No More Drama!
Encouraging kindness and respect among students in our classroom through community building activities.

No More Drama!
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2008-2009
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Abstract

Upon entering our classrooms, we began observing something we didn’t expect to see in primary grades: DRAMA. Our classroom drama became a distraction to the students creating it, the students around them, and the teachers. We decided to take action and incorporate more community building, community service, and various other strategies to encourage kindness and respect among our students.

Context of Classroom

Ms. Balarezo’s class

In my 1st/2nd multiage classroom, I have a diverse group of students. The classroom total is 24 now, with one student recently being added to our classroom community. Out of the 24 students, 10 are in 1st grade and 14 are in 2nd grade. The 1st grade group consists of three girls and seven boys and our 2nd graders consist of 11 girls and three boys bringing the classroom total to 14 girls and 10 boys. There are about eight students in our class who have behavioral and/or emotional issues. Only two of those students are known to be on medication for their conditions. The behaviors of six of these eight students have the potential to (and sometimes do) get many other students off-task and distracted from the classroom activities. These behaviors include calling out, speaking loudly during quiet activities, moving around the classroom when not necessary, physically hurting others, name-calling, and not obeying the teacher’s directions. The other two students’ issues affect mostly themselves, their own learning, and sometimes the couple of students closest in proximity to them. There are two students in our class who attend English as a Second Language (ESL) and three who receive additional instructional support.

In my classroom there are about four students who are less social than the rest. They tend to keep to themselves or only interact with a couple of other children. About 9 of the 14 girls in
the classroom have been struggling with friendship issues. Some of these girls do not actually start the problems, but have been involved because of another friend. A couple of these girls are constantly involved in friendship conflicts and another couple are constantly starting these friendship conflicts by gossiping and being disrespectful to other classmates. All of our students bring something special to the classroom.

*Ms. Denlinger’s class*

My classroom consists of 18 students, 11 of which are boys and seven of which are girls. We have four high-achieving students, 12 average-achieving students, and two low-achieving students. One of the average-achieving students is very low in reading, but is on grade level in every other area. We have two social leaders in the classroom, one girl and one boy. Only two students in the classroom are quiet, and that is only in regards to interacting with others and participating in whole group activities. One will talk to the adults in the room without hesitation. Nine students in this class are very easy to get along with, although some of these students do seem to put in a lot of effort when trying to socialize and be patient with those four that are difficult to get along with. There are three students in the room that have behavior problems. All of these students are male, and one has recently been released from his Teacher Support Specialist (TSS). There are two students who spend time with the autistic/emotional support teacher to assist with emotional conflicts. These two students participate in a lunch bunch where they learn social skills. There are four students in the class that have a lot of trouble getting their work done. There are two students in the classroom that attend Title 1 Reading and Writing support and only one student has been diagnosed with a learning disability.

Both classrooms participate in daily Morning Meetings in which students greet one another, have sharing, engage in an activity and participate in calendar math. At the beginning
of the school year, the classrooms completed various community-building activities that allowed
the students to get to know one another.

Wonderings and Questions

*Main Wondering*

How can community building help children become more respectful and kind to everyone?

Both classrooms had been experiencing problems with social interactions since the beginning of
the year. Students in our classes were not treating each other with the kindness and respect that
each student deserves. Both classes implemented various community building activities and
strategies to help with these issues (Appendix Q).

*Sub-Wonderings*

- Are students noticing the friendship issues as well? Do they share them with their
  parents, teachers, and friends or are they mostly keeping the issues to themselves?
- In what ways can participation in community service help students with these issues?
- Can participating in community building activities have a negative effect in the
  classroom?

Data Collection

*Clear Description of Data Collection*

Before: Before the community building activities were implemented, data was collected
in order to have baseline data. In both classrooms, our students participated in a survey about the
frequency of their actions and feelings with regard to social interactions (Appendix G). Much of
the data collected before the community building activities were implemented were in the form
of anecdotal notes. These anecdotal notes captured both positive and negative interactions
between the students in the classroom. Surveys were sent home to the parents in both
classrooms to collect information on the students. The surveys asked questions to learn more about the students’ attitudes toward school and others in the classroom as well as to collect information on the activities that the students are involved in outside of school (Appendix E, F).

**During:** Throughout the entire inquiry project, data was collected in a variety of forms. We both collected a lot of data in the form of anecdotal notes during the community building activities as well as during random parts of the day. In Ms. Denlinger’s classroom, the students spent considerable time working on the concept of community service. As a community building activity, the time that students spent planning and discussing different community service projects equaled the time spent participating in all other community building activities combined. Through this process, data was collected in the form of anecdotal notes as well as lists of student ideas.

Also, in both classes, students were introduced to a Grumble Box. This Grumble Box was a place where students could write about a situation that upset them or a problem that they were having with others in the classroom. The entries could be anonymous if the students wished and they could also leave out other names. The entries into the Grumble Box were used as talking points in class meetings. These topics were discussed as though everyone was involved, and the students were the ones who helped others come up with reasonable solutions. The entries into the Grumble Box, the frequency of the entries, and the anecdotal notes from the class meeting all served as data (Appendix O and P).

Ms. Denlinger’s class also spent time discussing how their actions affected others. The students began to work toward Zero Food Waste at lunch. Through this, the students were asked to “take what you want, but eat what you take”. The primary discussion had the students talking
about why this is important and what they can learn from doing this. This activity brought data
in the form of anecdotal notes as well as the data from weighing the food waste each day.

In Ms. Balarezo’s classroom, the students participated in Lunch Bunch and classroom
discussions. During Lunch Bunch, the students were able to communicate about positive and
negative social interactions and discuss the outcomes of their actions. They gave feedback about
the different strategies the class had been working on in order to make the classroom
environment more pleasant. The class discussions served the same purpose, but included the
entire class rather than just a select few students. One of the most meaningful classroom
discussions was one in which the students shared “how we want our classroom to be”, giving a
set of standards they worked toward in the classroom (Appendix Q).

**After:** The final data collected after the community building activities were implemented
were the student surveys (Appendix G-L). These surveys were the exact same surveys that the
students took at the beginning of the project. Ms. Balarezo’s class also had a classroom
discussion about the way to treat classmates after watching a public service announcement (PSA)
about being a good friend. The students were able to come up with a great list of the right ways
to treat their friends. This served as data that the students were fully aware of how to be kind
and respectful to others.

Data Analysis

*Steps to Analyze the Data*
Some of our data was much easier to analyze than others. Parent surveys, student surveys, and the grumble box provided hard data that could be tallied or graphed. Anecdotal notes and conversations were very valuable and informative in this process, but were much more difficult to organize and analyze.

Parent surveys:

The parent surveys served as a way to see the types of activities that students participated in outside of school and if students were sharing concerns about specific topics with their parents. Our goal was to find some sort of correlation between activities the students participated in outside of school and the way that they interacted with others in the classroom. Unfortunately, the manner in which we conducted the surveys did not lend itself to be compared with our other data. The surveys were anonymous and, although they provided us with great insight out our classrooms, we were not able to apply them to any of our findings. Had we known exactly what we anticipated using them for, we would have altered our data collection process (Appendix E and F).

Student surveys:

We used the student surveys as a way to look at the feelings and actions of the students as a whole. By conducting the first survey before the implementation of community building activities and strategies, we were able to get an idea of how the students were feeling and what the students were doing in the classroom prior to any intervention. The data for the first survey was tallied (for each question, how many said “Always”, “Usually”, “Sometimes”, or “Never”) and graphed. The same process was done the last week of implementation to get an idea of if and how our activities impacted the students’ actions and feelings. After tallying and graphing the second survey’s results, we compared the two graphs within each class and compared the
four graphs across the two classes. If there was a change in amount of students who responded a certain way, that was discussed under the results. For example, in question 1, which asks about the comfort level of the students around their peers, 12 out of 20 students answered in the first survey that they always or usually feel comfortable and 17 out of 22 students answered in the second survey that they always or usually feel comfortable. These results from one classroom show that more students felt comfortable in school with their peers after the implementation process. Although the number increase is small, one must take into account that the whole number of students is small. In a class of 20/22 students (because of absences not all students were surveyed the first and second time), even a change of one or two students makes a difference (Appendix G-L).

Grumble Box:
The Grumble Box provided us both with valuable data. We checked each Grumble Box at the end of every week from the time it was implemented. A tally was made next to each student’s name for each time he or she appeared in the box each week. After gathering numbers, two things stood out. The first thing that is very obvious by the data is that fewer student names ended up in the Grumble Box as each week went on. This told us that at the beginning of the process, more students were causing friendship issues in the classroom. It could be that, as time went on, some of the students began thinking about their actions and the effects that their actions have on others and ultimately became involved in friendship issues less often. It was also found that students were putting names in fewer times as the weeks went on. This could be because fewer students were interested in taking time out of their day to place names in the box, or because fewer students felt the need to “tell” on other students as they continued to learn about being a good friend in the classroom. This data also allowed us to focus on the students who, at
the beginning, were in the box many times and who either decreased or disappeared from the box by the end (Appendix O and P).

Anecdotal notes:

Because of the nature of the topic, it was difficult to get “hard data” for everything we were looking for. Anecdotal notes served a great purpose in this inquiry paper. Through anecdotal notes and conversations with those involved in these classrooms, we were able to write down the different conflicts and situations that arose in both classrooms, even if we were unable to tally or survey to get this information. This allowed us to cater our interventions to benefit our classes and also to put more meaning to the hard data we collected.

Explanation of Findings

Claim 1 and Evidence

Claim 1: Students became more aware of their own actions and feelings through participating in community building activities.

Evidence 1: Through the final student survey implemented in our classrooms, students stated that they now get involved in their friends’ arguments as well as talk about their friends behind their back more often. The students also claimed that they walk away less often when they get angry. Students answered that they tend to go home and worry about relationship issues more than they did before the community building activities were implemented. Another connection to self-awareness that was made through these surveys was that many students claimed that they think more often about the feelings of others before they make decisions.

The answers provided by the students in the survey appear to represent a change in behavior. Although the data appears this way on the surface, having a personal relationship with the students and taking into account other data collected through student quarrels, we feel
confident that this data more strongly represents a change in awareness than in behavior.

Students are now seeing the effects of their actions and words toward others, and they are able to verbalize and explain these occurrences. We feel as though this is a great first step toward solving classroom drama, but it is not until the students can act upon this awareness that we will truly see a large reduction in social issues (Appendix G-L).

Evidence 2: After having the students participate in community building activities, they became a bit more talkative on the carpet. This increase in side-talking, though, also brought an increase in self-awareness. The students gradually became more aware of their talking and their distractions and they began to choose a more appropriate seat. Students became aware of who they were likely to talk to and they would choose a seat a good distance from that other child. In the instances when a student would make a poor decision by sitting next to someone they tended to talk to, the teacher would say that student’s name and the student would choose to move away without the teaching having the opportunity to say anything else.

The anecdotal notes that accompany this evidence are strong and supportive. Given a second chance, we would have liked to notice this trend earlier and tried another form of data collection, possibly by tallying each time the students did not sit near friends and each time the students moved their seat before being told.
Claim 2 and Evidence

Claim 2: Students became more aware of social issues in the classroom through participating in community building activities.

Evidence 1: The first piece of evidence for this claim comes in the form of anecdotal notes. After beginning the community building activities and discussing problems that were ongoing in the classroom, the students eventually began to ask for class meetings and small group meetings to discuss various issues in the classroom. These requests became more and more frequent as time went on.

In Ms. Balarezo’s classroom, the group of girls that had regular social issues began asking for friendship meetings more often to talk about these issues and to try to resolve them. They became more aware that there were issues and less oblivious to the fact that other students were being hurt by their words and actions. As the friendship meeting requests increased, I was unable to fulfill all requests due to a lack of time. The requests were becoming so frequent that the students began to manage their own friendship meetings while using the friendship bear. Their awareness of these issues allowed them to immediately work to resolve them.
Evidence 2: In Ms. Denlinger’s classroom, the students that were causing problems became much more aware that they were the major source of issues. These students, as well as those students being affected, began to request more and more class meetings, with a few students suggesting the idea of having a small meeting with only those involved. The idea of small group meetings was not mentioned among this class previously, but with the knowledge of the issues going on in the classroom, certain students thought that having a small, closed meeting might help resolve some of their problems.

This demonstrates that they were fully aware of the issues that they were having and they were becoming more aware of strategies to use to try to solve these issues. These students were behind most of the social issues in the classroom, and for them to become more aware of these issues showed a lot of progress.
Claim 3 and Evidence

Claim 3: Participating in community building activities resulted in a decrease in social issues among some students.

Evidence 1: In Ms. Denlinger’s classroom, the use of the Grumble Box decreased significantly as the community building activities progressed. As students began to work with others in a different manner, the issues being placed in the Grumble Box decreased. When the Grumble Box was introduced, the students in Ms. Denlinger’s class were putting about 10 entries in per day. This lasted for about a week before the entries began decreasing. This was around the same time that the students in this classroom began planning their book drive as well as participating in other community building activities that required them to work as a group (Appendix P). In Ms. Balarezo’s classroom, the total entries into the Grumble Box decreased significantly throughout the three weeks. The number of students who were reported in the Grumble Box each week decreased by several students each week.
Evidence 2: Through anecdotal notes, observations, and conversations between the mentor teacher and Ms. Balarezo, they discovered that at least three of the students, who were more often involved in friendship issues at the beginning of the year, had a significant change in attitude and actions. The amount of times they were involved in friendship meetings and the number of times their names were in the Grumble Box (Appendix O) decreased. They were no longer a distraction to other students and were having fewer conflicts during class time and free time.

Claim 4 and Evidence

Claim 4: Students increased their side-talking after participating in community building activities.
Evidence 1: In Ms. Balarezo’s classroom, the amount of times the students were off-task increased greatly after some community building activities were implemented. There were three students in particular who were constantly out of their seats meeting with other students and socializing at inappropriate times. There were many times we found these students out in the hall or in the bathrooms socializing as well. Anecdotal notes and conversations between my mentor teacher and I support this; although in the future a tally with the amount of times the students were off-task would prove more beneficial.

Evidence 2: In Ms. Denlinger’s class, students began to talk more with one another when on the carpet and while at their seats. The mentor teacher and Ms. Denlinger had changed the seats twice during the time of the inquiry, and these new seating arrangements did not decrease the talking. Students were finding the time to talk to one another more during any transition time as well as during morning time that they knew they should be spending on work.

We believe that this occurred because students were resolving their issues and becoming friendlier with one another. Although on the surface this appears to be a negative issue, we believe that this shows positive progress toward our goal. The students were now getting along much better and were displaying these new friendships through their side conversations and transitional chatter.
Reflections & Implications for Future Practice

From the beginning, we have struggled to understand why there is so much drama in our primary classrooms. We continue to feel this way because, although we saw some improvement in our students’ attitudes and actions, the drama continues. At times it appears as though our students are purposefully hurtful toward one another, and we simply wonder why? Why do our students use their friendships as leverage to get their way? How do they know exactly what we expect of them and can recite how to treat one another with kindness and respect but fail to act upon those words?

We both feel that starting our inquiry project at the beginning of the year would have been both positive and negative. It would be out of the question in terms of time constraints because of our methods classes, but it would have given us a chance to start implementing specific community building activities in order to create the classroom environment we want for ourselves and for our students. It would have also allowed more time to see a true change in our students’ behavior. The issues we face in our classroom are significant, and a few weeks of working with our students on these topics was not enough. We both feel that a much greater impact would have been made if we could have started earlier in the year, although some of these issues were hard to foresee. Both classrooms participated in community building activities at the beginning of the year. At the same time, we noticed that the personalities of some of our students created difficult dynamics among the class. Could we have, at this point, focused on the students who needed our extra attention before it created classroom conflicts?

Our inquiry project taught us a lot of valuable information. First of all, through some focused and specific community building activities, our students can become more aware of their actions and feelings and also more aware of how they should treat one another. This will
definitely serve us in the future, because we know that awareness is the big first step in making a change. Whether or not we encounter these types of issues in the future, we both feel that a focus on community building is key to creating the classroom environment we desire.

Another thing that we realize is that regardless of how much community building we do, we may still have a group of students that is prone to drama. We were unable to figure out exactly what makes these students behave this way, but it is very possible we’ll encounter this again. Having this experience through our inquiry project will allow us to be more prepared for this type of challenge in a future classroom, whether we are working with 1st graders or 6th graders.
Appendix A

Andrea Balarezo & Megan Denlinger
Inquiry Brief/Rationale

CONTEXT
Profile:
Ms. Balarezo’s class: In my 1st/2nd multiage classroom, I have a diverse group of students. The classroom total is 23 now, with one student recently being added to our classroom community. Out of the 23 students, 10 are in 1st grade and 13 are in 2nd grade. The 1st grade group consists of three girls and seven boys and our 2nd graders consist of 10 girls and three boys bringing the classroom total to 13 girls and 10 boys. There are about eight students in our class who have behavioral and/or emotional issues. Only two of those students that I know of are on medication. The behaviors of 6 of these 8 students have the potential to (and sometimes do) get many other students off-task and distracted from the classroom activities. These behaviors include calling out, speaking loudly during quiet activities, moving around the classroom when not necessary, physically hurting others, name-calling, and not obeying the teacher’s directions. The other two students’ issues affect mostly themselves, their own learning, and sometimes the couple of students closest in proximity to them. There are two students in our class who attend ESL and three who receive additional instructional support.

In my classroom there are about four students who are less social than the rest. They tend to keep to themselves or only interact with a couple of other children. About 9 of the 13 girls in the classroom have been struggling with friendship issues. Some of these girls don’t actually start the problems, but have been involved because of another friend. A couple of these girls are constantly involved in friendship conflicts and another couple are constantly starting these friendship conflicts by gossiping and being disrespectful to other classmates. All of our students bring something special to the classroom and overall they are a great group of students.

Ms. Denlinger’s class: My classroom consists of eighteen students, eleven of which are boys and seven of which are girls. We have four high-achieving students, twelve average-achieving students, and two low-achieving students. One of the average-achieving students is very low in reading, but is at least on grade level in every other area. We have two social leaders in the classroom, one girl and one boy. There are three students in the classroom that would be considered conformists and four students that one would consider nonconformist. Only two students in the classroom are quiet, and that is only in regards to interacting with others and participating in whole group activities. One will talk to the adults in the room without hesitation. Nine students in this class are very easy to get along with, although some of these students do seem to put in a lot of effort when trying to socialize and be patient with those four that are difficult to get along with. There are only three students in the room that have behavior problems. All of these students are male, and one has recently been released from his TSS. There are two students who spend time with the autistic/emotional support teacher. These two students participate in a lunch bunch where they learn social skills. There are four students in the class that have a lot of trouble getting their work done. There are two students in the classroom
that attend Title 1 and only one student has been diagnosed with a learning disability. There are two students in the classroom who receive Title I reading support.

Both classrooms partake in daily Morning Meetings in which students greet one another, have sharing, engage in an activity and participate in calendar math. At the beginning of the school year, the classrooms completed various community-building activities that allowed the students to get to know one another.

**Rationale:**

Ms. Balarezo’s class: Since the beginning of the year, I noticed that some girls in our class were struggling with what I refer to as “girl drama”. The girls would come in from recess in tears, and we would have to take time from academic pursuits to address these issues. The girls were constantly changing friends, which is normal for this age, but they would exclude their previous best friend from the new friendship. It seemed that to them, they could only have one or two best friends, and everyone else was not able to be included in the friendship. This caused a lot of drama in our class and some of the girls didn’t know who to play with or what to do during free time. I could see that some girls were purposely excluding others and that was causing a lot of stress. Other girls were having problems standing up for each other. Sometimes a student was put down and the previous best friend would not stand up for her because the new best friend was the one giving the put down.

Another issue that we struggled with was almost the opposite. There were a couple of girls that were such best friends that they were distracting during the day. At one point, one student said to the other that she needed some time apart and the other student began crying and did not understand at all. At times there were students using their friendships as leverage. “If you want to be my friend you have to do this.” This made some girls feel uncomfortable and unable to fully focus on our lessons and activities throughout the day. Because these issues were really taking away from instructional time, I decided to look into why it was happening (especially at such a young age) and what we could do to help strengthen our classroom community. I began wondering if community building activities and strategies could help make the girls more respectful and kinder to each other.

Ms. Denlinger’s Class: There are some students in the classroom that generally interact with the same students every day, blatantly excluding some others. There are often unkind remarks made toward or about other students that sometimes result in tears. When students are able to choose partners, they pick the same students every time. When students are randomly put into partners, many students whine and complain about who they are with. During the greeting part of our Morning Meeting, many students continually greet the same small group of classmates. They often sit by the same students on the same part of the carpet, causing a specific group of students to always be chosen last. Through this inquiry project, I would like to see my class grow as a community and begin to treat others the way that they wish to be treated.

**Wondering:**

- How can community building help children become more respectful and kind to everyone?

**Sub-wonderings:**
• In what ways is treating all friends respectfully a problem with many girls this age now or is it specific to our group of girls?
• How does the media affect student’s friendship issues and attitudes?
• Are students noticing the friendship issues as well? Do they share them with their parents or are they mostly keeping the issues to themselves?
• In what ways can participation in community service help students with these issues?
• What else affects social interactions in the classroom (language, culture, learning disabilities)?
• How does a child’s temperament affect the way he/she treats others?

**Data Collection**

*Parent survey* – the intern will send home a survey to the parents asking questions regarding the way their child feels about school and their classmates.

*Student survey* – the intern will have her students complete a survey about how they feel they are treated in the classroom and how they feel they treat others. This will be repeated after implementation of community building activities.

*Other teacher surveys/interviews* – the intern will survey/interview other teachers in the primary grades to find out if there is also girl drama in their classrooms or similar issues.

*Student interviews* – the intern will interview some students about their comfort level in the classroom and around their classmates. This will be repeated after implementation of community building activities.

*Anecdotal observations* – the intern will record observations in written form about instances relating to the inquiry project.

*Strategic observations* – the intern will record observations on a chart for different areas of interaction between students

*Grumble Box* – the intern will gather data from amount of times the grumble box is used during the day and for what reasons.
Ms. Balarezo’s Weekly plan:

February 2-8
* Firmed up wondering
* Began observations

February 9-15
* Continue observations
* Schedule meeting with Joanne Morrison for next week
* Have parent letter and parent survey for Principal by Friday
* Create student surveys
* Write brief for next Monday

February 16-22
* Continue observations
* Survey students
* Create observation sheet for para, mentor, PDA
* Send parent surveys on Friday

February 23-Mach 1
* Continue observations/begin systematic observations
* Interview individual students
* Begin community-building activity with class and girls
* Sit in on lunch bunch (Wednesday)
* Introduce class buddies

March 2-8
* Continue observations
* Continue implementing community-building activities

March 9-15
* Spring Break

March 16-22
* Continue observations
* Continue implementing community-building activities

March 23-29
* Continue observations
* Continue implementing community-building activities

March 30-April 5
* Observations/collection of data – “After” portion of implementation
*Begin thinking of claims based on data.

**April 6-12**
*Analyze data
*Write claims/evidence
*Draft for peer reviewer due April 11.

**April 13-19**
*Finalize paper
*Prepare presentation?

**April 20-26**
*Finalize presentation (at the beginning of the week)
*Present on April 25th
Appendix C

Ms. Denlinger’s Timeline

Feb. 16-20
- Send home parent letter and survey
- Hand out student surveys
- Collect data
- Have class meeting #2

Feb. 23-27
- Interview Eileen Pearsol
- Interview students
- Class meeting #3
- Decide on top 3 community service projects
- Implement new greeting
- Do community building activity
- Collect data

Mar. 2-6
- Collect Data
- Community building activity
- Plan 1st community service project

Mar. 9-13
- SPRING BREAK

Mar. 16-20
- Collect data
- Plan community service project #2
- Implement community service project #1
- Community Building activity

Mar. 23-27
- Collect data
- Plan community service project #3
- Implement community service project #2
- Community building activity

Mar. 30-Apr. 3
- Collect data
- Implement community service project #3
- Community building activity
- Begin forming claims based on data

Apr. 6-10
- Collect/analyze data
Solidify claims
Write paper

Apr. 13-17
Finalize paper
Prepare presentation

Apr. 20-24
Practice presentation

April 25
Present at Inquiry Conference
Appendix D

Annotated Bibliography


Lyn Mikel Brown is an author and researcher on girls’ social and psychological development. In this article she addresses the issue of “mean girls” and how our young girls are being affected by it. Her article has some excellent information about why these issues continue to happen, why they are encouraged. Her research will be helpful during our inquiry project and she also has strategies to help parents deal with the issue of girl-fighting, which we can also use in our classrooms.

Child Development Project. (February 1996). Ways We Want Our Class to Be: Class Meetings That Build Commitment to Kindness and Learning. Developmental Studies Center.

This book provides tools and activities to improve the Morning Meeting as well as information on starting a Morning Meeting in a classroom. There are many great ideas of things to add to a Morning Meeting as well as how to go about implementing those activities. This resource would be useful for any teacher interested in implementing Morning Meetings for the first time and for teachers looking to improve their Morning Meeting already in place. This resource is relevant to this project because much of the community building will take place in the Morning Meeting.


This article focuses on the importance of teaching children to provide kind and caring comments about students’ sharing. The author does a wonderful job of outlining the steps of teaching children to make caring comments and offers a variety of suggestions to the reader about teaching the students how to share in a way that prompts questions and comments. This article will be useful because it offers great ideas for adding talk into the Morning Meeting as well as how to teach your students to use kind words.

This book provides useful information about ways to run a classroom. The authors discuss methods and activities to make the classroom a welcoming and nurturing environment for all types of students. This resource was very useful in regards to looking at classrooms successful at making students feel liked and comfortable. This resource relates to the inquiry project because it touches on many aspects of a welcoming classrooms, which is the goal for the end result of the project.


This book contains information and tips for teachers to create a good relationship with the parents of the classroom. It discusses ways to handle diverse families and provides tools for establishing productive parent-teacher relationships from the beginning of the year. This source is particularly useful because it is always important to have a sincere relationship with the parents. Contact with the families will be made during this project, making this book very beneficial.


In this book, the author addresses the issue of relational aggression among preteen and teen girls. She offers strategies to prevent this aggression from happening and also strategies to use if it does happen. This book will help us tremendously in finding strategies to use in our class for long-term achievements and immediate interventions.


This book focuses on the first six weeks of school throughout various grade levels. It talks about how to build community in the classroom through setting routines and expectations, and through various activities. Although it is no longer the beginning of the year, we can use this book to get some community building ideas for our classroom and information on the benefits of working from the beginning of the year to build community.

E. Pearsall, personal communication, Future Date

We will conduct an interview from this school counselor at a future date.

This resource discusses why students should be able to use their words to assert themselves in a respectful way. The article provides examples from a classroom in which students were able to use strong and respectful words to stand up for themselves as well as ways to talk to your class about using these words. This article relates to this inquiry because it offers suggestions and tips as to how to get your students to use words that will help others see their point of view, which can transfer into many lessons within our community building activities.


This article discusses how literature can impact discussions on conflict resolution and apologizing. The article offers literature suggestions to use with the class as well as talking points with the books. This resource is useful for this inquiry project because discussing how to work through problems is relevant to the ongoing situations in both classrooms. This article will be a great resource when talking with the class about how sometimes saying “sorry” just is not enough.


This game teaches children skills that will help them work together in a much more cooperative manner. It provides needed materials, set-up, game description, time requirements, instructions, and helpful hints. This game relates to the project because it is a useful game that will allow the students to begin working together as a team. The game will also provide a good talking point for the student and teacher about working together and getting along.


This article discusses relational aggression beginning at preschool age. It discussed research showing that parents who use psychological control/punishment/manipulation had children who were the aggressors in this age group. This article definitely relates to our inquiry project, since we are discussing issues with students before they reach the
No More Drama! 29

preteen/teen years (which is what most articles focus on.) This gives us a nice background for our projects dealing with much younger children.

Hill, A., & Helmore, E. (2002). Mean girls. Schoolgirls’ ways of being cruel to each other are now so insidious and sophisticated that their victims can feel the devastating effects well into adulthood., Retrieved February 16, 2009, from http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2002/mar/03/schools.uk.

This article discusses the long-term effects of relational aggression and the path that bullying is taking among girls. It discusses how serious the situation gets when girls move from an elementary school setting into a middle school setting. This is a great information article for us, and truly motivating to get our girls to end their relational aggression so that it does not get worse in the years ahead.

J. Morrison, personal communication, February 16, 2009

The interview with Joanne provided me with a lot of professional opinions about the friendship issues in my class and some valuable strategies to put into effect to help with community building.


This article focuses on “tweens” and the activities that this age group partakes in during free times. It also heavily discusses the effects that the media on this age group. The effects of the media on children is one of our sub wonderings so we thought this article would be a helpful resource.


This book discusses all aspects and benefits of classroom morning meetings. It is a great resources for ideas and activities for community building from the beginning of the year through the end of the year. This is very helpful for us because it gives many strategies
and activities to do with a class to build community and keep communication lines open among teachers and students.


This article discusses relational aggression as one form of alternative aggression and the ways that girls use their relationships to hurt others. They can use new relationships to exclude friends, spread rumors, and make others do as they're told. This article has a lot of facts regarding the “girl drama” that I will be studying and it will be very helpful to our inquiry. I was surprised to find that I am seeing the things the author discusses happening with my 2nd grade girls.


This interview, conducted with the principal of Houserville Elementary and Lemont Elementary, provided information regarding limitations of community service projects, resources available to interns and teachers, and suggestions of things to do with the project. This source was very useful. The interview provided more information than anticipated and applied to both the community service aspect of the project and the community building part.


This article discusses the journey that one classroom took to better their community. The author provides great advice as to how to go about getting the students interested in community service, organizing an event, and incorporating lessons into the projects. This resource proves to be very useful in regards to the community service activities being planned in one of the classrooms. The information in the article also offers great talking points for discussions in the classroom.


Northeast Foundation for Children.

This book discusses the different developmental stages that children go through throughout their childhood years. It has a lot of great information to allow readers to understand why specific activities are work and others don’t with a certain group of students. It is very helpful in our project because we can see what behaviors are common and expected of our students and which issues need to be resolved that do not stem from developmental changes.
February 20, 2009

Dear Families,

As a PDS intern, I get the opportunity to engage in a collaborative inquiry project in which I take a wondering about our classroom, our students, the curriculum, etc., and learn more about it through research and data collection. For my inquiry project, I would like to learn more about how community building activities and strategies can strengthen friendships and encourage kindness and respect among our students. As part of my data collection, I would like to learn a little more about all of my students from their families’ perspective. Attached is a survey of questions regarding your child, his/her friendships, and out of school activities. If you are willing and able, please answer the questions and return to school on Monday in your child’s Friday folder. Please use the lines to elaborate or explain any of your answers. If you prefer not to answer a specific question, please feel free to skip it. Thank you so much in advance for your help with this project!

Sincerely,

Andrea Balarezo

1. Is your child usually excited to come to school?

YES  NO

________________________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________

2. Does your child ever voice concerns about others in the classroom?

YES  NO

________________________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________

3. Does your child ever voice concerns about being left out of other students’ activities?

YES  NO

________________________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________

4. Does your child have play dates with students from his/her class?

________________________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________
5. Is your child involved in social, service or team activities outside of school?

YES  NO

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________________

6. How does your child spend the majority of his/her time after-school? (Examples: playing with friends, reading, watching t.v., outside, playing sports, etc.)

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________
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__________________________________________________________________________________________________________

7. Does your child watch t.v. during the week or on weekends? If so, what types of shows?

YES  NO

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________________

8. Are you satisfied with the way your child is treated by other students?

YES  NO

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________________

9. Are you satisfied with the way your child treats other students?

YES  NO

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________________

10. Do you have any other questions, comments, suggestions, or concerns about our classroom social environment?

YES  NO

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________________
Dear Room 21 Parents,

As a Penn State Professional Development School (PDS) intern, I am required to do an inquiry project in my classroom. Inquiry is a relatively new process in the teaching community in which students and teachers learn through questioning and implementation.

The goal that I have for our classroom, including the adults, is to be an accepting and welcoming community of learners. I would like to see students in the classroom choosing a variety of people to work with. I would also like to see all of the students in the classroom choosing kind words and expressions to use with one another.

My inquiry project involves using community service and community building activities and observing the effect it has on the classroom community. I am working with another intern who teaches in a first/second grade classroom at Park Forest Elementary. We will each be collecting data in our own classrooms and then coming together to compile our information.

As the students and I come to a final decision as to what service projects we would like to do, your child will hopefully begin to share that information with you. One way you can help is to complete the attached survey to provide me with useful information regarding the way your child feels about coming to school and doing community service.

Attached to the survey and this letter is an envelope to hold the completed survey. Please return the surveys by Wednesday, February 23rd.

Thank you so much for your help and cooperation. If you have any questions or comments you can email me at mrd27@scasd.org.

Thank you,

Megan Denlinger
1. Is your child usually excited to come to school?

YES  NO
__________________________________________________________________________________________________________
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2. Does your child ever voice concerns about others in the classroom?

YES  NO
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3. Does your child ever voice concerns about being left out of other students’ activities?

YES  NO
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4. Does your child have play dates with students from his/her class?

YES  NO
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5. Is your child involved in social, service or team activities outside of school?

YES  NO
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6. How does your child spend the majority of his/her time after-school? (Examples: playing with friends, reading, watching t.v., outside, playing sports, etc.)
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7. Does your child watch t.v. during the week or on weekends? If so, what types of shows?

YES  NO
8. Are you satisfied with the way your child is treated by other students?

YES  NO

9. Are you satisfied with the way your child treats other students?

YES  NO

10. Do you have any other questions, comments, suggestions, or concerns about our classroom social environment?

YES  NO

11. Does your child participate in any community service activities or does your child volunteer anywhere outside of school? If so, what and where?

YES  NO
Appendix G

Name ____________________________________________

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Always</th>
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<tr>
<td>2. I yell at other students.</td>
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<td>3. If students who are my friends are arguing, I stay out of it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. I talk about classmates behind their backs</td>
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<td>5. When I am mad, I walk away to cool off.</td>
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<td>6. I feel well-liked in the classroom.</td>
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<td>7. I feel included by other students in group activities.</td>
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<td>8. I listen to the opinions of other people whether they are my close friends or not.</td>
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<td>9. When I go home at night, I worry about my relationships with my friends.</td>
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<td>10. I feel comfortable/safe making mistakes in the classroom.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. I exclude others from my group.</td>
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<td>12. I think about other people’s feelings before I make decisions.</td>
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13. What do you think is usually the cause of friendship issues?
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

14. About how many students in this classroom do you think are your good friends? Who?
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
Appendix H

Name: S5

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<td>2. I yell at other students.</td>
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<td>12. I think about other people's feelings before I make decisions.</td>
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13. What do you think is usually the cause of friendship issues?  | Not of times there are toys that we all want to play with and it turns into a competion.  |

14. About how many students in this classroom do you think are your good friends? | I would say almost everyone.  |
Appendix I

Ms. Balarezo's Student Surveys, Before

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Ms. Balarezo's Student Surveys, After

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Number of Students

No More Drama! 38
Appendix J

Results (in comparison to first survey):

- More students are always or usually comfortable in the classroom with classmates.
- Did not increase/decrease times students yell at each other
- Less students stay out of arguments that their friends are having
- More students sometimes talk about their friends behind their backs
- Less students walk away to cool off if they are angry – More students sometimes or never walk away.
- More students always or usually feel well-liked in the classroom
- Did not increase/decrease feeling of inclusion in group activities
- Did not increase/decrease whether students’ listen to opinions of others
- More students sometimes go home and worry about relationship issues with friends than before (when they never worried)
- Fewer students always feel comfortable making mistakes and now usually feel comfortable making mistakes in the classroom.
- Fewer students exclude others from their groups
- It is inconclusive as to whether more or less students think about others’ feelings before making decisions.
Appendix K

Ms. Denlinger's Student Surveys, Before

<table>
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Ms. Denlinger's Student Surveys, After

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Appendix L

Results (In comparison to first survey):

- More students always feel comfortable in the classroom with their classmates.
- There is no significant change in the amount of students that yell at other students.
- Fewer students stay out of their friends’ arguments.
- There is no significant change in the amount of students talking behind other students’ backs.
- Fewer students walk away to cool off when they are angry.
- More students feel well-liked in the classroom.
- There is no significant change in the amount of students that feel included by other students in group activities.
- More students always listen to the opinions of other students in the classroom.
- More students always worry about relationships with their friends when they go home.
- More students always feel comfortable and safe making mistakes in the classroom.
- Fewer students always exclude others from their group.
- There is no significant change in the amount of students that think about other people’s feelings before making decisions.
Appendix M

How we want our classroom to be:

During our implementation stage, Ms. Balarezo’s mentor had a classroom meeting about how the students want the classroom to be. During this discussion the students came up with the following standards for their classroom:

- Organized and clean
- Kind students
- Kind teachers
- Not too loud

When students are not behaving the way that they said they want the classroom to be, the teachers are able to refer back to our list and ask, “is this how we want our classroom to be?”.

The students respond better to this because it is something that they created themselves.
Appendix N

How we should treat others:

During a classroom meeting at the end of the implementation stage (April 2, 2009), Ms. Balarezo’s class watched the Public Service Announcement “How to be a good friend”. After watching this PSA, the students came up with ways that they should treat one another to have a pleasant classroom. This was the list that they came up with during this classroom meeting:

- Stand up for each other (but do not attack others)
- Be understanding
- Include everyone
- No fighting
- Always share
- Be happy
- Be helpful
- Be caring
- Be kind
Appendix O

Ms. Balarezo’s Grumble Box:

During the implementation stage of the inquiry project, I introduced the grumble box to my students. This box was a way for students to “tell” on another student or share about a negative social interaction without taking class-time away from others. The grumble box served as a strategy to deal with friendship issues and also as a form of data collection. At the end of each of the three weeks the students had the grumble box available, I removed the papers from the box and recorded the names of the students and the number of times they were put into the box. Here is a summary of the students each week:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1:</th>
<th>Week 2:</th>
<th>Week 3:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S2 – 1</td>
<td>S4 – 3</td>
<td>S5 – 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4 – 6</td>
<td>S5 – 2</td>
<td>S8 – 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S5 – 2</td>
<td>S6 – 1</td>
<td>S13 – 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S6 – 2</td>
<td>S7 – 1</td>
<td>S15 – 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S7 – 2</td>
<td>S10 – 2</td>
<td>S17 – 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S9 – 1</td>
<td>S13 – 1</td>
<td>S18 – 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S10 – 5</td>
<td>S15 – 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S15 – 4</td>
<td>S17 – 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S17 – 6</td>
<td>S18 – 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S18 – 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S20 - 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total students in box: 11  Total students in box: 9  Total students in box: 6
Number of “tells”: 35  Number of “tells”: 23  Number of “tells”: 13
Appendix P

Ms. Denlinger’s Grumble Box:

As I began to implement new strategies in my classroom, I decided to create a Grumble Box. This box was to be an outlet for my students where they could tell who was being mean and exclusive as well as write down classroom situations that were bothering them. I made my Grumble Box an anonymous outlet so that students would not have to sign their name. I also explained to them that they do not have to put the name of the person that they are mad at or that is being mean to them, but I explained that if they did not put the name I would not be able to help them with the situation. I checked the Grumble Box approximately every day, but kept count of entries on a weekly basis. I counted the total number of entries, as well as taking note of any entries that included the name of the person causing the problem. Here is a summary of the students each week:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1:</th>
<th>Week 2:</th>
<th>Week 3:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S2 – 6</td>
<td>S2 – 3</td>
<td>S2 – 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4 – 1</td>
<td>S7 – 2</td>
<td>S10 – 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S7 – 3</td>
<td>S10 – 3</td>
<td>S11 – 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S8 – 2</td>
<td>S11 – 3</td>
<td>S14 – 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S10 – 5</td>
<td>S14 – 4</td>
<td>S17 – 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S11 – 3</td>
<td>S15 – 1</td>
<td>No Name – 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S14 – 5</td>
<td>S17 – 4</td>
<td>No Name - 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S15 – 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S17 – 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Name – 11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total students in box: 9  Total students in box: 7  Total students in box: 5
Number of “tells”: 42     Number of “tells”: 30     Number of “tells”: 12
Community Building Activities & Strategies:

In our classrooms there were a variety of activities and strategies that were implemented to encourage kindness and respect among students. Some of these strategies were used in both classrooms, while others were used in only one of the classrooms.

- **Morning greetings:** the focus of the morning meetings became to encourage students to greet those they normally don’t spend much free-time with (so that they are not constantly greeting the same students). We focused on “compliment greetings” in which the students gave a compliment to the person they were greeting about a characteristic or trait instead of something we can see on the outside like appearance.

- **Classroom Buddies:** On a weekly basis, the students were assigned a classroom buddy. Their buddy was who the student was to sit next to during lunch, read with during S.O.A.R. time, sit with on the carpet, and play with during free-time if they desired. This encouraged students to get to know each other better.

- **Lunch Bunch:** Students were selected to have lunch with Ms. Balarezo in the classroom and discuss friendship issues in our classroom.

- **Classroom meetings:** On occasion, the class would have meetings regarding different issues that arose. The students were able to discuss how we want our classroom to be and how they should be treating one another.

- **Grumble Box:** The grumble box was used as a place for students to write names or situations that bothered them during the day. This was used as a strategy to deal with friendship issues and as a way to collect data.
Kindness Jar: Although the kindness jar was implemented at the beginning of the year, it was reinforced during this time. It was important to have the kindness jar available to the students so that we were not only focusing on the negative (grumble box).

Family Meetings: Throughout this project, there were several families who requested meetings about their students regarding friendship issues in the class. This was a great opportunity to share some finding with the parents and get some family involvement.

Friendship bear: The friendship bear was used as a strategy to help students during times of anger and during friendship meetings. The bear could be used as someone to hug, talk to, scream to, or “mediate” during meetings.

Friendship meetings: Students requested friendship meetings when they had issues with one another. Ms. Balarezo facilitated these meetings at the beginning, and toward the end the students were conducting the meetings themselves.

Community service: Students brainstormed ideas of projects that they could plan and work on to better their community. The students then began to implement their first activity by planning the details for a school-wide book drive in which Ms. Denlinger merely supervised the details.

“Zero Food Waste”: The students worked together every day at lunch to reach their goal of Zero Food Waste (ZFW). The students were reminded to “take what they want, but eat what they take” as they were getting their lunch. The students were then responsible for placing all uneaten or partially eaten food in a container at the end of their lunch. This container would then be weighed to record the amount of ZFW the class had as a total.