn and participate in school. About six have behavior problems that hinder the success of the class as a whole. One child has outbursts of tears when he gets frustrated and does not get what he
wants. Another child is a very big distraction to himself, his classmates and his teachers. He has his own behavior modification plan and is slowly working on completing his work, staying focused and showing respect. There is also a boy who is very combative with one of the girls in the class. These few students who have behavior problems set the tone for the rest of the class.

There are several visible groups, especially within the females in the room. Three Russian girls keep to themselves and usually only speak Russian to each other, which pushes the other students away. There is one girl who is very isolated from the rest of the class and is usually working or playing by herself. It is more difficult to see the social groups forming with the boys. There are two boys that stand out as the leaders of the group, and they also have the most behavior problems. Overall, the majority of the boys in my class play together at recess and seem to be forming one solid group.

**Wonderings and Questions**

**Main Wondering**

- What are the effects of incorporating class meetings and increased efforts to build a sense of community among our 5th graders on our students’ attitudes toward others and their behavior in school?

**Sub-Questions**

- What motivates my students to behave in the ways they do?
- How do community-building activities in the classroom affect students’ attitudes toward each other and their teachers?
- How aware are parents of the social interactions and problems going on within the classroom?
- Which activities are most age appropriate and enjoyable for 5th grade students?
- Does the kind of community building activity affect individual students in different ways?
- What kind of impact can I expect to have?
**Data Collection and Analysis**

**Observation and field notes, anecdotal records**

During the length of our inquiry we kept anecdotal records (Appendix E) for each of our students’ behaviors. These records were used to keep track of any behaviors we noticed that were extraordinary or different from the normal behaviors in our students’ daily interactions. Not only did we have notes for each individual student, we also kept records of whole class behaviors. At the end of the day, a notation of (+/-) was added to note if the student had an overall positive or negative day, taking into consideration that this is the perspective and judgment of the classroom teachers.

After reviewing our anecdotal records, we color coded and highlighted those days or cases where most positive and negative behaviors occurred and compared these behaviors with others in the class. Many of the negative behaviors tended to happen on the same day. Since we also kept detailed records of our class meetings and community building implementations, we made connections between the days that we had class meetings and positive behaviors.

**Baseline Survey**

The first survey we administered to our students was an anonymous baseline survey, (Appendix C) asking our students how they felt about the climate in each of our classrooms. Through this survey we collected evidence about our students’ comfort levels during the school day, whether they felt they had people they could trust, how they dealt with their feelings, and any suggestions they had for improvements in our rooms. This survey helped us to plan out the path that our inquiry would take throughout the rest of the semester.

We each compiled a master survey including the responses from all of the students in our classes. On each of these master surveys we color-coded the responses based on if they were
male or female. Then, we merged our data to make overall claims about the responses from our combined results. We found the percentages for each of the questions asked, as long as they were not open response questions. These percentages were then entered into data tables (Appendix C). From these percentages we were able to create pie graphs to have a visual representation of our students’ responses.

**Follow-Up Survey**

In order to evaluate our students’ feelings about the changes that were taking place in our rooms, and specifically their feelings on the time we spent sharing, we had each of our students complete a second survey. This survey includes how students feel about sharing, if students’ feelings of comfort have changed during the school day, and if they would like to continue sharing for the rest of the year. We also asked for suggestions from our students for improving the environment of our classroom.

Through the follow-up survey we were able to analyze students’ feelings about sharing time. We followed the same procedure to analyze our follow-up survey data as the baseline survey, by making two master surveys and merging the data. Pie graphs (Appendix D) helped us to visualize student responses overall. We also made charts (Appendix D) to organize our data, and used the charts to form overall percentages for many questions found on the survey.

**Parent Surveys**

We distributed a parent survey (Appendix F) to each of our students in their Friday Folders to take home over the weekend and return the following Wednesday. We found that the results from this survey were inconclusive due to lack of participation from parents and lack of detailed responses. Many of the responses that we did receive contained valuable information, but it did not sway our data or claims in any way.
Specials Teachers Interviews

In order to evaluate how our students acted outside of our classrooms, we decided to interview our specials teachers because we feel that they have known most of our students for an extended period of time throughout their five years of school. These teachers also have experience with different students in this age group. We emailed each of the teachers a list of questions (Appendix G) and gave them the option to either answer the questions via email or in person. If they preferred to answer via email, we followed up with the questions at a later date to find any necessary information that was not included in the original response.

The specials teachers that we interviewed compared our classes to others in the school. They commented that our classes “talked out of turn” more frequently and engaged in “impulsive behavior” and “lacked self control.” These responses helped us to pinpoint the exact issues that we were facing in our classrooms. We also saw if the behaviors of each student were typical based on the teachers’ experience with the student from previous years. We had a brief follow-up discussion with specials teachers to see if they noticed any changes within our classrooms, which gave us great insight from a perspective outside of our classroom. We used this data to compare with baseline and follow-up surveys. We noted consistencies and differences between the data to strengthen our claims.

Guidance Counselor Interview

Since both of our schools have the same guidance counselor, we decided to interview her to gain insight into how fifth grade students behave and interact. We came up with a list of questions (Appendix H) to ask her to confirm whether or not what we were seeing in our classrooms was typical for fifth graders. We got a lot of great feedback to use in our classrooms, including activities and advice for dealing with any problems we may face in the future. She also
discussed that many students will remain unchanged by our efforts, even though we try hardest with them. She commented that we will have an impact on our students but we cannot expect their personalities to change drastically within the year. This interview helped to clarify our sub wonderings. We also noticed that her insight strengthened claims that we had previously noted.

**Videotaping**

Videotaping was a useful tool in analyzing our students’ actions during class meetings. By taping class meetings, we were able to analyze the meeting ourselves to ensure consistency. In particular, we noted students’ positive and negative interactions and were able to pinpoint triggers for negative reactions. We noted the antecedents for any extraordinary behaviors that may have occurred and were able to use this data to conduct more productive class meetings in the future.

**Explanation of Findings: Our Claims and Evidence**

**Claim A:** Students’ comfort level increases due to the implementation of sharing time, which enables students to connect with peers about their personal experiences outside of the classroom.

**Evidence 1A:** One of our main focuses during our classroom meetings, has been sharing. We felt that it was important to get feedback from our students, so we created a survey to gain a sense of what our students were feeling (Appendix D). From this survey we learned a lot about what our students were thinking and feeling about how we were incorporating sharing and class meetings into our day. We asked them, “Do you enjoy sharing time during classroom meeting?” We received an overwhelming response that 77% of students have enjoyed the implementation of sharing time. Receiving these results from a survey was very beneficial because students could answer anonymously. When asked why they enjoy sharing, most students said that they
like telling their classmates what is going on in their lives that they may not find out from day-to-
day conversation.

It was also important for us to find out if students wanted to continue sharing throughout
the rest of the year. This information would help us to adjust our techniques to help our students
feel comfortable. Fortunately, we found that 82% of students wanted to keep sharing time for
the remainder of the year. This showed us that sharing time is beneficial to our students’ days
even if it is in a way that we did not intend it to be. We also looked at the connections our
students were making with their classmates and if sharing has helped them to become closer.
More than half of the students (56%) felt that sharing time has helped our class become closer.
We will continue to work on creating a stronger bond within our classes and hopefully this
percentage will increase by the end of the school year.

Evidence 2A: We taped one of our collaborative classroom meetings, where both of us were
present in Andrea’s classroom, in order to observe students interactions during this specific time
of the day. These observations led us to believe that our students are feeling more comfortable
and are able to connect with their peers as a result of classroom meetings. We observed students
making eye contact with each other during the greeting and while others are sharing. This was a
major improvement from initial classroom meetings, when students had trouble using eye
contact. We also had many students asking encouraging and engaging questions to their
classmates after they shared. This showed us that students really wanted to know what their
classmates were feeling. We also noticed that students had a very positive attitude while
participating in the classroom meeting. We observed students smiling, enthusiasm and
participating in the greeting.
**Claim B:** By incorporating student suggestions regarding how to improve the classroom environment, students react positively and enthusiastically to the new changes and programs that are implemented.

*Evidence 1B:* Students and teachers benefit from students’ suggestions regarding classroom routines. When students’ suggestions were implemented, satisfaction increased. At the beginning of our inquiry, we planned to only have sharing time a couple of times a week; however, because of student enthusiasm and interest, we decided to include it in our daily classroom routines. In our anecdotal notes (Appendix E), we noted that students asked if we could have class meetings when it was not written on the daily schedule, which showed student interest and eagerness to participate in our daily check-ins. In our Follow-Up Student Survey (Appendix D), we discovered that 82% of students want to keep sharing time for the rest of the year. We have received very positive responses to this implementation and have continued class meetings with sharing at least 3-4 times a week.

*Evidence 2B:* In our baseline student survey (Appendix C), we asked students for their suggestions about how we could improve our classroom community. Two students suggested that students should be given the opportunity to read aloud during the read aloud time. Two others wrote that they would like more choice in the classroom and would like to “do more.” When questioned further about these suggestions, we found that the students thought this would help more students become involved in the classroom and it would be a fun way to give students more leadership. Since then, students have been able to sign up to read aloud and the response has been outstanding. Almost every student has signed up to read and when a new sign up sheet is presented, several students crowd around the sheet to sign up as soon as they can. Not only does this show enthusiasm, but students that have never showed leadership qualities in the past,
were suddenly participating during read aloud time. This increase has shown us that student suggestion and choice increases the enthusiasm and overall satisfaction in the classroom.

**Claim C:** When structured class meetings are introduced into the classroom routine, there are less negative small group and individual interactions between students, and between students and teachers.

**Evidence 1C:** Conflict resolution lessons (Appendix I) during class meetings have helped our students to control their feelings more appropriately, and in turn, negative interactions have decreased. Students now know how to control their feelings in a positive and productive way that is beneficial to their peers. After taking our baseline survey, we found that 76% of our students did not rate “absolutely true,” when asked if they had strategies to control their feelings. Noting that this was a problem area in our classrooms, we decided to introduce discussions where they could express the ways in which they were feeling, and also talk about appropriate strategies to use when feeling upset. Judging by our anecdotal records (Appendix E) since the end of February, 90% of students have had positive behavioral days, which increased greatly from 65% in January. The classroom environment has shifted and we feel that this is one of the effects of class meetings and conflict resolution lessons.

**Evidence 2C:** Since students feel more comfortable in the classroom, interactions have improved between every member of the classroom. According to the Follow-Up student survey (Appendix D), 56% of students felt that sharing time has helped them become closer to others in the class. Though this is just over half our students, we have seen drastic improvements in the amount of interactions with students that are not in their peer group. We have not had to intervene or mediate peer issues within the classroom as frequently as we have had to in the past months. After speaking with specials teachers (Appendix G) in a follow-up discussion, they have noticed
drastic improvements with the more challenging students in our class, and have noted to us that their attitudes and actions have become more positive.

**Claim D:** Although teachers offer additional effort and support to all students in the classroom, there will be students unaffected by the changes made to help them.

**Evidence 1D:** Although the results from our follow-up survey were mainly positive, we did receive a few responses that showed us that some of our students were unaffected by the plans that we put into effect. When asked if students enjoy sharing time, six out of thirty-nine said they did not and three out of thirty-nine said they either “kind of” like sharing or “sometimes” like sharing. These numbers are low in comparison to students who enjoy sharing time, but we do realize that we may have to find alternative strategies in order to reach these students. When asked if students want to continue sharing time for the rest of the year, seven out of thirty-two students do not want to keep sharing time. Since the majority wants to keep sharing time, it will continue throughout the rest of the year, but we realize that those seven students may not respond positively to this time during the day. We asked if students feel that sharing time has helped the class become closer, and unfortunately fourteen out of thirty-nine students said it did not and two students either did not answer or said “in the middle.” Even with all of our efforts to help our classes become more comfortable with each other and act more like a team there still is a large majority who remain unaffected. While realizing that some students remain unaffected, we also recognize that many students are positively impacted. Seeing this happen makes us realize that continuing our efforts is beneficial to the group as a whole. We also asked our students, “How can your teachers help you to have a more positive experience in school?” We received many positive responses, but twelve of the thirty-nine students did not put anything or said something
along the line of “they cannot.” This is discouraging, but we have realized that even when we put all of our energy towards these students they may still not change their ways.

**Evidence 2D:** When we interviewed the guidance counselor, one of our main discussion points was, “What kind of impact can we expect to have?” We wanted to know, from her point of view, dealing with all different kids at all different levels, how she felt about the impact we could have, in general, and with our specific classes. She told us that there are always going to be those kids that are going to be more difficult to reach. They will fight against what you are trying to do to help them. We can try different techniques every day, but some kids are just going to be unresponsive to teachers, in general. She added that one of our rooms was going to be more difficult to change than the other, from the experience that she had with these specific children. These kids are always getting behavior and attitude modification plans, but they resist all of these changes. It is a hard reality to face but we have learned from our experiences and discussions that this is a realization that we have to face as educators.

**Reflection and Future Practice**

We have grown throughout our inquiry as educators and have already made changes in our current teaching practices, and will continue to do so in the future. We would like to implement class meetings from the beginning of the year. By having regular class meetings, students will have the opportunity to share information and feelings about their personal lives and classroom issues each day. Since we have observed the enthusiasm and interest that students have during class meetings, implementing class meetings at the beginning of the year will be beneficial for teachers as well as students. We would like to always have a suggestion box that students can write and drop in questions, comments, or concerns that they have regarding the school day.
The conflict resolution lessons that we focused on during our class meetings were eye opening to gain students’ perspective about their personal characteristics. We would like to continue to check in with students consistently and regularly. It is imperative to have an individual meeting time with each student, not only to show that each student is cared for, but also to ensure well-being for each student. As we reflect on our project we also realize that we need to stay in close communication with parents. From our experiences, we have found that parents want to be more aware of their child’s actions. When parents are able to speak and reflect with students at home, parents and teachers can provide more effective, consistent discipline.

Although we have found ways to redirect their disruptive behaviors in more positive ways, we continue to wonder why our students act the way they do, and what motivates them to act in this way. Also, would the classroom community have changed overall if these changes were implemented in the beginning of the year? We wonder if our community building activities would still have needed to increase in the middle of the year if they were already instituted.

Throughout our inquiry process, our eyes have been opened to new ways of talking with students about misbehavior, learning how to address the large group about a whole class issue, and some of the most effective ways to communicate with parents. Even though classroom environment may tend to become more negative throughout the middle of the year, there are definite steps to improving and enhancing the class, as a team. We will use the strategies, such as class meetings, individual check-ins, and conflict resolution lessons throughout our future teaching. These management strategies and programs have been invaluable for our classrooms this year and have made school days and individual lessons more enjoyable.
Appendices

Appendix A: Annotated Bibliography
Lindsay Baer and Andrea Stewart

   a) This book, written for teachers, offers suggestions for individual problems for “dealing with students, yourself, and others.” In each “teaching challenge” there is a classroom scenario, followed by what is effective, ineffective, and the bottom line. This book is written in a matter-of-fact style that is effectively brief in explaining what an appropriate course of action is, if you are to encounter a similar situation. Some of the situations seem exaggerated and not very realistic.
   b) This book will be useful because it provides us with information about dealing with disrespectful behaviors and handling “I don’t care” attitudes. This will be helpful to read situational examples of how two seasoned teachers would deal with problematic issues in the classroom.

   a) The study described in this article focused on turning destructive behaviors into socially appropriate ones in 4th and 5th grade classrooms using a social problem solving curriculum. The researchers chose 4th and 5th grade students because of their increasing independence and their need for the ability to resist “negative peer influence.” Students at this age are also cognitively ready to develop more in-depth problem solving strategies. The study also focuses on student aggression and how these lessons affected students.
   b) We can use this study because some of the behaviors that we plan to target are destructive and our goal is to channel this energy into something more positive. This article also helps to explain what cognitive stage our students are in, and what is developmentally appropriate for them. This also relates to some of the Conflict Resolution lessons we taught at the beginning of the year.

   a) This book provides another perspective on classroom management and dealing with behavior problems. It looks at a non-traditional approach to behavior management and how this is implemented in different schools around the country. The authors give suggestions to organizing the space and scheduling of the classroom so that the tempo is kept at a steady pace and the students are kept engaged. The book focuses on promoting positive behaviors and reducing undesirable ones through many different strategies.
   b) When we began to look at this book it gave us many good ideas for keeping our data, as well as different strategies to use in our own classrooms. We plan on using some of the charts and graphs we found in our book to monitor and track our students’ behaviors.
This book gives us another look at how we can adjust the environment and behaviors that we are currently seeing in our own rooms.

   a) Since Jo is the guidance counselor for both Park Forest Elementary and Boalsburg Elementary, she will be a great resource to help us throughout our inquiry. She has background working with teachers and students to improve the quality of the classroom environment. She works collaboratively with teachers daily to help individual students appropriately socialize in the classroom. She conducts one-on-one meetings and check-ins with students, which is something we would also like to do throughout our inquiry.
   b) By interviewing Jo, we will be able to find out how similar classroom situations have been resolved in the past, and if she has any feedback as to how we can improve our inquiry plan. We also would like to ask her about her questioning strategies during one-on-one interviews.

   a) Karen has a strong set of expectations and consequences in her classroom, called The Limits. These are known from the first day of school and are revisited each month throughout the year. Each student has a role in her classroom and there is frequent open discussion about any problems that may be occurring in the room. The Helping Hands wall in the classroom provides a different job for every single student in the room. These jobs include; read aloud, reason to smile and news correspondent.
   b) By interviewing Karen, we will be able to learn new strategies to implement in our classroom to enhance the sense of community. She has many great resources and is very open to sharing her ideas with us.

   a) This book is a great resource for any teacher that has a morning meeting in their classroom. It provides the complete outline and explanation of what a morning meeting is and how to set one up in their own classroom. It also has many great examples for greetings and activities to use during a morning meeting.
   b) This book is going to be a lot of help for us during our inquiry. We will be able to use many of the examples to work with our own students in our own classrooms. We are specifically interested in the Circle of Power and Respect that this book explains to use with older students.

   a) This book provides an excellent resource to a teacher who is beginning and/or modifying their classroom management technique. It starts off discussing why children misbehave and the different types of discipline problems. This will help a teacher in guiding him/her to the right path for his or her own classroom. There are many different suggestions and
techniques for dealing with any misbehavior or discipline problem including; how to set up the environment, non-verbal cues and interventions.

b) We have found a great guide for our inquiry in this book. Since we read this book last semester we immediately knew that we would be able to find many great ideas to use in our own classrooms. Many of the techniques we previously read about we have already begun to implement but now that we have defined our inquiry we are able to read further into the meaning and suggestions this book has placed in front of us.

   a) The described in this article focuses on how peers perceive each other, and what factors contribute to this perception. I liked how they acknowledged how many different skills it takes to have positive social relationships. For example, the article described how students need to be able to coordinate goals, process social information, and respond appropriately to conflicts. The article also points out the disconnect between self-perception and peer perception and how that may affect a child’s behavior in a negative way.
   b) Since this study focuses on the upper intermediate grade level, we are able to directly relate the information to situations in our own classroom. Using this article, we may also want to focus on how peer perception may be a driving force behind student misconduct. This relates directly to our sub-wonderings, especially “why do students feel the need to misbehave?”

   a) This study looks at a group of fifth grade students, and whether their perspective of the social environment in their classroom affects their engagement in the classroom, and if this engagement is promoted by personal motivation. Teacher support, promotion of interaction, and student support were a few of the factors that affected the students’ engagement in the classroom. It depends on the situation if the students’ motivational beliefs played a role.
   b) This study is a great comparison to use with both of our classroom. We will be able to investigate many of the wonderings that these authors had with our own students. This article also brings up many ideas that we may not have thought of prior to reading it, but these ideas are definitely related to what we are wondering in our own inquiry. We can use many of these investigations and techniques in our own data analysis.

   a) *Teaching Tolerance* is a website for teachers, administrators, teens, kids, parents, and anyone who works with youth frequently. For teachers, the site provides classroom activities focusing on individuality and diversity; web articles; free classroom materials including posters, videos, and lesson kits; and an online monthly newsletter. The site’s goal is to create communities that value diversity. The site also offers downloadable
public service announcements relating to issues of diversity and differences which can be useful in any classroom.

b) During our inquiry, we would like to look for strategies and activities on the site to increase the students’ tolerance for others and to help them think “outside of themselves.” We may also create web-based activities for our students using the “For Kids” section of the website, where students will be able to read about social situations where people have taken a stand.
Appendix B: Inquiry Brief

Context

Andrea Stewart’s Classroom:

Ten girls and eight boys make up our fifth grade classroom. Two of our students come from lower socio-economic situations. Our class also consists of three lower achieving students and six higher achieving students. The higher achieving students are very involved in our school, helping with all-school meetings and assisting other students with their assignments. The lower achieving students lack motivation, and often do not complete their homework or turn in incomplete work. One student is a nonconformist, often challenging teachers and is frequently verbally inappropriate. About half of our class is made up of students whom are easily influenced by their peers. Approximately a quarter of the class demonstrates leadership skills in our classroom and within the entire fifth grade. A quarter of the class does not engage in large group social situations but has positive personal relationships with one or two other students. One student is not socially involved but has set goals to talk to more of her peers daily and has demonstrated progress in this area. Another student has low-level autism and occasionally disrupts the lesson and requires repeated verbal and non-verbal cues to regulate the volume of his voice and to reduce outbursts. He has been working towards self-regulation with a half-day TSS that helps him to stay on-task, his attitude towards writing has improved, but he currently has been more frequently arguing with teachers.

Lindsay Baer’s Classroom:

My class is made up of twenty-three fifth grade students. There are thirteen male students and ten female students making up the group of ten and eleven year-olds. In my classroom there are many different behavior patterns. Four students see the guidance counselor once a week. About half of the class is very well behaved and eager to learn and participate in school. A group of students have behavior problems that hinder the success of the class as a whole. One child has outbursts of tears when he gets frustrated and doesn’t get what he wants. Another child is a very big distraction for himself, his classmates and his teachers. He has his own behavior modification plan and is slowly working on completing his work, focus and respect. There is also a boy who is very combative with one of the girls in the class. These two students are constantly getting into fights and when this happens it is a big distraction for the rest of the students. These few students who have behavior problems set the tone for the rest of the
Since these students are ten and eleven years old there a lot of different social relationships forming. There are different groups, especially with the girls that are easy for me to see. Three Russian girls keep to themselves and usually only speak Russian to each other. This pushes the other students away. There are two girls in the class who are the leaders of the group and also are constantly trying to please the teachers. Four other girls have formed their own group and are occasionally with the two girls but they usually stay separate. There is one girl who is very separate from the rest of the class and is usually working or playing by herself. With the boys it is more difficult to see the social groups forming. There are two boys that stick out as the leaders of the group, and these are the ones who also have the most behavior problems. One boy moved from Scotland to our school this year. Surprisingly, he has not had trouble fitting in and making friends. Another boy moved from another school in the district, he is quiet but one of the other boys in the class has really taken him in and they have become good friends. The majority of the boys in my class play together at recess and seem to be forming one solid group.

**Rationale**

Since Lindsay and I have noticed that the majority of our daily reflections have revolved around the behavioral issues in our classroom, we decided that we would like to study the ways we can improve our classroom communities at this point in the year. We expect that challenges we may face include, student involvement in activities, student attitudes, and student motivation. We would like to use community-building activities that are engaging and helpful for our students long term. By interviewing specials teachers at the beginning and end of our inquiry, we hope to gauge the progress of our class’ dynamic. The goal of our inquiry is to help students express their feelings in more appropriate and positive ways.

As we prepare them to enter middle school, we try to foster individuality and positive strategies to interact with others, teachers and classmates, throughout our inquiry we would like to build their repertoire of strategies and skills. Many of our students are quick to follow their peers when they are tempted by negative behavior, which directly affects the entire classroom dynamic. Our hope is to improve day-to-day student attitudes and negative interactions, through community building exercises.
Main Wondering
- What are the effects of incorporating increased efforts to build a sense of community among our 5th graders on our students’ attitudes toward others and their behavior in school?

Sub-Questions
- What motivates my students to behave in the ways they do?

- How do community-building activities in the classroom affect student’s attitudes toward each other and their teachers?

- How aware are parents of the social interactions and problems going on within the classroom?

- Which activities are most age appropriate and enjoyable for 5th grade students?

- Does the kind of community building activity affect individual students in different ways?

- What kind of impact can I expect to have?

Timeline
Ongoing
- Anecdotal records of subgroup (half the class)

February
- Baseline survey: student perception of the classroom environment, as it exists now (Week of February 11-15)
- Implement classroom building activities (February 18th)
- Survey specials teachers for observations about our students (Sometime between 18-29)

March
- Continue to classroom building activities
-Parent survey to see how informed they are of classroom activities, social situations, and daily events (March 3-7)

-Observations of community building activities using a checklist for certain behaviors and comments (March 17-28)

-Individual student surveys or subgroup interviews with students (March 24-28)

-Survey specials teachers to gauge change (March 24-28)

_April_

-Continue community-building activities

-Wrap-up data collection and analysis (April 1-4)

-Draft final paper (April 1-11)

-Prepare for presentation (April 14-26)

_Data Collection_

-Observation and field notes, anecdotal records

-Reflective journals and lesson reflections

-Surveys (parents, students)

-Interviews (students-small group and individual, specials teachers)

-Behavior checklist (ABC analysis)
Appendix C:

Student Baseline Survey
Anonymous Classroom Climate Survey

1. On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being to a very high degree) circle how comfortable you feel as a member of our classroom (e.g., expressing your opinions, working in groups, feeling accepted and respected as a member of our class as a team, etc)

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10

Please use the space below to clarify why you rated this as you did.

2. Provide one (or more) reason(s) you look forward to coming to school each day.

3. Have you had any experiences that have caused you to feel uncomfortable in school? In our classroom in particular?
   Discomfort in school? Yes  No
   Discomfort in our classroom? Yes  No

If you answered “yes” to either of these questions please describe what happened in as much detail as possible without using names. Was this a temporary issue or has your discomfort been ongoing?

4. On a scale of 1 to 5, (5 meaning very often)
   a. how often do you talk to your parent(s) about lesson, books, projects, and other schoolwork?

      1  2  3  4  5

   b. How often do you talk to your parent(s) about the peer relationships you have in school (and in this classroom)?

      1  2  3  4  5
Please use the space below to clarify your answers to 4a & 4b:

5. For the following series of questions, circle how true or false you find the statement to be for you. [Feel free to elaborate on your answers in the available space below each statement]:

   a. I have friends in my classroom that I can trust.
   Absolutely False Somewhat False Somewhat True Absolutely True

   b. I have friends at school that I can trust.
   Absolutely False Somewhat False Somewhat True Absolutely True

   c. I feel comfortable taking risks in class.
   Absolutely False Somewhat False Somewhat True Absolutely True

   d. When I feel upset, I have strategies to help me control my feelings.
   Absolutely False Somewhat False Somewhat True Absolutely True

We plan to consider your ideas and we appreciate your honest feedback.

What suggestions do you have that would help to make our classroom even more of an inviting place for you to work each day?

What suggestions do you have that would help to make our class feel even more like a team (and make you feel proud to be a part of it)?
Anonymous Classroom Climate Survey

1. On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being to a very high degree) circle how comfortable you feel as a member of our classroom (e.g., expressing your opinions, working in groups, feeling accepted and respected as a member of our class as a team, etc)

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

   Please use the space below to clarify why you rated this as you did.

   I am still a little shy and some students bother me, but many students are friendly towards me

2. Provide one (or more) reason(s) you look forward to coming to school each day.

   1. I get to see my friends
   2. There is always something new

3. Have you had any experiences that have caused you to feel uncomfortable in school? In our classroom in particular?

   Discomfort in school? Yes ☐ No ☐
   Discomfort in our classroom? Yes ☐ No ☐

   If you answered “yes” to either of these questions please describe what happened in as much detail as possible without using names. Was this a temporary issue or has your discomfort been ongoing?

   Two boys in the classroom bother me a lot and they are still doing it.

4. On a scale of 1 to 5, (5 meaning very often)
   a. How often do you talk to your parent(s) about lessons, books, projects, and other schoolwork?

      1 2 3 4 5

   b. How often do you talk to your parent(s) about the peer relationships you have in school (and in this classroom)?

      1 2 3 4 5

   Please use the space below to clarify your answers to 4a & 4b:

   4a: Sometimes I forget about what happened and just go on with the day.
   4b: I have a lot of good memories with my friends that I like to talk about.
5. For the following series of questions, circle how true or false you find the statement to be for you. [Feel free to elaborate on your answers in the available space below each statement]:

   a. I have friends in my classroom that I can trust.

      Absolutely False  Somewhat False  Somewhat True  Absolutely True
      I have told secrets to my friends and none of them told anyone about it.

   b. I have friends at school that I can trust.

      Absolutely False  Somewhat False  Somewhat True  Absolutely True
      I don’t absolutely trust friends outside of the classroom because I rarely see them.

   c. I feel comfortable taking risks in class.

      Absolutely False  Somewhat False  Somewhat True  Absolutely True
      I enjoy trying new things.

   d. When I feel upset, I have strategies to help me control my feelings.

      Absolutely False  Somewhat False  Somewhat True  Absolutely True
      I never get upset in school.

We plan to consider your ideas and we appreciate your honest feedback.

What suggestions do you have that would help to make our classroom even more of an inviting place for you to work each day?

   More creative activities than there are already.

What suggestions do you have that would help to make our class feel even more like a team (and make you feel proud to be a part of it)?

   Larger scale group activities.
Each student responded to the following prompts:

**I feel comfortable taking risks in class.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absolutely False</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat False</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat True</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absolutely True</td>
<td>18%</td>
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</table>

**When I feel upset, I have strategies to help me control my feelings.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absolutely False</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat False</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat True</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absolutely True</td>
<td>24%</td>
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</table>
Appendix D:  
Student Follow-Up Survey

Name (optional): ______________________

Please respond to the following as completely and thoroughly as possible:

1. Do you enjoy time for sharing after math class?
   
   YES   NO

   Why?

2. In the past few months, have you felt more comfortable, the same amount of comfort, or less comfortable in our classroom? Please explain why in a few sentences.

   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________

3. Do you think sharing has helped you to become closer to other students in the class?

4. Would you like to keep having time to share in the remaining months of school?
   
   YES   NO

5. How can your teachers help you to have a more positive experience in school?

   ________________________________________________________________
Circle One: Male  Female

Please respond to the following as completely and thoroughly as possible:

1. Do you enjoy time for sharing during morning meeting?

   YES  NO

   Why? Because if I know what people have been doing, then I can ask them questions about what they did.

2. In the past few months, have you felt more comfortable, the same amount of comfort, or less comfortable in our classroom? Please explain why in a few sentences.

   I fell more comfortable now because I have made new friends and learned about things that I had trouble with. I have made at least 10 new friends or came closer with. I do fell a lot more comfortable than I did a few months ago.

3. Do you think sharing has helped you to become closer to other students in the class? Yes, because I have learned about what the classmates like to do. Maybe I like to do the same thing. Then we become good friends.

4. Would you like to keep having time to share in the remaining months of school?

   YES  NO

5. How can your teachers help you to have a more positive experience in school?

   Well, I would like to have different seating arrangements every month.
Enjoy Sharing Time

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Enjoy Sharing Time</th>
<th># Students</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOMETIMES/KIND OF</td>
<td>3</td>
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</table>

77% of students surveyed enjoy sharing time

Keep Sharing Time

<table>
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<th># Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>7</td>
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</table>

82% of students surveyed want to keep sharing time for the rest of the year

Helped to Become Closer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Helped to Become Closer</th>
<th># Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Answer/In the middle</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

56% of students surveyed feel that sharing time has helped our class become closer.
Appendix E: Anecdotal Records (Brief Excerpt from one student’s records)

+ 2.19.08 He agreed to work hard to respect teachers and respond with a good attitude to questions in large group discussions
- 2.20.08 Disrespectful- tone of voice, calling out, over reaction to another student, wrote an appropriate apology note
- 2.23.08 Did not complete reading and vocabulary homework- 5 words from chapter 3 and 4
+ 2.26.08 Very positive day, responded appropriately to all questions and during discussions
+ 2.28.08 Great day- received positive reinforcement token for helping other classmates with experiment after he was finished, able to set up next experiment with teachers
Appendix F: Parent Survey

Dear Parents and Guardians,

As an intern in the Penn State Professional Development School (PDS), I am learning to collect information about students to help develop lessons and activities to benefit their growth and learning. My current inquiry relates to social interaction and positive learning communities. I would value your input and would appreciate it if you could take a few minutes to fill out this brief survey regarding your child’s discussions with you about their interactions within the classroom and with friends. Please return by Wednesday, April 2nd. Thank you for your help. If you have any questions, please contact me at als5021@psu.edu.

Sincerely,
Andrea Stewart
Room 210 Student Teacher Intern

Please circle the answer that fits you the best. You may include any additional information on the reverse side or on a separate piece of paper about your child’s experiences in the classroom. The information you provide will help me to improve the classroom environment in the future and will be kept confidential. Thank you for your time.

Student’s Name________________________ (optional)

Male                          Female

1. How frequently has your child discussed positive experiences that they have had in the classroom involving friends or social situations?

   Daily                         Weekly                 Bi-weekly       Monthly              Never

2. How frequently has your child told you about any discomforts they have had with other people in the classroom?

   Daily                         Weekly                 Bi-weekly       Monthly              Never

3. If your child has felt discomfort, is this a temporary issue or has his/her discomfort been ongoing?

3a. If your child has felt discomfort, what is the discomfort typically related to (e.g. social issues, behavior issues, or academic issues)?
4. Does your child share stories about interacting with other students in our class?

Frequently   Occasionally   Seldom   Never

If yes, are the stories mostly: positive or negative? (Circle One) [You may elaborate in a few words below if you wish.]

5. When your child is upset, do you feel he/she has strategies to help control his/her feelings?

Absolutely True   Somewhat True   Somewhat False   Absolutely False

What are some of these strategies?

* What suggestions do you have that would help to make our class feel even more like a team (and make your child feel proud to be a part of it)?
Dear Parents and Guardians,

As an intern in the Penn State Professional Development School (PDS), I am learning to collect information about students to help develop lessons and activities to benefit their growth and learning. My current inquiry relates to social interaction and positive learning communities. I would value your input and would appreciate it if you could take a few minutes to fill out this brief survey regarding your child’s discussions with you about their interactions within the classroom and with friends. Please return by Wednesday, April 2nd. Thank you for your help. If you have any questions, please contact me at als5021@psu.edu.

Sincerely,
Andrea Stewart
Room 210 Student Teacher Intern

Please circle the answer that fits you the best. You may include any additional information on the reverse side or on a separate piece of paper about your child’s experiences in the classroom. The information you provide will help me to improve the classroom environment in the future and will be kept confidential. Thank you for your time.

Student’s Name ____________________________ (optional)

Male  Female

1. How frequently has your child discussed positive experiences that they have had in the classroom involving friends or social situations?

   Daily  Weekly  Bi-weekly  Monthly  Never

2. How frequently has your child told you about any discomforts they have had with other people in the classroom?

   Daily  Weekly  Bi-weekly  Monthly  Never

3. If your child has felt discomfort, is this a temporary issue or has his/her discomfort been ongoing?

   Always temporary – usually something funny
   but embarrassing.

3a. If your child has felt discomfort, what is the discomfort typically related to (e.g. social issues, behavior issues, or academic issues)?

   Usually social situations

Please turn over to complete questions on reverse side.
4. Does your child share stories about interacting with other students in our class?

Frequently  Occasionally  Seldom  Never

If yes, are the stories mostly: positive or negative? (Circle One) [You may elaborate in a few words below if you wish.]  positive

5. When your child is upset, do you feel he/she has strategies to help control his/her feelings?

Absolutely True  Somewhat True  Somewhat False  Absolutely False

What are some of these strategies?

Talking with friends, parents, the teachers.

* What suggestions do you have that would help to make our class feel even more like a team (and make your child feel proud to be a part of it)?

More "team" activities of at least 4 people; 2 girls + 2 boys in each group if possible and mix up the teams with every new project.
Appendix G: Interview Questions for Specials Teachers

1. How long have you worked at PFE?

2. Are there any specific behavioral problems that you frequently have/had with our fifth grade class?

3. Does this seem to be a typical issue within other classrooms at this grade level?

4. Do you have any suggestions for our particular class to improve behaviorally?

5. Do you have any students that you have dealt with in particular? Are there any management strategies that you have found to work with them?

6. Do students work in groups in your class? Are these groups assigned or chosen?

7. Do students choose where they sit in your class?

Appendix H: Interview with Guidance Counselor (Audio Recording)

• What are some strategies that we can teach to help them next year in middle school?
• Do you find that parents are aware of students’ social interactions at school? At home? (IM, chatting, club penguin)
• What are some ways to teach students self-control of emotions?
• How much of an impact can I expect to have?
• What can we do immediately about subtle teasing during a lesson without disrupting the flow of a lesson when we are teaching?
• How should we react, as teachers, to students who are extremely disruptive or overly emotional? (i.e. stomping out of the classroom, loud yelling in the middle of a lesson)
• What behaviors are typical of upper intermediate students?
• What games would you suggest for 5th grade students? Or activities? Things we can incorporate into our lessons?
Appendix I: Conflict Resolution Lesson Outline:

Patience
I. Where do you find that you feel the most impatient
   a. Why do you think this is?
   b. What strategies do you use to control your patience?
   c. What happens when you are not patient?
II. What strategies do you use to control patience?
   a. What goals can you implement into your own lives?
   b. What areas of your life can you realistically make goals to improve your patience?