“Classroom Community Built on Mutual Respect and Caring”

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Teaching Context

This year I have had the pleasure of interning at Park Forest Elementary School in the PDS program. Since August, I have been interning in a self-contained third grade classroom, which is comprised of twenty-three students, eleven boys and twelve girls. This class is composed of one African American girl, two Indian girls, and twenty Caucasian students.

Students were assessed on a scale of eager to please, compliant, and defiant/oppositional for their behavior patterns, by their previous years teacher. Six students were classified as eager to please, sixteen compliant, and two defiant. It was not shared how these teachers came to their classification and I do not know if they established a scale. Over the course of the year, I have established my own scale to assess these characteristics. Eager to please students are those that go out of their way to please and seek the approval of teachers and peers. Compliant students follow rules and generally do not cause classroom distractions. Defiant students are those that intentionally break rules or seek attention through miss-behavior. Through my observations, I have found similar results. It is important to note that this behavior assessment is very fluid and these are inferences based on my daily observations.

Based on my observations, I have found an interesting social-relationship dynamic in this classroom. Fourteen students have very dominant personalities. They are self-assured and enjoy taking control of situations; they seem to enjoy “running the show”. Students with these dominate personalities clash at times because they always want things no other way except theirs. This creates power struggles between students leading to arguments. The opposite personality type also exists in large numbers within
my classroom. Several students are very sensitive and are easily manipulated. When these personality types mix an interesting dynamic is created and requires a great deal of teacher monitoring. For example, these more self-assured students can dominate classroom discussion if allowed. It is important to make sure the quiet soft-spoken students are also an integral and respected part of the classroom activities. One major goal in my approach to community building is giving each student an equal voice. I want to create an environment where every child believes they can express their opinion or view without teasing or disrespect from their classmates.

Most students seem to think about the good of the class and try to work as a member of a team. However, a high number of students have little sense of what teamwork really is or they do not demonstrate a desire to work as a team member. They do what is good for them at the time and do not worry about anyone else. They are impulsive and make rash decisions.

Lately, I have observed several cases of verbal bullying among students in my classroom. The bullying incidents may be unintentional; I do not believe the students always stop to think about the other person before acting. Students seem to still be in an egocentric state of mind. I have also witnessed very blatant hurtful behavior such as name calling and teasing. In my inquiry, I will be observing students to document the amount or severity of bullying between students. I will then compare that to the severity or number of occurrences, at the end of the semester, to evaluate if community building helped students find a more productive outlet of expression.

Many students have developed close friendships with other students in the class, and there are several “groups” of students that gravitate toward each other. With a few
exceptions the girls usually tend to remain with the girls, and the boys generally remain
with the boys. Occasionally, girls and boys will choose to work with each other. I have
observed that there are several socially outcasted students. They do not seem to fit into
any of the groups. Some of these socially outcasted students tend to be shy and keep to
themselves, while the others tend to be oppositional. In my inquiry, I am seeking to find
out if community building can change some of the social dynamics and help oppositional
students relate in a more appropriate manner to the class and teacher.

Through my inquiry, I wanted to learn more about community building in the
classroom. I wondered how community building would fit into an already packed daily
routine. I was also curious about student perception of community building. I wanted to
find out if community building could be used to lower bullying and teasing among
students. Lastly, I wondered if community building could help promote positive social
interactions between students as well as build intrinsic motivation. Through my
observations and daily interactions with my students I know that they can make good
decisions. I also feel reasonably sure that they do know right from wrong. However, I
question the reasoning behind their decisions. I wondered if they make decisions based
on internal motivation and internal values or if they are making decisions based on
external motivators.

Wonderings and Questions

My main wondering is “What affect can community building have on the internal
structure of peer groups in a classroom, will implementation of community building
decrease bullying, promote teamwork, and increase respect among students in the
classroom”, as I began thinking about this main wondering, many other questions arose
related to community building, the following questions are my sub-questions or wonderings.

- How can I determine who the non-team players are and can I implement some course of action that will manifest change in the larger classroom setting?
- Will community-building activities create a more cooperative social environment? Will it change the classroom social dynamics?
- How do educators help students understand the importance of making good choices vs. inappropriate choices? How do educators promote internal regulation of the decision-making process and decrease the amount of students’ dependence on rewards or teacher monitoring?
- Can community building decrease bullying and teasing?
- How can community building be built into the daily routine of the classroom?
- How will community building affect my students: How will they feel about the activities, will their feelings change? Will they view the activities as important or useless?

Classroom community extends beyond academics and into the social lives of children. I wonder how to foster a cooperative and collaborative learning environment.

One goal of education is to help students become contributing members of society, which requires effective collaborative skills. I hope to develop through this inquiry strategies for encouraging positive social interactions within the classroom setting.

Data Collection and Analysis Process

Data Collection

Before I began implementing community-building activities, I needed to establish a baseline or starting point from which I could then draw comparisons. After analysis of any changes or lack of changes in the data, from the beginning to the end, of the inquiry, comparisons will be made, and claims will be formulated. My data collection consisted of three main methods- student and parent surveys, observations, and open-ended student journals.
During my base line data collection and throughout the implementation of community building I focused my observations on several specific items. I observed students to see who associates with whom during recess, lunch, partner work, and who sits by whom on the carpet. I wanted to evaluate where the cliques were forming, student popularity, student neglect and or rejection, as well as who were the controversial students. Using the previous observations, I was able to compare and contrast classroom dynamics and evaluate the affect of community building on the internal structure of peer groups.

Secondly, I evaluated student interaction. When observing interactions, I was looking for the difference between the amounts of time students spent arguing and the amount of time they were able to work cooperatively. If students were observed arguing, I wanted to know how they handled the situation, how they settled the disagreement, who was doing the arguing, and if someone would try to solve the problem or act as a peacemaker. In addition, I also observed for the difference between acts of kindness and acts of bullying among the students in my classroom. I observed for students saying nice or mean things to each other. I documented the amount of times students did something nice or helpful toward each other without being asked by my mentor or myself. I also documented the amount of bullying (name calling, physical violence, and intimidation). Lastly, I documented who was engaging in these behaviors positive or negative. I also conducted observations during the implementation of community building activities. During the activities, I evaluated student ability work collaboratively together.

Along with observations, I also conducted parent and student surveys as part of my data collection. The surveys focused on student perceptions of the classroom atmosphere (do they feel safe, valued, and respected), as well as, how they felt about their
peers, my mentor, and myself. I surveyed the parents to evaluate what students talked about at home. As part of the student surveys, I conducted a sociogram, which was used to provide additional information regarding student interaction with peers. This is a valuable tool for determining how his or her classmates view a student. The parent survey and sociogram survey can be viewed in Appendix C. Lastly, I asked the students a series of open-ended questions. These questions were repeated throughout the inquiry process to compare and contrast student responses before and after the implementation of the community building activities.

Analyzing the Data

When starting the analysis process I began by evaluating my observations. First I took the notes that focused on social cliques in the classroom and analyzed them for trends and reoccurring patterns. I found that among the girls there was a clique of six girls. These girls repeatedly sat next to each other on the carpet, worked together on partner and group work, chose to sit next to each other when given the opportunity to make their own sets, and played together consistently at recess. I found that among the boys there was two groups or cliques both composed of four boys. The two groups differed in personality characteristics. One group generally follows classroom rules, building rules, and engages in on task behaviors. The other group of boys generally need to be reminded of the proper behaviors, reminded of what they should be doing, break classroom and school rules, as well as seek out confrontational behaviors. In my classroom, five girls and two boys did not fit into the cliques. They usually were on the outskirts of classroom activities. They also had trouble-finding partners to work with during group work activities. Two of these girls do not play with anyone at recess; they
wander and play by themselves. Lastly, one boy and one girl in my classroom move fluidly among their classmates. They do not socialize solely with one particular set of peers; rather, they are continually changing playmates and partners. (Appendix B)

Next, I analyzed the classroom sociogram to further my understanding of the social dynamics of my classroom. I analyzed the number of times students were mentioned in a positive or negative light. I first combined questions three, four, six, and seven on the student survey. I tallied the amount of times each student was mentioned (disliked compared to liked), I then took this data and created bar graphs. I was able to use the graphs to compare all students in one glance. They also allowed me to look at each individual student and observe if that student was overwhelmingly liked or disliked or if they fall some where in the middle. This process was completed twice during the implementation once in the beginning and once at the end of the inquiry.

During the implementation of the community building activities I continued my observations in the same way as before the implementation. During and after the community activities I asked students to complete the exact survey that was given before the implementation. I then analyzed the data in the same way as I did before the implementation of the community activities this allowed me to compare the affects of the community building on the social dynamics of the classroom.

Next, I focused on student responses to this open-ended survey question, “ How do you feel about your classroom and your classmates?” Students were not given any further directions. This survey was given on February 20, 2008. Eighteen students were present. Out of the eighteen students surveyed twelve felt negatively about the classroom that is 66% of the students surveyed. Four students felt positively about the classroom
environment, 22% of students surveyed. Two felt neutral they felt happy in the room but recognized that there were problems, 11% of students surveyed. When assessing student comments I devised a scale to judge if the comment was negative, positive, or neutral. This is an example of a negative comment, “usually no one wants to play with me or talk to me. I don’t understand I am nice.” Here is an example of a positive comment, “Everyone in this classroom is great and I always feel great when I come to the classroom.” Lastly, this is an example of a neutral comment (neutral comments were not overly negative or positive), “Sometimes people in this classroom treat me with respect but sometimes they say shut-up or make fun of me”. (More student responses are located in the Appendix B.)

After addressing all student surveys, questions, and observations, I shifted my focus to the parent surveys. To analyze the parent surveys I tallied the responses to each question. The data and break down of responses can be found in Appendix B. After the implementation of the community building activities I sent home the same parent survey, tallied the data in the same way, then used the data to compare the before and after. I found the results to be very similar in the beginning and the end of the inquiry.

Lastly, during my analysis of data I compared the amount of positive and negative student behaviors. Before the implementation of the community building activities, I found that my class had a slightly higher average of positive behaviors than negative ones. This led me to rethink my sub-wonderings. I started wondering how could I reinforce and increase these positive behaviors. I then assessed the frequency of arguments that occur in the classroom and witnessed at least four arguments per day. Students (8 out of 10 times) found my mentor or I to solve their problems. Through my
observations of these arguments, I observed that the same three students were usually involved in all of the disagreements.

*Explanation of Findings (Claims and Evidence)*

**Claim One**

Students are not intrinsically geared to work in cooperative learning situations. They must be trained in the process and taught the necessary skills for succeeding in collaborative learning environments.

**Evidence**

When planning my community activities I planned an introduction, the activity, and time for debriefing the activity. I assumed that the students would be able to work together in cooperative groups, however, my assumption was faulty. What I found in the first several community activities was that students wanted to fall back into their comfort zone of independent work with little to no regard for their group members or group goals.

In a game called “Knots” we began with a circle of eight to ten children who “knot themselves” by grasping right and left hands with other hands. The children try to then figure out how to unknot themselves without letting go of each other’s hands. Before the activity began we talked about some strategies that would help the students be successful. One tip was that only one person should be talking at a time. The students started the activity and chaos broke out, even after we had discussed the proper way to go about this activity. The students were arguing, everyone was talking at once, and they were even being rough with each other. Students wanted to carry out their ideas with little regard for the well being of the group. The activity did nothing in the way of building community. This same pattern occurred with several of the activities.
After reflecting upon the activities and after further reading, I realized that students need instruction on how to work cooperatively. They also need many opportunities to practice collaborative work and the skills that are associated. According to Adrienne Herrell, in *35 Classroom Management Strategies: Promoting Learning and Community*, “Teaching these initial skills and setting norms for behavior is a crucial step toward successful group projects and the key to accomplishing group tasks smoothly in a cooperative environment. Teachers must systematically teach the process, and students must practice the norms and procedures prior to attempting collegial work on a new product or concept.” (Herrell, 182)

*Claim Two*

Teachers can plan well thought out cooperative community activities and still some students will remove themselves from the activity or become left out by their peers. Therefore, the teacher must be ready to intervene and ensure all students become involved in the activities.

*Evidence*

In the “Puzzle” activity the students were given a puzzle piece from the teacher. When the music started, students were to be silent. They were to work cooperatively to put the puzzles together. Prior to this activity students were given a few minutes to discuss some strategies. They then started working and assembled the puzzles with relative ease. At the end, of the activity one puzzle piece was missing. The students knew that they had seen the piece and that it was there a moment ago. One student deliberately took his puzzle piece and hid it. This would cause the class to not meet their
goal. This action turned into an argument between this student and his classmates. He intentionally excluded himself from this activity.

In another activity, called “Everybody Up” several students decided they did not want to participate because they were not immediately experiencing success with their partner. One boy whom was frustrated sat down and said, “I am not doing this it is dumb.” He and his partner were not working well together and so he wanted to quit.

Also, during my observations I noticed that several students did not readily participate in-group activities and were left out by their peers. Here is one example, I asked students to work in groups to solve a riddle. When I walked around I noticed that several students were not participating or offering their opinions. I also observed that the other students did not readily ask for input from their hesitant peers.

One way to prepare for these occurrences is to plan activities where everyone has a set role. According to Adrienne Herrell, in *35 Classroom Management Strategies: Promoting and Building Community*, “Students’ roles in groups should be carefully planned. While some roles are necessary for almost all projects, other projects have specific needs. Teachers should make roles clear to students, and remember that many roles require training.” (Herrell, 192)

*Claim Three*

Community building activities can change the composition of the classrooms social dynamics.

*Evidence*

Before community building was implemented in the room 66% of students felt negatively about some aspect of the classroom environment, 22% felt positively about the
environment, and the remaining 11% felt indifferently. After the implementation of the community building activities the numbers changed slightly. I surveyed the students after the community activities and 44% felt negatively, 44% felt positively, 12% were indifferent or neutral.

After the implementation of community building activities I surveyed the students parents. I compared parent responses I found that students talked about school at home (in a positive way) at a slightly higher rate. I also found that student’s reports to parents of bullying decreased from 11 out of 16 to 8 out of 16 (reporting bullying).

Lastly, after the implementation of the community activities, I conducted another student survey and another sociogram. I compared the frequency of students being liked and disliked. The students that were mostly liked in the first sociogram were still liked in the second. I observed the most change in the students that were mostly disliked by their peers in the first sociogram they were becoming slightly more liked or accepted by classmates. The most interesting item found in this set of data was that in the first sociogram some students were not mentioned in either good or bad terms. Several of these students were mentioned in the second sociogram in a positive light.

Claim Four

With teacher planning and preparation community building can easily become part of the daily routine of a classroom.

Evidence

I wondered if there was enough time in the school day to add another item to the schedule. I was concerned that community building was going to take too much time out
of the day. I found that it was relatively easy to include community building into the
daily routine.

When I was conducting my research one valuable resource was The First Six
Weeks of School by Paula Denton and Roxann Kriete. In this book, Paula Denton
presents ways to integrate community building into the daily routine. I found during my
implementation of community activities that there were many times during the day that
before I would not have thought to utilize two examples are lunchtime and recess time. I
went to lunch with my students several times a week. During this time, I started
conversation that focused the students on one common topic. For example, one day I sat
with a table of my students and we discussed siblings. Students realized that they had
much more in common than they realized. For recess time, I planned fun games that the
students would enjoy and that would force them work collaboratively.

Sharing time was also easily adapted to promote community. Instead of allowing
students to bring toys I created themed sharing times. For example, one week if students
wanted to share they had to bring in a “Me Bag”. In the “Me Bag” were items that were
important to the student or items they felt defined them as a person. I learned a lot about
my students by implementing themed sharing times.

Writing time was a great time to focus on community. I implemented several
writing activities that focused on getting to know one another. For example, students
interviewed each other and wrote a little report about the person they interviewed. They
then presented this person to the class.

Reflections and Future Practice
“We sink together or we swim together.” The affect of community building in a classroom setting has always been of deep interest to me. This inquiry has allowed me to further develop my preexisting beliefs and become more aware of the importance of incorporating a feeling of community. I had ideas on how to incorporate community into the classroom but I didn’t fully understand the entire process. Through this experience, I learned that a twenty-minute community building activity will not form a community, but it is the environments in which it is put in. The community mentality must be always present it is not something you turn on for twenty minutes and turn off. It is something that must be continually present. There is also a lot of planning and thought that must go into the before, during, and after segments of the activities.

Through the analysis of my data I have observed that community building can increase the amount of students that feel safe and comfortable in their classroom. Community building if used in a wise manner by the teacher can provide students with comfortable ways to get to know each other, to share their ideas and interests, and to feel safety and comfort in their classroom. One implication on my teaching is that I will start community activities in the very beginning of the school year. I will use the first several weeks to help children view their school as a place where they belong and feel respected. Community building will remain a high priority throughout the entire school year.

According to my data community building can also change the social dynamics of a classroom. Students place a great deal of importance on their social interactions with peers during this stage of their lives. According to Paula Denton, in The First Six Weeks of School, “Taking time to plan for highly structured opportunities for students to get to know each other, have fun together, and openly discuss potential social problems and
solutions make a big difference. This is even more important with this age group than with younger children, we want to fill the time and space so that there is no room for negative habits and cliques-old or new—to establish themselves.” (Denton, 66) It is important to be proactive in our classroom decisions. I didn’t observe a large shift in the cliques of the classroom but the perception of several students changed for the better.

I believe that the most important thing I will take away from this inquiry is that community building is a much more complicated process then originally thought. I believe that student perceptions may have changed in large part due to my realization that total participation is essential for the success of the community. In 35 Classroom Management Strategies, by Adrienne Herrell, there are six ways to increase participation and therefore the success, the six steps are create expectations for competence (When a student feels confident and competent about teaching something to the group, their expectations for success for themselves and the groups expectations of their competence will improve and their group interactions should also increase.), validate student expertise, provide multiple-abilities treatment, assign competence to low-status students, avoid pitfalls, and evaluate student engagement.

Perhaps the most intriguing realization that I have come to through this inquiry is that students are not innately programmed to work cooperatively. Students must be trained to work cooperatively. Students will also not experience success if the teacher doesn’t make wise decisions. The teacher must assess their objectives and the ages of their students. The teacher should then use that information to choose activities for students to complete as teams of learners. One last thing to keep in mind is the
complexity of the tasks chosen. Tasks need to start out easy and gradually increase in difficulty.

In conclusion, I have found that community building can affect the classroom community in a positive fashion. Community building is one of the most important aspects of classroom management. Community building promotes positive social interactions and helps create a safe and warm learning environment.
Appendix A

Inquiry Brief

Context
In this third grade classroom, there are 23 students, 11 of which are boys, and the remaining 12 are girls. Students were assessed on a scale of eager to please, compliant, and defiant/oppositional for their behavior patterns, by their previous years teacher. The students in my room were classified as six students that are eager to please, sixteen that are compliant, and two that are defiant. I do not know what these teachers based their observations on and I do not know if they established a scale. However, in the course of this year I have established my own scale on which to assess these characteristics. Eager to please students are those that go out of their way to be overly pleasing. These students continually ask if there is anything they can do to help and continually seek approval. Compliant students follow the rules and generally do not cause classroom distractions. Defiant students are those that intentionally break rules or seek attention through misbehavior. Through my observations, I have found similar results. It is important to note that this behavior assessment is very fluid and changes daily. These are inferences based on my daily observations.

Many visitors to my room feel that the majority of my students are defiant or oppositional; however, their judgments are based on very little knowledge of each student. Some of my students may appear oppositional, however, they are seeking something and those who do not know them well may quickly judge. Observing for these characteristics and monitoring any changes will help me in my study of classroom community. I believe that these characteristics will play a role in the success or failure of the community building. As part of my community building I am seeking to understand the stages of cognitive and social development in children. These oppositional students may also display these characteristics when interacting with their peers, which may in turn affect how they are viewed in the classroom. In this inquiry, I am seeking to find out if community building can change some of these social dynamics and help these oppositional students relate in a more appropriate manner to the class and teacher.

There is an interesting social relationship dynamic in this classroom. Several students are bossy. They tell their classmates what they should be doing or if they are doing something wrong. These students are very self-assured and seem to be the more dominate personalities in the classroom. These dominant personalities have also seemed to clash. There are many power struggles occurring within the classroom among these students. They seem to want everything their way or no way. The polar opposite also exists in large numbers in my classroom. Several students are very sensitive and are easily manipulated. This is an interesting dynamic in the classroom that requires a lot of teacher monitoring. For example, these more self-assured students can dominate classroom discussion if allowed. It is important to make sure the quiet more soft-spoken students are also an integral and respected part of the classroom activities. One major goal in my approach to community building is giving each student an equal voice. I want
to create an environment where every child feels they can express their opinion or view without threat of teasing or disrespect from their classmates.

Lately, I have observed several cases of verbal bullying among students in my classroom. I am not positive that the bullying is always intentional. I do not believe that the students always stop to think about the other person. Some of these students seem to be very egocentric still. However, I have witnessed some very blatant hurtful behavior such as name calling and teasing. In my inquiry, I will be observing students to document the amount or severity of bullying between students. I will then compare that to the severity or number of occurrences, at the end of the semester, to evaluate if community building helped students find a more productive outlet of expression.

Lastly, I would like to discuss teamwork. There are several students that seem to think about the good of the class and try to work as a team. However, there are also a large number that have little or no sense of what teamwork really is or at least they do not demonstrate that they have a desire to work as a team. These students seem to be in their own world. They do what is good for them at the time and do not worry about anyone else.

Rationale

I want to learn more about community building in the classroom. I am curious about so many aspects of community building. I wonder how it can be fit into an already packed daily routine. I am also curious about student perception of community building. I want to find out if community building can be used to lower bullying and teasing among students. Lastly, I wonder if community building can help promote positive social interactions between students as well as build intrinsic motivation. Through my observations and daily interactions with my students I know that they can make good decisions. I also feel reasonably sure that they do know right from wrong. However, I question the reasoning behind their decisions. I am wondering if they make decisions based on internal motivation and internal values or if they are making decisions because my mentor or I are standing there. I wonder if they would make the “bad” choice if they knew my mentor or I were not going to find out. I also wonder how peer pressure affects their decision-making skills. I have noticed that students seem to have more difficulty making the right decision when next to a peer encouraging the “bad” decision.

Main Wondering

What affect can community building have on the internal structure of peer groups in a classroom, will implementation of community building decrease bullying, promote teamwork, and increase respect among students in the classroom.

Sub-Questions

1. How can I determine who the non-team players are and can I implements some course of action that will manifest change in the larger classroom setting?
   * I will introduce activities in which the students must work together to accomplish a team goal. I will observe the students to find out who thinks of the group and who thinks of themselves.
2. Will community-building activities create a more cooperative social environment? Will it change the classroom social dynamics?
*I am going to document several items that I believe indicate the social dynamics of the classroom and keep a detailed journal of these items. I will find a baseline and compare the data from the beginning to the data at the end of the inquiry.
3. How do educators help students understand the importance of making good choices vs. inappropriate choices? How do educators promote internal regulation of the decision-making process and decrease the amount of students’ dependence on rewards or teacher monitoring?
*Observations
4. Do students know what the right thing is? (Actions, word choices)
*Interviews and focus groups.
5. Can community building decrease bullying and teasing?
*Documentation of bullying and teasing, observations, and comparisons from the beginning to the end.
6. How can community building be built into the daily routine of the classroom?
*My own reflective journals.
7. How will it affect or impact the community?
*This will require many forms of data collection such as focus groups, surveys, and interviews.
8. How will it affect my students: how will they feel about the activities, will their feelings change? Will they view them as important or useless?
*Journals, surveys, and interviews

*Data Collection Method

Timeline
February 11th-17th - Conduct Research/Finish Final Brief and Bibliography
Begin formatting interview questions for Ms. Donnan Stoicovy and Doris Grove. Begin formatting surveys for students and parents. Talk to specials teachers about what they see during their time with my class. Ask if they can keep notes and record any changes they see.

February 18th-24th - Continue research and reading sources. Begin observations of students. Finish interview questions and parent/student surveys. Write a parent letter introducing my inquiry and the surveys.

February 25th-March 2nd - Send out parent letter and parent survey. (Monday) Give students initial survey (Before Friday.) Arrange interviews with Ms. Donnan Stoicovy and Doris Grove (Give them each a copy of interview questions or topics. (By Tuesday)
Observations

March

March 3rd-9th - Analyze data from interviews and surveys. Observations and analyze data from observations. Begin introducing community-building activities. My goal will be to
complete one community building activity per day. However, this may be unrealistic. I will conduct at least three a week. Some may be longer running projects and some may be very quick and only take a few minutes so it really depends upon the activity how many will be done each week. Talk to specials teachers about what they see during their time with my class.

Spring Break- Work on Paper. Plan more community building. Create a survey for students and parents to evaluate any changes seen.

March 17\textsuperscript{th}–23\textsuperscript{rd} - Community Building. Observations during community building activities and non-community activities.

March 24\textsuperscript{th}–30\textsuperscript{th} - Community Building. Observations. Set up a meeting with Ms. Donnan Stoicovy to go over data and observations.

March 30\textsuperscript{th}–April 4\textsuperscript{th} - Community Building. Observations. Final parent and student surveys. Meet with specials teachers to discuss any changes or lack of changes.

April

April 5\textsuperscript{th} & 6\textsuperscript{th} - Analyze data and observations. Begin paper.

April 7\textsuperscript{th}–11\textsuperscript{th} - Finish writing paper and edited. (Intern, Co-Worker, Ron, and Ms. Stoicovy).

April 12\textsuperscript{th} - Paper Due

April 16\textsuperscript{th} - Peer Editing Session, April 23\textsuperscript{rd} –Final Draft Due!

Data Collection Ideas

Since I am focusing on community building and its affect on classroom dynamics I first need to clearly and thoroughly understand my baseline or starting point. In order to gain this understanding I will conduct observations and parent/student surveys. I will also be interviewing my students’ specials teachers. During my base line observations I will be focusing on the following: Whom do students play with at recess? How are they interacting? What kind of games are they playing? Do they need to work together at all and problem solve? If they do how to they handle disagreements? Who do students choose to work with during class? How do they feel when partners are chosen? How do students get along in general? Is there any noticeable bullying or teasing? This list is a starting point. It may be edited as my inquiry progresses.

I will also be conducting student and parent surveys. These surveys will focus on how students feel. For example, I want to know how the students feel about the classroom atmosphere in general. Do they feel safe? Do they feel valued? Do they feel respected? How do they feel about each other? Do they feel like they know their classmates? Have they ever experienced bullying or teasing in the room or out by a
classmate? I want to find out who considers whom friends. I am curious to understand who are friends with whom. I want to know if there are any “socially outcasted students”. For the parent surveys I want to find out what students say at home about the classroom. Do they talk about school and friends? I am also curious to know if they play or interact on a regular basis with students from class at home? If they do what do the parents notice about the social interaction?

I am also planning to implement an anonymous comment or suggestion box. This will be a place where students can communicate with me anonymously. I would like to also use student interviews and focus groups.
Appendix B

Data Collection Community Activities

![Bar Graph]

Figure 1 This bar graph depicts a number of students surveyed before community-building activities were started and how they felt about the classroom environment.

In this open-ended survey, students were asked to answer the following question, “How do you feel about your classroom and your classmates?” Students were not given any further directions. This survey was given on February 20, 2008 after lunch. Eighteen students were present. Out of the eighteen students surveyed twelve felt negatively about the classroom that is 66% of the students surveyed. Four students felt positively about the classroom environment, 22% of students surveyed. Two felt neutral they felt happy in the room but recognized that there are problems, 11% of students surveyed.

Student Responses:

Negative:

“I do feel like someone does tease me. He makes me feel like I am bad and everybody hates me. I feel like everyone gives an attitude.”
“Lots of people in this class break rules and one person in this class bullies me. I feel this class needs to work on being more respectful.”

“It seems that most kids in this class think I am going to hit them.” (This student wrote but erased “I am not.”)

“Usually no one wants to play with me or talk to me. I don’t understand I am nice.”

“Someone in our room can be mean.”

“There are two students that are mean, they have hit me, and they tease me. I do not like that.”

“I feel like students do not respect me and some people make fun of me.”

“Someone in the class always says he hates me and always pushes me and he doesn’t say sorry, ever. It makes me sad when he does that and says that.”

“I feel like people in my set copy me. A certain student bullies me by like using me to get friends, and she yells at me a lot and gives me dirty looks. I feel like people make fun of me. I also feel like they talk about me behind my back. They think I am too smart for my own good.”

“I feel bad when ever this girl who sits next to me is rude. She always calls me names and tries to copy off my papers.”

“I am happy except when someone keeps stepping on my foot. I wanted to turn around and tell them to stop but I remembered I couldn’t talk in line. I also wanted to tell you but I forgot. He always gets behind me everyday.”

“I think some of the kids in the room do not like me.”

**Positive:**

“I think everyone treats me like I want to be treated and I treat them how they want to be treated.” (How is that? How do you want to be treated? How do others want to be treated?)

“I feel fine about the classroom.”

“Everyone in the classroom is great and I always feel great when I come in the class. I never get made fun of and everyone is nice.”

“I think the classroom is okay. There are no bullies in our room.”
Neutral:

“Sometimes people in this class treat me with respect but sometimes that say shut-up or make fun of me.”

“I like this classroom. I want this class to get along very well so friendships can grow. We need to work together a lot better. We can’t win if everyone doesn’t work together.”

Comments: “I am informed daily on my daughter’s day. She is always sharing with me. She really enjoys school.” “Especially if it is very unexpected (the outcome of an experiment). She also likes to talk about things that you did at school that have to do with us at home.” “Especially unit activities.”

Question Three: 15 out of 16 said yes. 1 responded with some.

Comments: “Yes, daily. She has many friends in class.” “She mentions (keeps track of) the different relationships between friends, table mates, teachers and children.”

Question Four: 11 out of 16 said yes. 5 out of 16 said no.

Comments: “Yes. There have been issues with one particular student. It has been addressed by teachers and we haven’t had any problems since then.” “She sees things and needs to tell me right away- lunch time, recess, “outside of organized activity times especially”. She doesn’t feel bullied but notices it.” “A qualified yes. Talks about class members who she thinks are mean.” “Just a little from one child.”

Question Five: 15 out of 16 said yes. 1 out of 16 said no.

Comments: “Yes, she interacts with many students both girls and boys.” “Half the female population is in the same Girl Scout troop and she meets several for play dates too. Some have been together since kindergarten (off and on).” “He has friends over or goes to someone’s house about once or twice a month.”
**Questions 3,4,6,7**

![Bar chart showing times mentioned by different students for questions 3,4,6,7.](Image)

Students

**Questions 3,4,6,7**

![Bar chart showing times mentioned by different students for questions 3,4,6,7.](Image)

Students
These students were not mentioned as best friends.

Sam, Gerry, Alizay, Joe, Luke, Amani, Cameron, Melanie, Helena

These students were not disliked by any classmates.

Gerry, Sienna, Hannah R, Hannah N, Will, R.C., Needhi, Pete, Melanie, Cameron

Overlap (Not Mentioned On Either)

Gerry, Cameron, Melanie

Seating on the Carpet

2/26/08 Dismissed by Sets Calendar Math 9 a.m.

Front Row: Cora, Gerry, Alizay, Will, Sam, Melanie
Row Two: Hannah R, Hannah N, Sienna, Shannon, Amani, Needhi, Helena
Row Three: Luke, Cameron, Nick, Pete, Ben, Rhea, Anthony

2/27/08 Random joining to the carpet. Writing 9:30 a.m.

Front Row: Anthony, Helena, Sam, Alizay, Melanie, Cora, Will, Gerry
Row Two: Rhea, Needhi, Amani, Hannah N, Shannon, Sienna, Hannah R.
Row Three: Luke, Nick, Pete, Ben,
Row Three: Cameron

3/3/08 Dismissed by Sets. Morning Work 8:50 a.m.

Front Row: Gerry, Shannon, Hannah R., Cora
Row Two: Sam, Hannah N., Needhi,
Row Two: Amani
Row Three: Luke, Pete, Nick, Rhea, Helena
Row Four: Ben, Anthony

3/4/08 Random joining to the carpet. Math 11:30 a.m.

Students sat in a circle.

Anthony, Hannah N, Nick, Cameron, Pete, Luke, Gerry, Joesph, Ben, R.C.
Amani, Shannon, Needhi, Melanie, Sienna, Hannah R., Rhea, Alizay
Will, Cora, Helena, Sam, Matt

3/5/08 Math 11:30-12:30

Pair Share on the Carpet These students didn't talk to anyone.

Alizay, Rhea, Cameron, Hannah N, Sam, Anthony, Ben
Recess

2/25/08
Inside Recess
Playing together.
Independent
Wandered
Cora, Will
Nick, Cameron
Needhi, Amani, Sienna
Gerry, Ben, Matt
Hannah R, Shannon

3/3/08
Inside Recess
Playing together.
Hannah N, Sienna, Needhi, Amani, Hannah R, Nick, Pete, Cameron
Helena, Cora, Rhea
Ben, R.C., Matt,
Independent
Sam, Gerry
Partner Work

2/27/08
Partner Work
Morning Work
Hannah R, Sienna
Nick, Pete
Cameron, Alizay
Gerry, Needhi
Amani, Shannon
R.C., Anthony
Melanie, Will
Helena

2/28/08
Partner Work
Math 11:30-12:30
Gerry, Anthony *
Alizay, Gloria*
Pia, Joesph*
Racheal, Needhi
Will, Cora
Melanie, Hannah N
R.C., Ben
3/3/08  Students chose sets.

Set One:    Cora, Will, Helena, Sam
Set Two:    Shannon, Amani, Hannah N, Needhi, Melanie
Set Three:  Joesph, Ben, Matt, Anthony, Gerry*
Set Four:   Sienna, Rhea*, Hannah R., Alizay
            Luke, Nick, Pete, R.C.,
Set Five:   Cameron

* Didn't move from original spot. Students moved around them.
Appendix C

Student and Parent Surveys

Please feel free to elaborate on any or all of the following questions.

1. In general, how does your child feel about school and the classroom?

Please circle one of the following responses:

Likes Indifferent Dislikes Strongly Dislikes

2. Does your child talk about class activities at home? Yes No

3. Does your child talk about friends and peers at home? Yes No

4. Has your child expressed concerns about bullying or teasing inside or outside of the classroom? Yes No

5. Does your child regularly play or interact with anyone from the class? Yes No
1. Does anyone in this classroom ever bully you? (Call you names, make you feel uncomfortable, hit you, tell you what to do) Explain?

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

2. If you have been bullied how did it make you feel? Do you have any suggestions to make the bullying stop?

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

3. Who is your best friend in this classroom?

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

4. Do you dislike anyone in this classroom?

_____________________________________________________________________

5. List the two classmates you would most like to sit by in the classroom?

_____________________________________________________________________

6. Write the name of the person you would most like to work on a project with?

_____________________________________________________________________

7. Who would you least want to sit by?

_____________________________________________________________________


8. Tell me one time that you made a good decision and how you felt?
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
____________________________

9. Tell me one time you made a bad decision and how you felt?
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
____________________________

10. If you were going on a vacation, name six classmates that you would like to take with you. Explain why?
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

11. Name three people you would like to work on a Social Studies project with?
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

12. Name three people you would not want to work with?
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

Appendix D

**Sample Games and Activities**

**Everybody Up**- Begin with two children sitting on the ground, hands clasped, feet touching. Their job is to work together to raise themselves from sitting to standing. When two-somes succeed, students work in threesomes, foursomes, and occasionally even higher numbers.

**Knots**- Begin with a circle of eight to ten children who “knot themselves” by grasping right and left hands with random other hands in the circle. All hands must have another hand to hold. The children must then figure out how to unknot themselves without letting go of each other’s hands.

**Puzzle**- In the morning, the students will pick up a puzzle piece from the teacher. When the music starts, you must be silent. Walk around the room and locate the other people who have pieces to complete the puzzle your piece fits into. Work cooperatively to put the puzzle together. Glue the puzzle onto another piece of poster paper. Decide on a name for your team and write it on the paper.

Directions for teacher: On paper, arrange the children into groups of four or five students. Use on sheet of construction paper (same color) for each group. Divide each sheet into jigsaw pieces, one for each child in that group. Write one name per piece. Just before starting the activity, hand each child the piece with their name on it. Play music. Check the completed puzzles for accuracy of group members.

**Electricity**- “Electricity” is a nonverbal form of “Telephone”. Children gather in a circle holding hands. Once child sends a nonverbal “pulse” around the circle. This pulse passes from child to child until it returns to the first sender. (How long does it take? Can you beat your record?)

The pulse can also be a nonverbal pattern: three little squeezes and a big one, or two bug squeezes and one little one, or whatever. (Does the last child receive the pattern that the first child sent?)
Appendix E

Annotated Bibliography


This is a very short article but it is very useful because it focuses on what a peaceful classroom is and how it can be reached. It provides a wide variety of ideas, one in particular is a “peace table” a safe and neutral place where students can work out differences. This resource will be useful to my inquiry because it includes an extensive list of resources that focus on community building, resources for peace education, and resources for peace education using children’s literature.

Cunat, Mary; Garlock, Joni; Jaddaoui, Noelle; Sorensen, Krista; Poduska, Katie; Roche, Erin; Shah, Ushma. *Creating Democratic Classrooms: The Struggle to Integrate Theory and Practice.* New York, New York: Teachers College press, 1996.

This book will be a useful resource for my inquiry because it focuses on creating democratic classrooms. This book explains in-depth the process of the process of creating this democratic classroom. It gives descriptions of what this kind of classroom looks like and how it functions. The most intriguing section in this book focuses on empowerment that children gain from being a part of a democratic classroom. In this section, the authors give the reader some ideas how to help students extend the values of the classroom to their everyday life, including decision making, critical thinking, reflection, and recognizing multiple viewpoints.


Although this book focuses on the first six weeks of school many of the activities and ideas can be implemented at any time in the year. This book will serve as a starting point for community building activities. This book is full of morning meeting ideas and activities as well as games that focus on
community building. This book will also be useful because it features daily
schedules and how the authors fit community building into an already
packed daily schedule. I plan on using some of the scheduling ideas
presented in this book.

Gibbs, Jeanne. Tribes: A Process for Social Development and Cooperative

This book is an older resource, however, it will still be useful. This book focuses
on building community through what the author calls tribes. I may or may
not use the idea of tribes but several chapters directly relate community
building. One chapter focuses on building community, how to lead a
whole group activity, and how to set up community building stations.
Another chapter focuses on encouraging responsible behavior it focuses on
practicing individuality and respecting differences. This will be a valuable
tool due to the amount of resources and activities it offers.

Herrell, Adrienne L. 35 Classroom Management Strategies: Promoting Learning and

This book is a teacher resource aimed at professional development. This book
focuses on many classroom management strategies. It will be useful in my
inquiry because it focuses on community building. Some of the community
building topics are as follows; modeling and building mutual respect, using
words positively, empowering students to resolve conflicts, training students
to recognize and respond to needs of the group, how to insure that all
students are active participants in cooperative activities. This book is very
useful because all strategies are thoroughly explained and steps for
implementing the strategies are given. Two classroom examples are given
for each strategy in order to show how use of each strategy will differ based
on age.

Hopp, Mary Ann, Cheryl L. Horn, Kelleen McGraw, and Jenny Meyer, comps.

Improving Students Ability to Problem Solve Through Social Skills

This article focuses on research that has been done on independent student
problem solving. This article describes affective problem solving and how teachers can help support students in their journey to becoming affective problem solvers. This article will be useful to my inquiry because it is grounded in research.


“Rewards are like punishment” they are used to control people and used to produce temporary compliance. The previous is the main idea of Alphie Kohn’s book Punished by Rewards. This resource argues that using external incentives such as “do this and you will get that” are a way to manipulate and control. When this method is utilized the underlying problem is ignored and children are less likely to develop a sense of responsibility and the ability to make ethical judgments. This will be a valuable resource for my inquiry because I want to internally motivate my students. I do not want them to act one way in front of me because they believe they are going to receive something out of it. I want them to be able to judge their behaviors and do the right things without some external motivation. This book will help think of ways to reward students that focus less on external incentives.


This book explains what is humor and how it can be used to maximize learning. It seeks to affirm, sustain, and encourage educators in the practice of humor-to maximize the benefits of humor in education. It includes current research based data and how to support an optimal learning environment and how to build safe communities that reflect the relational trust necessary for collaborative learning. It focuses on positive psychology and how it can contribute to a joyful learning environment. This will be an interesting element to address in my inquiry. I am interesting in studying how humor may benefit my classroom environment. I believe this runs parallel to community building and may even intersect at some point.


Readers will find definitions, statistics, and theories that will help them identify and
characterize bullying. They will learn about the authors’ School Social Development and Bullying Prevention Model, a blueprint for schools that students, teachers, and parents enjoy being a part of. This model shows how school professionals can prevent and reduce bullying by creating a positive environment and by ensuring all children have the social skills to communicate well and solve problems without aggression. The book has guidance in selecting research-based bullying prevention programs, and steps for assessing a school’s needs and for evaluating a program’s effectiveness. This will be useful in my inquiry because part of an effective classroom community is being able to communicate and interact in positive socially accepted ways.

Ramsey, Robert D. Don't Teach the Canaries Not to Sing: Creating a School Culture That Boosts Achievement. Corwin P, 2008.

This book clearly defines what school culture is, where it comes from, how it works, and why it is critically important. The author seeks to explain what is necessary to develop a school culture that supports student performance. This resource includes a profile of a healthy school, tips for assessing how your school culture measures up and ways to spot warning signs, frequently asked questions about creating a positive school culture. This book will be useful to my inquiry because it focuses on what a positive school community is and how to build a strong collaborative school community.

Interviews
I am going to be interviewing Ms. Donnan Stoicovy. She has conducted research of her own on community building and has written several of her own papers on community building. I know she believes in community building and she has worked very hard to use promote community school wide. I will be asking questions focused on community building. I would like to know about her first hand experience-implementing community building.

I am also interviewing Doris Grove. I will be talking to Doris Grove primarily about bullying. I want to find out how she handled it as a principle. I am curious about her schools “bullying plan”. I also want to ask her how educators can act proactively in regards to bullying. I am also interested in how to deal with bullying behaviors. I will also be asking her to “pair share” with me in regards to how can community building be used to reduce bullying in the classroom.