Unity in the Elementary School Classroom:
Building Community Through Increasing Positive Social Interactions
Between and Among Students

Sally Piatt-Jaeger

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Table of Contents

Abstract

Children's sense of a community is essential in elementary schools. This helps gives students a sense of belonging and control over their environment.

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of several strategies from the Toolbox Project and their effect on building community in the classroom. Collin (2003b) discusses his Toolbox Project curriculum and defines it as a social and emotional learning curriculum for kindergarten through sixth grade students.

Grade six students at a faith based elementary school served as participants in this project. The teacher, as researcher, implemented select strategies from this program and monitored results. The researcher collected data from the students through focus group discussions, writing samples, and informal observations.

Findings and analysis indicate highly positive results overall, and demonstrate that unity and community within schools and classrooms can be attained effectively and efficiently with the assistance of the Toolbox Project program skill set. The twelve Toolbox Project tools are indeed tools for learning – tools for life (Collin, 2003a). They not only enhance creating and sustaining unity and community among individuals and groups, they also prepare our youth for successful futures embracing equality.

Chapter 1 Introduction

Within my recent years of teaching I have been fortunate enough to interact with a variety of students at different grade levels, age levels, and social development levels. If I have learned one thing so far in my experiences, it is that socialization and a sense of community, within the secure unity of a given school, is extremely important and relevant to students of all ages and grade levels. Students need to feel safe in their environment in order to fully express themselves through positive social interactions.

A method needs to be in place to inform students on how to express ways to positively interact with each other in social situations and to simultaneously help build school unity and a common community. Tools developed should build social skills throughout the elementary grade levels in order to deepen and enrich positive social norm behaviors, both inside and outside the classroom. Students may benefit from being shown how to appropriately and successfully express themselves and their behaviors in certain social situations.

Hallinan, Kubitschek, and Liu (2009) state that students benefit socially from belonging to a school community, and therefore empirical analyses demonstrate these positive effects. Goodenow (1993b) confers that school's community organization and positive students attitudes are linked. There seems to be a relationship that emerges between student achievement and motivation in the classroom, including classroom belonging, which takes place during early adolescence (Goodenow, 1993a). Hallinan et al. (2008) further describe this "link," and it's effects:

The primary mechanism that links school community to student academic and

social outcomes is rooted in the climate and culture of the school. Teachers and

students express the communal spirit of a school through their attitudes, values,

and behaviors. Teachers provide students with academic support, challenge them

to reach high academic goals, and show concern for them as well. Students learn

positive academic attitudes and positive social behaviors. As a result, students

accept school and social norms and values that help them grow cognitively,

emotionally, and socially (p. 6).

Statement of Problem

Elementary school students are not appropriately expressing themselves in social settings and

situations. Hence, students are currently using negative forms of behavior to express and convey

their emotions to peers. This is therefore leading to a decreasing feeling of unity within schools,

community in the classrooms, and with peers. Unity to be defined as oneness: the quality of

being united into one, and community to be defined as common ownership: the quality of

possessing common interests and goals.

 Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to improve elementary school students' behaviors, specifically sixth

grade students, in social settings both inside the classroom and out. Hopefully, leading to an

increased feeling of unity within the classroom and community among the school. Perhaps other

schools and districts may benefit from this study and also adapt the techniques and

methodologies mentioned. The Toolbox Project by Mark A. Collin (Collin, 2003a) has much to

offer to schools and the socialization of students when implemented into the classroom and

school curriculum, and can be followed throughout all elementary grade levels (K-8).

Research Question

How does building unity and community within the classroom and school actually increase and foster positive social interactions between and among students inside the classroom and on the playground? How does bullying influence the social interactions in the classroom and change the dynamic?

Theoretical Rationale

The theoretical rationale behind involving unity and community in school classrooms, is derived from both literature and past experimentation. Perhaps the most prevalent rationale emerges from Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1969). Bandura's Social Learning Theory provides positive feedback that people learn from one another, via observation, imitation, and modeling. This theory has often been referred to as a bridge between behaviorist and cognitive learning theories because it encompasses attention, memory, and motivation.

Bandura's theory is also related to Vygotsky's Social Development Theory (Learning Theories Knowledgebase, 2010b) and Lave's Situated Learning Theory (Learning Theories Knowledgebase, 2010a), which together emphasize the importance of social learning as well. Lev Vygotsky's Social Development Theory argues that social interactions precede development; therefore consciousness and cognition are the end product of socialization and social behaviors (Doolittle, 1995). Jean Lave's Situated Learning Theory posits that learning is unintentional and yet situated within authentic activity, context, and culture. That is, according to Lave and Wenger (1991), as it normally occurs in everyday life learning is embedded within activity, context and culture. It is also usually unintentional rather than actually deliberate.

Lave and Wenger (1991) call this process "legitimate peripheral participation" in their Communities of Practice Social Theory explanation. Lave and Wenger (1991) summarized

Communities of Practice (CoP) as groups of people who shared a common concern or passion for something they all did and learned how to better perform it as they interacted on a regular basis. The learning environment that forms is not necessarily intentional in all cases. However, there are three components that are required in order for a CoP to exist and sustain performance: (1) the domain, (2) the community, and (3) the practice (Learning Theories Knowledgebase, 2010a).

Assumptions

The assumptions in this research study include the idea that by building school community and unity in the elementary school classroom, there will be an increase in positive social interactions between and among students both inside and outside the classroom. Another assumption is that the Toolbox Project is an effective and efficient program for teaching socialization, and building unity and community within elementary schools.

Background and Need

The Toolbox Project was developed and established between 1993-2002 (Collin, 2003b). In November 2010 the Stuart Foundation funded a grant on the Toolbox Project/Sonoma County Collaboration for Resilient Children. De Long-Cotty (2010) in association with WestEd, conducted their research study on the effects of the Toolbox Project curriculum over a 15-week time period. Their research methods included looking at goals consisting of using Toolbox in the involvement of classroom, family, and parenting/mental health curricula: to improve links between school, home, and community efforts to support children's positive social, emotional, and behavioral growth; to improve resiliency skills and assets for children; and to improve school climate and connectedness for teachers and staff. Data analysis and the results of their

research show that the Toolbox Project curriculum is in fact effective and the study shows highly positive results for all parties involved (De Long-Cotty, 2010).

Not many studies have been conducted before or after this research study, but the Toolbox Project curriculum continues to display positive results and behaviors (De Long-Cotty, 2010). The background on the Toolbox Project curriculum shows that it is a useful skill set for school-aged children to attain. Children have even commented adults need to use their tools more often.

It is essential for everyone to remain a life-long learner and choose to better themselves, and their surrounding communities for a brighter educational future. In order to continue and maintain unity and community in our schools, more research in these areas and enhanced development are needed. The Toolbox Project curriculum will benefit from increased utilization and further analysis.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

Introduction

The Toolbox Project (Collin, 2003a) is a newly formulated curriculum that is currently only in use within California. To date only one other research study has been formally performed and published for viewing. This research study will enhance the understanding and evaluation of the Toolbox Project curriculum, and its effect on building increasingly positive social interactions between and among elementary school students. Historical context will be discussed first, along with a review of the previous research provided by the WestEd study, and various others to be mentioned directly. An interview with an expert from the Toolbox Project follows, complete with sample, site, and ethical standards for research. Finally, a summary of the literature concludes this chapter of the research study.

Historical Context

Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1978) provides positive feedback that people learn from one another, via observation, imitation, and modeling. This theory has often been referred to as a bridge between behaviorist and cognitive learning theories because it encompasses attention, memory, and motivation (Bandura, 1969). Bandura's theory is also related to Vygotsky's Social Development Theory (Learning Theories Knowledgebase, 2010b) and Lave's Situated Learning Theory (Learning Theories Knowledgebase, 2010a), which emphasize in the importance of social learning as well (Learning Theories Knowledgebase, 2010c).

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Review of the Previous Research

Throughout the review of previous research on the topic of unity and community within schools, five major themes emerged involving, 1) community building, 2) emotional well being, 3) self-sufficient and regulating students, 4) partnerships between students and adults, and 5) student pride and responsibility from all.

Community Building

Community building is a fundamental factor in any successful environment. Rule and Kyle (2008) proved this to be true in a diverse setting. Their research demonstrates how community-building, within our schools, is an integral aspect for not only community-building, but also parent involvement and school faculty bonding. In their findings they documented five strategies

in a diverse classroom, 1) parent visits, 2) weekly interactive newsletters, 3) bi-monthly open houses, 4) Valentine's letters, and 5) an African culture celebration. These strategies yielded positive results and connections for each student and faculty involved (Rule and Kyle, 2008).

Breitborde and Swiniarski (2002), present two models of educational programs that address the iniquities among public education in America. One model is a collaborative effort, while the other model utilizes technology for outreach. A distance learning aspect is also included within the technology model. Together both educational models recognize the major role families and communities play in the education of their children. The research illustrates how each model defines and exemplifies initiatives that attempt to transform society to accept social responsibility for educating everyone (Breitborde and Swiniarski, 2002).

In addition, Hallinan, Kubitschek, and Liu (2009) together examine the effects of both positive and negative social interactions, more specifically interracial social interactions. The study carries on to determine whether students sense that their school is a community. The data analysis concludes that positive interracial interactions contribute to students' sense of school community, while negative interactions inhibit that sense of school community (Hallinan et al., 2009).

Keiser and Schulte (2009) utilize the Elementary School Ethical Climate Index (ESECI) and the two-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs), to compare the school climate of two elementary schools. One elementary school is urban, and the other suburban. The research results emphasize the importance of evaluating the culture of a school in an intentional and thorough manner, in hopes of strengthening the sense of community within the given school (Keiser and Schulte, 2009).

Emotional Well Being

Emotional well being is definitely involved in the interactions and influences of school-aged children in their school and classrooms. McLaughlin (2008) debates different labels and definitions, and shows literature to support mentioned problems and current related issues. In her research she reaches the conclusion that schools must engage in different students situations such as, teacher-pupil relationships, pedagogy, and school engagement, without an individualistic approach. By looking at emotional well being and social concerns including, psychotherapy and neuroscience, resilience, and the role of schools, McLaughlin offers several implications for future educators; the matters of conceptualization and definition, emphasis and effort, and strategy (McLaughlin, 2008).

Social support effects emotional well being and can also influence students. A theoretical approach demonstrating resilience has been analyzed having to deal with gender and social support. This research by Chapin and Yang (2009) differentiated between boys' and girls' social support. The students originated from low-income Latino neighborhoods. The results of this research question why girls show more differentiation among various types of social support in comparison to boys. It is suggested that this study needs to be repeated with diverse populations and different developmental contexts, in order to accurately express social support and emotional well being of students (Chapin and Yang, 2009).

De Long-Cotty (2010) submitted research on the Toolbox Project curriculum and the resilience of school-aged children. The Toolbox Project is a research-based, social, and emotional learning curriculum that enhances the development of resilience, emotional intelligence, and other positive behaviors and skills in kindergarten through grade six students. The study includes formative research that was conducted during a 15-week time period. The

data and analysis from this formative research study yield highly positive results along with

significant positive changes (De Long-Cotty, 2010).

Self Sufficient Students

Collin (2003b) discusses his Toolbox Project curriculum and defines it as a social and emotional

learning curriculum for kindergarten through sixth grade students. The Toolbox Project

curriculum fills a gap in today's educational assumptions, and along with Dovetail Learning,

helps support children in being able to manage their own emotional, social, and academic

success. The twelve tools for life that the Toolbox Project provides, empowers students and

gives them the tools to problem solve for themselves (Collin, 2003b).

Partnerships

Partnerships require a common understanding and equal evaluation. Mitra (2007) examines

developing what she calls the concept of communities of practice to acquire understanding and

knowledge of others. With the research, many factors are determined to be needed for a

successful partnership including, various levels of mutual engagement, a common language, and

some common identities. It is concluded that many partnerships fail due to power, status

influence, and voice of initiatives. Communities of practice are presented as the entry of further

information and withstanding of partnerships with the details behind them. Building youth –

adult partnerships takes balancing of power in communities, but also builds meaningful roles of

respect and responsibility (Mitra, 2007).

Pride and Responsibility

Responsibility is required in order to build unity and community. Personal responsibility is the

most important followed by community responsibility. A three-year study involving fourth

grade students was performed and their responsibility and community knowledge awareness

assessed (Zhang, Scardamalia, Reeve, and Messina, 2009). Researchers believe there is a

collective cognitive responsibility for community knowledge involving awareness of

contributions, complementary contributions, and distributed engagement. The analysis of the

three-year study confirmed all three factors needed for a successful environment, and also

suggests the need for knowledge diffusion and further depth of understanding. Deep trust in the

student agency, working with a sense of emergence, and a progressive curriculum with continual

idea improvement are required to design and build collective cognitive responsibility in

knowledge-building communities (Zhang et al., 2009).

Along with responsibility comes ownership, and with schools money seems to

consistently be an issue. Wenglinsky (1997) studied the relationship between district spending

and academic achievement of students in school. His research showed a relationship between

spending and class size, social environment, and student achievement. Spending and social

environment expressed the weakest relationship, but all others showed positive results in

effectively spending to positively impact academic achievement, which directly relates to

building responsibility for all and influencing a collective community environment (Wenglinsky,

1997).

Interview with an Expert

The Toolbox Project

Mark A. Collin is the founder and creator of the Toolbox Project curriculum, and is now in

association with Chuck Fisher and Dovetail Learning. Collin (2003b) introduced his initial work

and the development behind the Toolbox Project in Santa Rosa, CA. His Toolbox Project

curriculum consists of twelve tools that represent the fundamental concepts of the relationship

between self and others. The principles included are reinforced as students' progress through grade levels and the process moves children toward internalized values, rather than a system of punishment and rewards (Collin, 2003a).

An interview with the founder, executive director of Toolbox Project and the researcher was held via Internet, and the following information obtained from this source and others is presented with permission from the Dominican University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS Application, #8276).

Mark A. Collin together with a group of students developed the first concept of the Toolbox Project program. The twelve tools, or what Collin calls the common language, provide strategies and methods as well as allowing areas of needed self-reflection to occur. Persistent use and exercise of tools in social situations leads to eventual subconscious use, and can influence students to the point where using tools becomes natural. Once this is achieved a variety of things are possible; problems are solved easier, misunderstandings addressed politely, positive outcomes to situations occur frequently, and individual's gain control over their own emotions which empowers them for success (Collin, 2003a).

In working to build unity and community the Toolbox tools enhance the power of positive thinking, and can benefit students at any age, even adults (K-80 years old). Through Toolbox skills students are able to recognize the advantages of utilizing tools as opposed to negative responses in social situations. Over time tools become embedded in behavior and become part of a social filter. These tools are essential basic life skills, and are tools to strive for happiness and acceptance for who we are (Collin, 2003b).

Summary

Overall, in order to build community and gain unity in schools, students need to simultaneously grow in areas of community building, emotional well being, self sufficiency, partnerships, and self pride and responsibility within their environments. The historical context and previous literature have displayed positive insight into attaining ideal classroom settings and learning environments for this to take place effectively and efficiently. The Toolbox Project may play an integral role in this achievement, and also in helping students to require the necessary skills for success in their ever changing and growing, academic and social environments.

Chapter 3 Method

Description of Method

The method used for this research study is a non-experimental qualitative methodology. This study uses action research where the teacher is also the researcher. This research study method will determine the outcome of the Toolbox Project curriculum and any increasingly positive social interactions between and among sixth grade students at a California parochial school.

Sample and Site

Sampling Techniques

The techniques used to determine the sample of participants for this research study are as follows: the sample of participants is biased; all students are enrolled in a faith-based elementary school. This was a sample of convenience and includes the entire sixth grade class as an intact group. Using a sample of convenience, students enrolled in my class, allowed me to constantly observe and monitor student interactions within the elementary classroom and school.

Sample Participants

Participants for this research study are the students of my own classroom. The participants for this research are also the sample population, and includes the entire intact group of sixth grade students, quantitatively 20 participants. The demographic variables of the participants consist of age (11-12 years old) and gender (11 females and 9 males).

Site Location

The site of this research study takes place in a California faith based school within the greater San Francisco Bay area and the Archdiocese of San Francisco. The site is a K-8 school

educating approximately 160 students, both male and female. The specific sites for research are the sixth grade classroom and outside yard areas.

Ethical Standards

Ethics and the use of human subjects in experimentation are very strong topics to consider. It is important to protect participants and not violate their constitutional rights. All participant information in this research study is confidential as individuals have the right to privacy. To seek and ensure the protection of human subjects, approval has been gathered from the school principal and site administrators. Student participants and parents/guardians understand the purpose of research, along with having informed consent. This informed consent includes:

1. *The general purpose of the research*

The purpose of this research is to determine if using the Toolbox Project program as a resource to teaching and building unity and community in the classroom leads to increasing positive social interactions between and among elementary school students.

2. *What students experience during the research*

All student participants receive the same amount of instructional time in the Toolbox Project skills program. All participants' behaviors and conducts are analyzed through observations, discussions, surveys, referrals, and/or suspensions.

3. *Potential benefits*

The potential benefits include an increase of the students' social abilities, and contribute to the success and continued use of the Toolbox Project skills program in elementary schools.

4. Potential difficulties

Potential harms include that feelings may get hurt, and participants may have difficultly learning to appropriately communicate with each other.

5. Student choice in participating

Students understand that they may choose whether or not to participate in the study.

Debriefing with all involved parties is also performed at the completion of the research. These ethical standard techniques supply the physical and psychological protection of all human subjects participating in this research study on unity in the elementary school classroom, by building school community through increasingly positive social interactions.

Access and Permissions

Access and permissions have been approved by the school principal, site administrators, student participants, and their parent(s)/guardian(s) as the Toolbox Project is already incorporated into the standard school curriculum. All above parties mentioned have full access to the involved curriculum grades K-8.

Data Gathering Strategies

The treatment of this research study includes the Toolbox Project program integrated within the sixth grade curriculum. The strategies for gathering data on this research study include the use of biweekly student journals, biweekly class meeting minutes, and daily informal observations both inside and outside the sixth grade classroom during regular school hours.

Analysis Approach

After teaching lessons from the Toolbox project, students completed journal entries, participated in formal class discussions. I also conducted informal observations. Once data were collected, I examined responses for common themes.

Chapter 4 Findings

Description of Site, Individuals, and Data

This non-experimental qualitative research study uses action research to obtain findings and data. This research study method determines the outcome of the Toolbox Project curriculum and any increasingly positive social interactions between and among sixth grade students at a California parochial elementary school within the greater San Francisco Bay area and Archdiocese of San Francisco. The entire in tact sample population includes 20 sixth grade student participants (11 females and 9 males; ages 11-12), obtained by a biased, sample of convenience. All students participated in the Toolbox lessons. Data on journal entries is from three boys and three girls. Class meetings and observations were of the students as an intact group.

The Toolbox Project curriculum is reviewed with students weekly in their sixth grade classroom discussions, and biweekly in student exercises. The sixth grade classroom serves as the primary site for this research study; however, findings are also collected from outside play and lunch areas within school grounds. The findings are presented as data results and categorized by their respective activities consisting of, journals entries, class meetings, and informal observations.

Data Results

The findings were collected over a nine-month period by me as the sixth grade teacher, and are referenced specifically from the Toolbox Project curriculum (Collin, 2003b).

Journal Entries

Students keep a Toolbox binder in which they write bi-weekly journal entries reflecting on each tool and it's use, one at a time. For each of the twelve Toolbox tools, a sentence phrase is given

to be included somewhere within the journal entry (see Appendix). Students are also required to include a specific example indicating a time when they have, should have, will have, or have seen others utilize the tool and the impact of it's use. Journal entries are between five and ten sentences in length and are hand written in cursive. A single journal entry is written for each tool, for a total of twelve journal entries, to complete each sixth grade student's Toolbox binder. Binders are colorfully decorated and covers illustrated by students. A sample of the Toolbox tools journal entries are listed as follows, and include pseudonym examples of various sixth grade students' work (Collin, 2003b).

Breathing Tool: Calming ourselves, checking in

As I saw the dog dying, tears welled up in my eyes, but she was passing on to a better place. The breathing tool, 5 deep relaxing breathes, helped me through this unfortunate time (Student 1).

I used the breathing tool using timed testing and took 5 deep breaths when I became nervous. Now I use it all of the time in similar situations to help me on exams (Student 2).

Listening Tool: We listen with our eyes, ears, and heart

I use this tool everyday at school. I listen with my eyes by observing my teacher. I listen with my ears for important knowledge and information. And I listen with my heart by taking in all of the information that my teacher gives me. I know these things will definitely help me later in life (Student 3).

I use the listening tool in all situations. The listening tool is when you listen with your eyes, ears, and heart. When my teacher is talking, and when she is explaining directions on how to do something, I use the listening tool (Student 4).

Empathy Tool: Caring for others, caring for ourselves

My parents are constantly utilizing the empathy tool, caring for others and our family, in everyday life. They not only supply me with comfort when I am hurting, and extend welcoming arms when I need support, but they care about my well being and provide me with substantial meals, sufficient clothing, and overall love (Student 5).

A time I used the empathy tool occurred recently when I cared for a random dog. This dog came panting to my friend and I. We played fetch for hours and gave him lots of water. I cared for the dog, and also for myself by going inside afterward to do my schoolwork (Student 6).

See Appendix A for a complete list of Toolbox tools and sentences phrases (Collin, 2003b).

Class Meetings

Class meetings are held in the sixth grade classroom bi-weekly, usually on Fridays, and are between 30 and 45 minutes in length. First I, the teacher, acknowledge any issues I feel necessary and/or pertinent, and then the floor opens up to the students for discussion topics, issues, concerns, etc. In an orderly fashion students share their opinions and express openly their feelings.

Over the nine-month time period data shows multiple topics and issues within the findings. These include, but are not limited to, the following concerns: locker problems, outside yard game rules, emotional misunderstandings, issues with students in other grades, rudeness, exclusiveness, bullying, common courtesy, and self-awareness among themselves as a sixth grade community. All students participated in expressing their opinions and voiced their concerns appropriately utilizing Toolbox methods. Many misunderstandings and hurt feelings

have been resolved as a result of these group discussions, which took place during and around class meetings.

Observations

As teacher and researcher I made several annotated informal observations over the nine-month time period in which I influenced my student's social interactions with the assistance of the Toolbox Project curriculum. Over time the findings presented a steady increase in positive social interactions between and among students with slight shifts in between. Observations are recorded chronologically and collectively, three months at a time, and include but are not limited to the following data:

August, September, & October

- First day of school, 15 returning students, 5 new students

- Everyone getting along and enjoying time to learn about each other and new students in class

- Students are introduced to the Toolbox tools for life

- Journal entries, class meetings, and observations as scheduled and/or needed

- Utilizing class exercises and speeches to learn about one another and gain knowledge of others

- Some help needed to assimilate new students, particularly new boys into groups

- Making effort to build across friendships and create new friendships, currently seeing pairs of friends emerge from some students

November, December, & January

- Journal entries, class meetings, and observations as scheduled and/or needed

- Outdoor education class trip for four days

- Unique bonding and growing experiences

- New friendships created and current ones strengthened

- Gaining common respect for others

- Social issues arise surrounding emotions and feelings

- Misunderstandings take place and feelings are hurt

- Resolutions are experienced

- Students continue to work on their social filters

February, March, & April

- Journal entries, class meetings, and observations as scheduled and/or needed

- Spring fever is in the air and emotions and feelings are running high

- Attitudes are influenced and tough choices are made socially

- Two extra class meetings are held relating to discipline and respect issues

- Student ownership has improved and withstands

- Some students put too much un-needed pressure on themselves

- Assistance is required to lead students in right directions

- Teachers, peers, and parents alike involve and assist in certain situations

- Students struggle to make correct choices for themselves and most succeed in their efforts positively

- Students continue to utilize their Toolbox tools for life and work on expressing positive social interactions

Summary

By combining journal entries, class meetings, and observations one is able to gain a greater

picture of social interactions between and among sixth grade students in all of their surrounding

environments. One set of data coincides and validates another; hence all parts are needed for the

maximum effect of findings and results. See Table 1 for a numerical version of the data

collection over time. The Toolbox Project curriculum has displayed its role and attributes within

the referenced information provided and recorded. In the final chapter of this research study on

unity and community, the data results are analyzed and discussed regarding validity and

significance.

Table 1

2010-2011	Journal Entries	Class Meetings	Positive Observations	Negative Observations
August	0	1	5	2
September	2	3	6	1
October	2	2	7	1
November	1	2	8	0
December	1	2	9	0
January	2	2	6	3
February	2	2	8	2
March	2	3	7	2
April	0	2	8	1

Chapter 5 Discussion

Upon analyzing this research study involving unity and community within the elementary school classroom, by using the Toolbox Project curriculum, an overall positive result has been achieved. In this chapter an analysis of the research study is performed with a summary of the major findings, comparisons of findings with existing studies including limitations and/or gaps in literature, and implications for future research studies. It concludes with the overall significance of the research study.

Summary

In summary I feel strongly that the Toolbox Project curriculum has provided many students with the necessary skill set to build unity within their schools, and community within their classrooms. By empowering students to use their tools for increasingly positive social interactions, they are making conscious choices and becoming both independent and self-aware. The data analysis suggests that when students are consistently reminded, and in an environment that promotes positive behavior socially, they will respond appropriately to that environment.

Results in research data began in late August 2010 and positively progressed until April 2011. In mid November the entire class took a one-week long field trip together to an outdoor education school. Student and adult bonding and relationships were enhanced as a result of this unique experience. The Toolbox tools served their purpose during this class trip in dealing with emotions and anxiety, creating a safe and carefree environment. This proved also to be true for the remainder of the school year in our sixth grade classroom.

Almost all analysis yields positive results when students are presented with the Toolbox Project curriculum in efforts to build unity and community in schools and classrooms. However,

data also shows slight plummets in results. These negative results occur in December – January and February – March (See Graph 1). Various theories can account for this short period of decline including the following: the coincidence that the drops in positive social behavior occur after a week or longer break in school. Upon returning to school after vacations, students have lost their routine and it seems to take some students a while to become readjusted to the school environment again. This pattern does not show true every week so weekends are not affected. This leads me to believe that the break in routine must be at least three or more days in order to change behavior.

Once consistently back at school students resumed an increase in positive social interactions, but never again reached the initial level of the beginning of the year. A steady positive increase in social interactions between and among students continues, but at a slower rate throughout the academic school year. Student age, growth, maturity, hormones, and the introduction of new students enrolled mid-year also effected the data results analysis.

Graph 1

Degree of Positive Social Interactions Between and Among Students
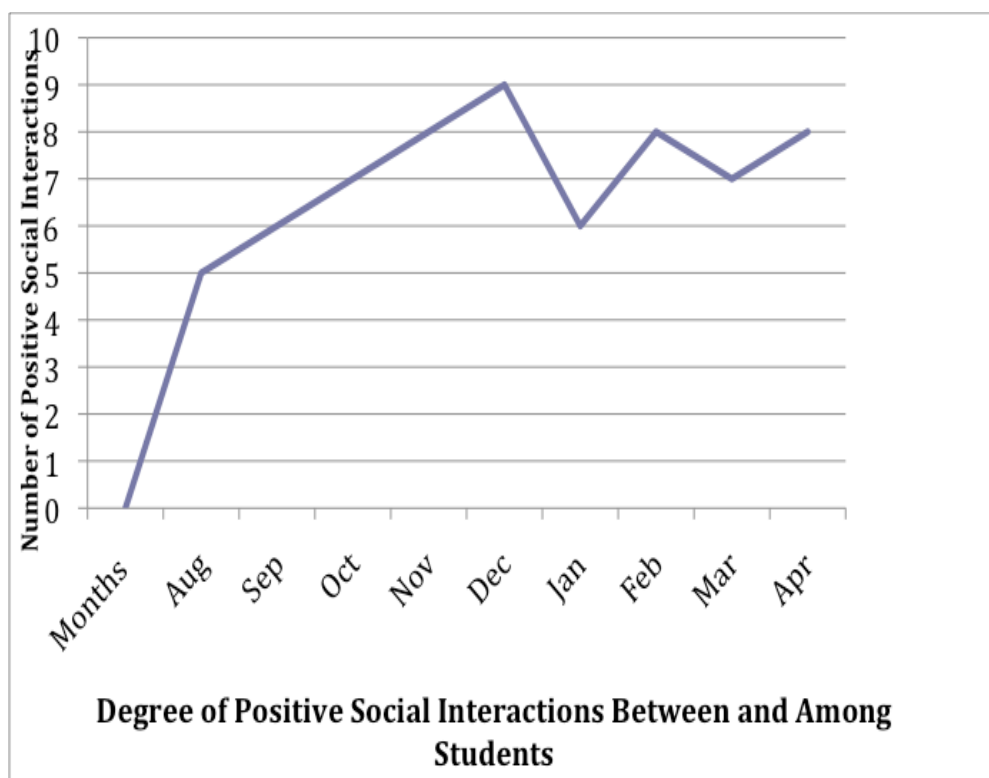
Comparisons

Upon comparison to the WestEd study on the Toolbox Project (De Long-Cotty, 2010), similar findings to this study were recorded and results based on the conclusions that significant positive change over time was demonstrated and expressed in students' social interactions between and among themselves. De Long-Cotty's study analyzed the data results in regards to 3 goals as criteria for success: 1) improving links between school, home, and community efforts to support children's positive social, emotional, and behavioral growth, 2) improving resiliency skills and assets for children, and 3) improving school climate and connectedness for students and teachers.

The primary purpose of this study was to pilot the Toolbox Project to acquire any needed updates and/or revisions to better enhance the curriculum. Since this latest report, the Toolbox Project, in association with Dovetail Learning, continues to flourish and has been the topic of much discussion in recent education (De Long-Cotty, 2010).

This current research study also utilizes the Toolbox Project curriculum, but focuses on building unity and community through increasingly positive social interactions between and among sixth grade students. The comparison of time frames and the demographics of the studies are different, but the data results and analysis are similar. Both formative studies show highly positive results, and promote the incorporation of the Toolbox Project curriculum into elementary schools.

Implications

There are many implications for further research to exist in this field. The Toolbox Project is a relatively young curriculum and is still under review and reflection. This method used is just one way of attempting to improve and build unity and community within a school and classroom. Various alternative options may be substituted in an attempt to achieve the same, if not better data results. Direct implications for future research studies link to continuing to sustain unity and community into high school, college, and ultimately adult life environments. Overall, human equality is the main goal to work for, and it is achieved with the assistance of the right tools in life.

Significance

The significance of this research is to demonstrate the effectiveness of the Toolbox Project curriculum on a group of 20 sixth grade student participants at a California parochial school, in

determining their level of increasing positive social interactions between and amongst

themselves, both inside the classroom and out over a nine-month period. The data results and

analysis are significant to this research study since they provide highly positive results and

effectiveness of the Toolbox Project and it's tools. This research may now be provided to

elementary schools in hopes of spreading the Toolbox Project program and it's positive effects

on the social skills of our educational society. With the knowledge and support that has shown

evidence of results in gaining unity and community, let's work together at understanding each

other, one tool at a time, towards achieving a united global society.

Conclusion

In concluding this research study, it has become apparent that building community through unity

and increasingly positive social interactions is necessary among our schools and society at large.

We have the responsibility as educators and/or parents to provide our children with the needed

skill set required in order to succeed in any given environment. Providing them with channels

for their feelings, and ways of dealing with and appropriately expressing their emotions. The

Toolbox Project program does just this for students, which also builds unity and community

within classrooms and schools. Slight variables can be seen, but various circumstances pertain to

these factors. However, overwhelming results conclude highly positive results and outcomes.

Therefore, the Toolbox Project, by building school community and unity in the elementary

school classroom, increases positive social interactions between and among students both inside

and outside the classroom. This is evident in student journals, class meeting minutes, and

informal observation notes, and is supported by various researchers and authors.

It is my opinion that unity and community within schools and classrooms can be attained

effectively and efficiently with the Toolbox Project program. Overall increased positive social

interactions are displayed between and among students, as well as social, emotional, and behavioral growth achieved over time. The twelve Toolbox Project tools are indeed tools for learning – tools for life (Collin, 2003a). They not only enhance creating and sustaining unity and community among individuals and groups, they also prepare our youth for successful futures embracing equality.

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Appendix

T O O L B O X
BY DOVETAIL LEARNING

Tools for Learning – Tools for Life

Breathing Tool: Calming ourselves; checking in.
I can take a breath. It takes only 3–5 seconds to calm myself.

Quiet/Safe Place: Remember your quiet place.
There is always my quiet/safe place. It is there for me.

Listening Tool: We listen with our ears, eyes and heart.
When I listen as well as hear, I can really understand.

Empathy Tool: Caring for others, caring for ourselves.
When I walk in someone else's shoes, it opens my heart.

Personal Space: Where my space ends and yours begins
I have a right to my space, and others have a right to theirs.

Using Our Words: The right words, in the right way, for the right reasons.
I ask for what I want and need. I am a problem–solver.

Garbage Can: Put it in the garbage can and walk on by.
I choose to let the little things go.

Taking Time Tool: Time-in and time-away.
I use my time wisely.

Please and Thank You: Words that open.
I treat others with respect, appreciation, and gratitude.

Apology and Forgiveness: Words that transform and repair.
I admit my mis–takes. I accept that others make mistakes, too.

Patience Tool: Quiet waiting.
I am strong enough to wait.

Courage Tool: Using your Tools when others are not using theirs.
I have the courage to do the "right" thing.

T O O L B O X BY DOVETAIL LEARNING ®