What Happened to the R-E-S-P-E-C-T in Second Grade?

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**Description of the Teaching Context**

As a Professional Development School (PDS) Intern through Pennsylvania State University, I work in a self-contained second grade classroom at Easterly Parkway Elementary School. My classroom consists of twenty students, eleven girls and nine boys. Each of my students have a unique personality, and behaviors, and social skills that help to impact our classroom community. In addition to the students in the class, there are four adults in the classroom. In the mornings, we have two Para-Professionals (Paras) in the room. One of the Paras is strictly there to aid one of our students. This student has trouble focusing in whole and small group situations, and is easily distracted. She is there to help him during morning activities and math class. The other Para is in the room until after lunch. She helps out with many of the morning routines. She is also in charge of teaching the program Words Their Way during literacy centers.

When talking with other teachers in the school, they constantly compliment me on how well behaved my students are. In whole group situations when other teachers are observing them, most of the time they are well behaved. During their observations, the majority of the students are consistently participating in whole and small group discussions; and they are following directions. However, the other teachers in the school do not see the times when my students talk while others are speaking; when they call out; when they are rude to each other; or when they interrupt a teacher during instruction. My students are not only rude to each other; they are rude to the teachers in the class as well. These behaviors cause other students in the class to have a hard time focusing. The students that are constantly misbehaving are very distracting to the teacher and the other students around them. This misbehavior is something that
can consistently be seen in the classroom from a variety of students on a daily basis. With the additional adults in the room, our classroom can at times be overwhelming. Everyday, the other teachers and I have to redirect our students who act out, who are being rude, and who are off task. It has become quite frustrating to constantly have to re-guide students behaviors, because I have seen that my students have the ability to be respectful and well behaved in the classroom. Throughout this inquiry, I will be providing many community-building opportunities to help my students become more aware of their behaviors; which will ultimately help to impact them in becoming better classroom citizens. (See Appendix A for full Inquiry Brief and Annotated Bibliography)

Wonderings and Questions

Main Wondering

My inquiry question focuses on integrating community-building activities to facilitate students in growing to become more aware of their feelings and the feelings of others in the classroom.

_How will students become better citizens to improve the classroom community?_

Sub-Wonderings

- How will literacy help to promote the students to become better citizens?
- To what degree will implementing a puppet help the students solve their problems in the classroom in order to make a better community?
- What effect will having the students respond to literature and situations through writing help them understand and become better citizens?
- How will classroom meetings help to encourage a stronger classroom community, allowing each student to become a better citizen?
Data Collection

Clear Description of Data Collection

Throughout my research, I collected an assortment of data to see the changes in my students’ behavior over time. The data collection was implemented before, during and, after the implementation of community building activities in the classroom.

BEFORE

Before starting this inquiry, I had many wonderings about why my students were not being respectful to one another. In the fall semester, I worked with my students to create a public service announcement for my social studies class. This announcement was used to promote respectfulness in the classroom and throughout our entire school. Together, my students and I created a pledge of respectfulness. The students use this pledge to help remind them to be respectful to one another. (See Appendix B for the PSA pledge).

Throughout the year, I have written many different response journals about the questions I had about why my students were being disrespectful to each other. These journals helped me to describe the different situations I observed throughout the beginning of the year. (See Appendix C for reflection journals).

Another piece of data that I began collecting before the implementation of my inquiry project was all of the various notes that the guest teachers had left for my mentor. In these notes I was able to look at the different times that my students had behaved well and when they displayed disrespectful acts to the teacher. (See Appendix K for guest teacher responses).

The above data helped to guide me to my question about getting my students to become better citizens in the classroom. I was able to determine that throughout the year this was
something that was not a strength for my students, and during my inquiry I planned on creating activities to help enhance their ability to be more respectful in the classroom.

**DURING**

Most of my data was collected throughout the inquiry project due to the fact that the majority of the data was from student work. I started off the inquiry by introducing my students to a puppet. This puppet (Sophie) has helped to lead classroom discussions. These discussions relate to the problems that were occurring in the classroom. However, these problems were brought up to the students as if the problems were happening to the puppet. The puppet would ask for the students help. The students and the puppet discussed ways that she could solve the problems with her friends. The students wrote in a response journal to give the puppet advice in solving her problems. For example, some of the students in the class were bullying some of the other students. They were picking on each other by calling them names and using rude tones. When Sophie came out to the class for the first time, she explained how her friend was picking on her and she did not know what to say to her friend. Sophie and the students talked about the feelings that you feel when someone is bullying you. They also wrote in their response journals about different ways that Sophie could talk to her friend about what happened.

The students were also introduced to many different read aloud books that helped to reinforce the conversations that were being held with the puppet. They had a chance to respond to the books as well as the puppet’s questions. The puppet then used the examples that the students gave in their response journals to guide the class discussions the following day. These discussions also incorporated how they could use the solutions in the classroom as well. As a class, we also came up with different lists that summarize the various solutions we could use to
solve problems in the classroom. In addition to the response journals, students were encouraged to write any other feelings or questions that they had to the puppet. These additional notes helped me in understanding students’ opinions that could not be heard during the class discussions. (See Appendix D for student response journals, Appendix E for additional notes, and Appendix F for classroom lists).

During the class meetings when the puppet was involved, I recorded the sessions. Videos and voice recordings were taken so that I was able to go over the data after completing the lesson. I found it extremely difficult to analyze the lesson, when I was also manipulating the puppet. I was involved in the conversations that were going on, so the videos and voice recordings helped to give me an overall perspective of what was occurring throughout the lesson. When manipulating the puppet, I was only able to really focus on the reactions of a couple of students at one time. I used the videos to get a better understanding of the reactions of the whole group of students. I also found it extremely helpful to use the video recordings to listen to the individual responses of the students. When I was looking at the video and listening to the voice recordings, I used systematic observations to track the amount of times that the students were off task and how many times the students had to be redirected during the lessons. (See Appendix G for puppet interaction iMovies, Appendix H for GarageBand voice clips, and Appendix I for systematic observations).

In the middle of the inquiry, I designed and conducted a survey to understand my students’ opinions on being respectful on various levels. The survey asked the students to define being respectful in their own words. It was a great way to see how each of the students described what it means to be respectful to them. I also asked the students to describe how respectful they think they are, and how respectful our entire class is. The purpose of this survey was to acquire
information about the students’ understanding of what it means to be respectful. (See Appendix J for examples of student survey: during).

I continued to use the guest teacher notes during my inquiry as well. Throughout the past semester we had many guest teachers in the classroom. It was important for me to continue using their notes to keep track of their behavior. The purpose of keeping all of the guest teacher feedback notes was to see if throughout my inquiry the students negative behavior decreased, and their positive behavior increased. (See Appendix K for sample guest teacher responses).

AFTER

I think that it is important to continue the community building activities because the students are still learning specific ways in which they can be respectful to others in the classroom. At the end of collecting data of the inquiry, I created a survey to further understand my students’ opinions on being respectful on various levels and to see if their answers changed in comparison to the first survey. The survey asked the students to define being respectful in their own words, just like on the first survey. I wanted to see if their ideas on respect have changed since the first survey. I also asked the students to describe how respectful they think they are, and how respectful our entire class is, as in the first survey. The students had been behaving much better than earlier on in the year and I thought that this would help me to understand if their impression of themselves had changed a lot. I also added two additional questions. I wanted to understand how they felt about the various read alouds that we used in the classroom. I asked them if they felt as though the books read at morning meeting have helped them in becoming more respectful. The final question was related to Sophie. I wanted to know their opinion on whether or not the puppet influenced how respectful the students are in the
classroom. The purpose of this survey was to acquire information about the students’ understanding of what it means to be respectful and to see if their ideas on respect had changed at all since the first survey. (See Appendix L for student survey: after).

In addition, I have feedback from the guest teachers that have been in our room. It is vital to see if there is a change between their behaviors during the inquiry to their behavior towards the end of the inquiry project. By keeping all of the feedback from the guest teachers, I will be able to see the overall behaviors exhibited by my students throughout the entire inquiry project.

Throughout the entire school year we had days where we needed a guest teacher in our classroom. This was due to the times that my mentor was out of the classroom for professional development. Out of those days, there were notes left by the guest teacher describing how problems occurred with in the classroom. It was helpful to track the different behaviors in the notes left throughout the school year.

**Data Analysis**

**Steps Taken to Analyze the Data**

Throughout the inquiry, I had been collected many different types of data. It was important for me to keep all of the data organized throughout the inquiry in order to aid in answering my main wondering and sub questions.

For every question that the students responded to, I recorded their responses into the computer. These questions came from questions that Sophie asked the students to respond to. Other questions cam from the group discussions about the read alouds read during morning meetings. Once the responses were on the computer, I was able to recognize patterns throughout their responses. Out of the twenty students in the class all but two of the students were able to
give a response to the questions each time. Out of the 18 students who responded each time, sixteen of the students gave examples and solutions for the problems described in the question. The other two children gave only examples, no responses on how to solve the problem in the question. In addition to the student responses in the response journals, there were three students who added their own additional comments to the puppet. Out of those responses, two of the comments related to the questions that were asked for the response journals.

For the first survey I conducted, I was impressed on the amount of work produced, and how neat the handwriting was in the responses that were given from the students. I first looked at their responses of what they believed it meant to be respectful. Out of the twenty student responses, fourteen of their responses discussed how students need to be nice to one another. Fifteen out of twenty students said that “the class as a whole is okay” at being respectful. Three students said that as a whole our class was ‘good,’ and one student thought that our class was ‘bad’ at being respectful. Sixteen out of twenty students thought that they were ‘good’ at being respectful. The other four thought that they were ‘okay’ at being respectful. This survey really helped me to understand that as a whole most of my students agreed on many of the questions.

While watching the videos and listening to the voice recordings, I was able to see the different ways the students reacted during the community building activities. The responses from the students enabled me to listen and understand their points of view, their feelings, and reactions to the activities that are occurring in the classroom.

**Explanation of Findings**
After analyzing my data, I was able to determine similar patterns that helped me to create three strong claims that support my main wondering of aiding students into becoming better classroom citizens.

**Claim #1: Literacy discussions help to engage students in thinking about their actions in regards to others in the classroom.**

Throughout the inquiry project, I have included many different forms of read aloud books to the students. Before and after reading the books, my students and I discuss the different topics that are in the story. The situations that the characters deal with in the story are problems that are occurring in our classroom. For example, many of the students were having a hard time not saying mean things to the other students in the class. I read a story that dealt with a character that was being made fun of by the other characters in the story. After reading the story I had the students respond asking them if they have ever been made fun of in school, and how did it make them feel. Out of twenty students, twelve students reported incidents where they were being made fun of and how they felt about what was happening. Below are a few examples of what students wrote:

3.3.09:

Student 20-One day me and my Best frens (friends) whent (went) to the paerk (park) to play we whent (went) to asske (ask) the kids that were playing basball (baseball) if we can play to no you can not play it me and my frens (friends) feelings wew (were) hrte (hurt) we tode (told) my mom and we get in the game

Student 4- Once I fell angry (angry) because some people teesed (teased) me because I was diret (different). And so I said I do not like whe (when) you tese (tease) me.

Student 18- Dear Sophie, I felt sad when my brother took my new crayons. He did not ask me at all. Then he came back and gave me them. From, C

These students all explain the event in which they were being made fun of and how they felt during the time the event occurred. The students were able to show their emotions through
their writing. The students were able to relate to the character in the story, because they had once felt the same way that she did. Picking characters that the students could relate to really helped to develop the discussion after their response journals. Throughout the group discussions, the students and I created lists that describe strategies that we can use in the classroom to help us become better classroom citizens. There were three lists created throughout the read aloud books read to the class. Below is an example of some of the solutions that were created by the students.

1. Use an I message
2. Walk away
3. Try something different
4. Think about what you want to say before you say it
5. Use your manners.

These lists are displayed in the classroom at all times. The lists include many great topics that give ideas that the students can use to help them to solve problems that occur in the classroom. After watching video recordings of the discussion, I have found that the students are on task more when read alouds are incorporated into the meetings. For the week of April 6th, the first meeting did not include a read aloud, and the students exhibited thirty-seven kinds of off task behavior, compared to the end of the week (three read alouds later), there were only eleven off-task behaviors shown by the students. In one week there was a decrease in off-task behavior when there was a read aloud included in the meeting.

Overall the students have shown me that when read aloud books are read to the students they are more likely to be on-task, and focused on the classroom discussion.
Claim #2: Students are more likely to act as good citizens when my mentor and I are in the classroom.

Since the beginning of the school year, my mentor teacher has been out of the classroom for professional development training. During the days when my mentor was out of the classroom, the students acted out the majority of the time. More than half of the times the students showed a specific behavior that caused the guest teacher to write a note about it. Below is an example of a note written by one of my guest teachers.

“Another incident at end of day involving H, M, and J with A giving the teacher a play by play about who had the squirt bottle of table cleaner. They ended up splitting the different aspects of the job.”

After coming back to school and reading a note like that, I began to worry. What can I do to enhance the students while both my mentor and I are not in the classroom? By incorporating a puppet and a daily read aloud book into the classroom, the students have a daily opportunity to discuss the negative and positive behaviors that they exhibit into the classroom. Since the inquiry project has been implemented, the amounts of negative notes from the guest teachers have decreased. There have been eleven guest teachers since the inquiry project began, only four of those times we had a negative note written by the guest teacher.

Claim #3: A puppet is a great way to motivate students to want to be better citizens in the classroom.

From the first time that I introduced the puppet to the classroom, I have noticed a huge change in the students’ attentiveness during classroom meetings. While manipulating the puppet during the first class discussion, all but five of the students looked directly at the puppet as if she was ‘really’ speaking to them. During morning meetings when the puppet comes out into the
classroom, the students have to be redirected on an average of three times, compared to an average of nine times without the use of the puppet. This was determined by systematic observations.

The puppet has led the students to have conversations about her even when she is not there. One time the students misbehaved so much that I had to take the puppet away to see if it had an impact on their behavior. The next morning when the students arrived in the classroom, there was a note addressed to the students from the puppet. The note explained that she was so sad about what happened in the classroom that she had to leave. During the morning meeting, the students and I discussed things that we could do as a class to make sure that the puppet would want to come back to our classroom again. After two days of good behavior, the students were wondering why the puppet had not returned to the classroom. Later that afternoon, there were seven students who gave up their recess to make a ‘We Miss You’ card for the puppet. This was prompted by the students after a conversation they had in lunch about how much they missed her. While the students were creating the ‘We Miss You’ card, they were having a conversation discussing how the puppet means so much to them, and how they need her in the classroom. Below are some of the things that were being said by the students.

“Need need Sophie (puppet) back, she’s my friend ok, she’s my friend ok, and I need her.”

“Sophie really listens to me, she helps me be better.”

“Sophie is really sad because we fought and made her leave, weeeeee neeeed her to come back and help us, we are so sad.”

Through this discussion, the students were talking about how much they missed her and needed her in the classroom. They expected that she would come back soon because as a class
their behavior had improved. After the students’ behavior was really negative, it took the students two days until everyone was doing enough respectful things to bring her back. I found it so interesting in how much the students cared about the puppet. I have had one student since the puppet was re-introduced to the classroom ask me if they were being nice that day and if the puppet was going to stay.

**Reflections and Implications for Future Practice**

I believe that incorporating community-building activities on a daily basis has helped my students become better citizens in the community of our classroom. After the first six weeks of school, community building activities began to decrease and with that so did the students behavior. I have found that the community-building activities such as morning meeting discussion, read aloud books, and the incorporation of a puppet have helped to minimize many of the disrespectful behaviors that were exhibited in the beginning of the school year. I believe that if these community-building activities were introduced in the beginning of the year and continued throughout until the end of the year, the students would show more positive, respectful behaviors in the classroom.

I am truly passionate about creating an environment that is built on a community of learners. I believe that it is important for the teacher, and the students to form strong relationships from the beginning. These relationships will build and develop as the year progresses. During the first six weeks, the students are still transitioning and getting used to the routines and the schedule of the classroom. I believe during this time it is vital to create an environment conducive for all the students’ needs. As the students become more comfortable in the beginning of the year, I will have them help me in creating the classroom’s expectations. I
believe that students will be more inclined to meet the classroom objectives because they were involved in creating them. In this way, they will care more about preserving those expectations in the classroom.

I believe that by implementing the use of read alouds and a puppet into the classroom it will help to inspire students to become better classroom citizens as long it is a year long effort in which they have many opportunities to grow as a citizen in the classroom. In my future classroom I plan to incorporate those community building opportunities starting on the first day of school. I am hoping that by implementing these community building activities from the very beginning the students will be motivated to become better classroom and school citizens.

When I think back to my main wondering about how will students become classroom citizens, I think that I have learned so much more then I ever expected. I have become inspired to continue this throughout the rest of the year and into my first year of teaching. My students have encouraged me to find additional books, and explore more topics on how I can help them in becoming better classroom citizens. They have shown me how much they care, not only about their own actions, but how their actions can affect others. I believe that I have allowed students a chance to talk about feelings, themselves, and others. They have been able to freely express their opinion on how to solve certain negative and positive situations that occur in the classroom. I am so motivated to expand this inquiry project into my future classroom, because I have had the opportunity to watch my students grow into better classroom citizens in such a short amount of time. My new wondering is how would my students act if they had these community building opportunities throughout the entire year? I hope that in my future years as a teacher, I will have the opportunity to continue researching ways to get closer to understanding how to make my students into better classroom citizens.