The Social Benefits of the Morning Meeting: Creating a Space for Social and Character

Education in the Classroom

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Table of Contents

Abstract

The intense focus of academics currently in practice in elementary schools limits the opportunities for developing social skills and abilities that are necessary 21st century skills. Through a specifically structured Morning Meeting a teacher can create a space in the classroom that encourages the growth of important social skills that will support the development needed in the future workplace. The purpose of this study is to gather information that explores the roll of social interaction activities such as a classroom morning meeting and its impact on social skills development.

The literature reveals the following 21st century skills need to be taught to students to facilitate their success in the future: problem solving, critical thinking, empathy, collaboration, creativity and respect. The literature supports the idea that a form of community building meetings, hosted frequently in the classroom, help promote necessary learning and social skills, empowering students both in academic and social settings.

This is a qualitative study using interview protocol. The participants included are currently employed as teachers in an elementary school and conducting morning meetings with their students.

Hosting daily Morning Meetings in the classroom helps to build a safe and encouraging environment where community, trust, and respect flourish. Through this process, social and emotional intelligences develop and the students begin to practice and use 21st century skills in their academic work and social relationships. Student academic achievement is affected positively from the work accomplished in Morning Meeting and student behavior improves.

Chapter 1 Introduction

In classrooms across the country the focus of instruction increasingly becomes about academics. More and more, teachers are faced with agendas and administrations forcing mathematics and language arts curriculum into the forefront of the classroom due to pressure from budget cuts, standardized test results, and requirements from the department of education. Teach to the test! Increase your scores! Adopt this new textbook! Teach all the kindergarteners to read! Introduce more reading strategies to the third graders! Every child must have his/her math facts memorized! Group according to skill level! Host smaller group instruction! Launch writer's workshop earlier! Make your bulletin boards fuller and brighter! Impress the parents with our academics!

With these and more stressors and expectations put upon teachers in the classroom, the students' days become filled with tight schedules and not enough time to accommodate all the academics that are required. The teachers' priorities switch and they focus their energy on completing the most urgent tasks asked of them. Trying to get through the academic curriculum becomes the main focus of the year. Any space for building and teaching social skills disappears from the classroom.

In my six years of teaching experience, I have observed a decline in social and character education due to the rigorous and narrow focus on academics. Teachers are lacking support to pursue a social education in their classroom. In spite of the increasing pressure for academics, teachers are asked to create the best, well-rounded students. At the end of each year I hear teachers, administrators, and parents wondering casually why it seems the students lack manners. Why they do not seem to problem solve on their own or work together in groups using critical thinking.

Our students need 21st century skills in order to be successful in their future careers however they are not being taught or given room to be taught these important skills in the classroom. Our world is shifting and the focus needs to be on supporting the skills that right brain thinkers possess instead of left brain thinkers (Pink, 2006) and on supporting the education of critical 21st century skills.

There is no structured space left in the classroom to create a caring community where teachers can model behaviors and students can safely practice their social skills with their peers. An opportunity for a solid character education is missing in the daily classroom. The strategy of hosting a specifically designed and structured Morning Meeting in the classroom can effectively begin to remedy this problem. With a specific format and prescribed tools, Morning Meeting helps create a safe space where students can learn and practice social skills such as empathy, active listening, positively contributing to conversations and discussions, problem solving, using critical thinking skills, interacting with peers, making new friends, treating people with respect, and building a community together. Morning Meeting can set the stage for a successful social environment in the classroom that will positively affect the students' behavior, academic work, and overall outcomes inside and outside the classroom.

Not just any kind of meeting or circle time in the classroom will accomplish these goals. One needs to implement the structures and utilize the tools laid out in *Responsive Classroom's* Morning Meeting, giving room for slight personal adaptations, to guide the students toward becoming problem solvers, critical thinkers, collaborators, leaders, and good listeners, in essence, to becoming successful future citizens in our ever changing world.

Statement of Problem

Without the structure of the Morning Meeting that focuses on developing critical thinking skills, problem solving and collaboration, students cannot receive the social education that they need to succeed in the classroom and in their future careers. With an emphasis on academics and increased pressure on teachers to deliver higher results, the classroom is losing its space as a great vehicle for social and character education.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to examine the importance and success of consistent Morning Meetings in an elementary classroom. This study documents that the social skills garnered through the structure of the Morning Meeting benefit the students' academic performance and successful collaboration in the classroom. This study also supports that Morning Meeting creates an opportunity for the teacher to model important skills and for students to understand and practice them in a supportive environment.

Research Questions

How can the classroom teacher use Morning Meeting as a strategy to assist students in developing social skills? How can the Morning Meeting encourage a more successful learning environment that will transcend the classroom? How are academics affected by hosting Morning Meeting in the classroom?

Theoretical Rationale

The theoretical rationale for this study is rooted in the theory of Albert Bandura's (1977) *Social Learning Theory.* This theory suggests that people learn from one another by observing, imitating and modeling. Most behavior is learned through modeling. Through observing modeled behavior a person develops an idea of how things are done and this guides his/her future actions. Behavior causes environment and environment causes behavior, meaning that both elements affect each other and have a reciprocal relationship. Bandura calls this "reciprocal determinism." Social interaction plays a key role in developing personal behaviors as social interaction models behaviors to those present, whether they are participating in the behaviors or simply observing.

Assumptions

This study assumes that there is a decline in students' character that may be connected to a lack of social education in the schools. In my experience as a classroom teacher I noticed teachers are surprised that students do not know how to be kind, respectful, or responsible anymore. We expect our students to embody these great qualities, but we are not promoting these qualities at school and we cannot rely on families to instill them at home. These qualities are not being taught in school due to lack of time and support. One cannot expect students to innately have good social skills and show great character. One must teach these students and model these desired behaviors.

If students were taught social skills they would be more successful academically and socially in school. With a safe environment and modeling in the classroom, students might be able to develop better character and social skills. With these important skills the students are

supported in acting independently in many academic and social situations inside and outside the classroom. A Morning Meeting can create a safe space in a classroom where students can learn and practice important social skills through respectful greetings, group work, problem solving, and creating a community together in the classroom.

Background and Need

Darling-Hammond (2010) says that our children need to be prepared for jobs that do not even exist yet and that our education system is not supporting them in preparing for these jobs. Pink (2006) shares that the world is shifting from left brain thinkers to right brain thinkers and we are in need of more right brain thinkers. Right brain thinkers are people who are creative, innovators, designers, inventors, teachers, and storytellers. The West Virginia Department of Education (2012) articulates that the most important skills for students to have are critical thinking and problem solving, communication and collaboration, and creativity and innovation skills.

There is a need for children to learn these important social and academic skills in order to be successful. Children need to learn and demonstrate 21st century skills in order to be successful in the workplace and society. Children need to attain the "four C's"— critical thinking and problem solving, communication, collaboration, and creativity—which are the most important and necessary 21st century skills as defined by businesses, economists, and education experts (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2011).

Summary

The majority of classrooms in elementary schools today are focusing most of the day on academics. This focus leads to an absence of social and character education in the classroom. There is a need for this social emotional education. Students would benefit from a focus of

proper education in necessary social skills in the classroom in order to attain the skills that are needed to be successful in the 21st century.

These 21st century skills are what employers will be looking for as students embark into the professional world. Both their social and professional lives will benefit from increased knowledge and understanding of critical social skills that reflect the evolving world. These skills include problem-solving, critical thinking, empathy, respect, creativity, and collaboration.

Responsive Classroom offers a framework that helps to create a safe environment that builds community and supports the growth of practicing and learning important social skills in the classroom. "The *Responsive Classroom* approach is a widely used, research- and evidence-based approach to elementary education that increases academic achievement, decreases problem behaviors, improves social skills, and leads to more high-quality instruction" (Responsive Classroom, 2013, para. 1). Morning Meeting is a component of this approach and the structure and framework of Morning Meeting is detailed in one of the Responsive Classroom's books.

Following Bandura's (1977) social learning theory of learning from modeled behaviors, Morning Meeting relies on classroom teachers to model appropriate behaviors and allow for students to practice and interact with their newly acquired social skills in a safe space within the classroom community. This study seeks to explore the effects Morning Meeting has on classroom environments and social and academic learning in the classroom.

Chapter 2 Review of the Literature

Introduction

This section is an examination of the research literature on the effects of Morning Meetings on building important social skills in the classroom. Information was gathered from academic library searches using online resources and printed books. Research information is organized in the following categories: Historical Context, Review of Academic Research, and Statistical Information.

Historical Context

The foundation for the formal American system of education was laid by Europe and much of the character education in the United States has roots in the education of character in Europe (Watz, 2001). Character education has come in waves in the American Education System. It has been both a formal and informal part of schools. Noddings (2004) notes that when American society experiences a time of transition and possible challenges, character education has been used in schools to help solve social problems and to socialize people. This character education is geared toward children to establish political, economic, and social orders (Noddings, 2004). The character education movement is a long-standing tradition of schools acting as agents of social stability, political stasis, and cultural preservation (Purpel as cited in Noddings, 2004).

Formal programs, like the YMCA, grew and prospered with society's need and request for necessary moral and social development of American youth. Although character-building

programs were initially created outside the sphere of public education, they have now been incorporated into public education.

There have been many other influences, including "a call from social studies educators, a movement from the Religious Right, and the occurrences of several traumatic modern school tragedies, that bridged the gap between public life and public education in order to embrace the societal demand for character education in public schools" (Watz, 2011, p. 44). There are now several popular character education programs in public education, such as the Heartwood Program, CharacterCounts!, and the Center for the 4th and 5th Rs.

Origin of Morning Meeting

Kriete and Bechtel (2002) believe that socialization of children has historically focused on younger children, as seen in preschools and kindergartens. They note that an influential early childhood educator, Lillian Katz, sees large benefits for structured interactions beyond these early years and past kindergarten grades.

The practice of Morning Meeting evolved from preschool and early childhood programs that traditionally started with "Circle Time." During this ritual students would sing, count, learn the calendar, take attendance, and share. Morning Meeting built upon this, understanding a child's need for social guidance, structure, and interaction.

Review of Academic Research

Morning Meeting

Kriete and Bechtel (2002) developed *The Morning Meeting Book,* as part of the Responsive Classroom approach to teaching and learning, to offer a structured format for a four part, daily morning meeting to help support the community and learning environment in the classroom. The Morning Meeting uses teacher modeling for students to practice and learn important social skills that will benefit the students' social and academic lives. Morning Meeting sets the tone for respectful learning, trust, cooperation, problem solving, and a sense of community in the classroom.

The Morning Meeting Book (Kriete & Bechtel, 2002) displays a structured morning meeting to be held daily in classrooms that would help build community in the classroom. Through this environment of trust and respect, students are taught important social skills and given spaces to practice and implement these social skills inside the classroom. Kriete and Bechtel (2002) used an array of elementary and middle school classrooms across the United States in their research and practice of the Morning Meeting. Through Kriete and Bechtel's (2002) work, they find that the effects Morning Meetings have on creating classroom community and in turn teaching important social skills to students in classrooms are great.

One of the key findings of Kriete and Bechtel's (2002) work with the Morning Meeting in classrooms is that teacher modeling plays a large part in teaching and showing students how to communicate, interact, and behave in social and academic settings. The components and structure of the Morning Meeting are key in presenting students with appropriate time and forums to see and practice their social skills. The social skills that the students learn through their work with the Morning Meeting are: active listening, giving appropriate questions and comments

to a speaker, sharing, empathy, problem solving, critical thinking, taking turns, and being a contributing member of a community.

Kriete (2003) used a follow up article to summarize the benefits of Morning Meeting. Following the structure of the Morning Meeting, teachers can create safe spaces in their classrooms that foster community and a respectful learning environment. Through Morning Meeting, human core needs of wanting to have fun and wanting to feel significant are met. The daily ritual of doing activities together, listening and responding to students' sharing, learning each-others' names and greeting each other builds a safe, caring, and respectful learning community that benefits students both academically and socially.

Effect of Classroom Meetings on Community, Social Skills and Academics

Using the structure of Morning Meeting, Gardner (2012) sees the benefits of creating community and teaching key social skills to her fifth graders as these components positively affect the work done during her science period in the classroom. Gardner sees the Morning Meeting as a place where skills can be practiced and discussed. She observes how modeled and practiced social skills in isolated situations during the Morning Meeting transfer into real life situations during science period. These skills help build a community of learners that demonstrate cooperation, respect, responsibility, empathy, and appropriate social skills while working together during a science period. This positively supports collaboration and relationships during her classroom's science period by enhancing her students' social skills.

The Morning Meeting and the science classroom relate well with each other and support the efforts of the lessons of community and social skills. The social skills taught during Morning Meeting transfer successfully to the environment of the science classroom. The students use their

learned skills of active listening, sharing, taking turns, empathy, problem solving, and collaboration to work successfully in groups during science period.

Grant and Davis (2012) conducted a study in Grant's first grade classroom about the effects of daily classroom meetings on student-to-student and student-to-teacher relationships. They discover that through the use of a similar framework to the Morning Meeting, the Nelsen eight building blocks for daily meetings, positive benefits occur inside and outside of the classroom. Due to the success of the daily meetings, a greater sense of community is built in the classroom. The students become better communicators and develop kinder demeanors toward children and adults alike. Improved conflict solving strategies, positive interactions among students and a more peaceful classroom climate were observed. Teaching children how to get along in the classroom positively affects their present and future relationships, helping them to become productive members of society.

Grant and Davis (2012) noticed that the students in their classroom did not know how to interact appropriately with each other. They noticed that the students needed to be taught how to get along. The purpose of the study was to implement daily classroom meetings to determine if they could create community in the classroom and to teach the students how to interact with each other in positive ways.

The authors found that there are many benefits from implementing daily meetings in the classroom. The benefits include improved conflict solving strategies, positive interactions among students, and a more peaceful classroom. The students become better communicators and develop kinder demeanors to children and adults. These meetings create a greater sense of community in the classroom and help build mutual respect and improved relationships among

the students and the teacher. Grant and Davis (2012) say that it is vital to support students' development of effective social skills and positive relationships in the classroom.

Webster-Stratton and Reid (2004) examined The Incredible Years Dinosaur Social Skills and Problem-Solving Child Training Program introduced into classrooms and found that it provides benefits to children's social skills and academic success when it is incorporated into classroom curriculum. The program is highly regarded by teachers, parents, and students and improvements in social and academic skills occurred. The program uses parent education, teacher training, and student practice. This study supports that students with behavioral problems need to be taught important social skills. This study also supports that students with low social skills suffer greater in school and academics and that socially competent children are more successful in academics

The lessons taught through this social skill building program create opportunities to promote effective learning behaviors, such as verbal and nonverbal communication skills, that include collaborating, cooperating, listening, attending, speaking up, and asking questions. These are key skills for children to have in order to learn academic skills and be successful in the classroom environment. Through the program, students "had significantly higher school readiness scores as measured by behaviors such as being focused and on-task during academic activities, complying during academic time, and showing cognitive concentration" (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004, p. 99).

Kagan, Robertson, and Kagan, (1995) present cooperative learning activities and structures to teachers who are interested in building classrooms with community where diversity is celebrated and students are excited to be there, to learn, and to work with one another. These

activities build community, celebrate students' diversities, and support students in working successfully together. This "classbuilding" supports students getting to know each other, promotes respect among students in the classroom, encourages better self-esteem, and engages the students. Through "classbuilding" the authors state that: "The classroom runs smoothly, and less time is spent on management and more time on active learning. Students learn lifelong interpersonal skills and are better prepared to function in an increasingly pluralistic society" (Kagan, Robertson, and Kagan, 1995, p. vi).

The Shift of Education Needs in the 21st Century

Both Darling-Hammond (2010) and Pink (2006) recognize the need for change in the way that students are educated. Due to the direction the world is moving, students need to be equipped with 21st century skills that will support them in their future careers and social relationships.

Through understanding the need for change in our schools' curriculum as a result of the shift from the "Industrial Age" to the "Information Age" and understanding child development, cooperative learning, multiple intelligences, human resilience and the need for 21st century skills, Gibbs (2006) offers *Tribes.* Hosting *Tribes* (Gibbs, 2006) in a school and its classrooms is a way to create cooperative learning groups and positive community and culture in a school environment. One of the goals of *Tribes* (Gibbs, 2006) is to establish a positive classroom climate. According to Gibbs, this evolves from: "An atmosphere of trust, a sense of belonging and community, involvement in decision making, kindness and encouragement from peers, the teacher's energy and morale, the teacher's authenticity and nonjudgmental attitude, clear expectations, goals, learning outcomes, [and] fairness and equity in participation" (Gibbs, 2006, p. 47).

Due to the decline in family-taught values and social skills, there is an increased need for schools to take the lead in teaching the skills needed for students to be successful in school, society, and the workplace. Gibbs' (2006) *Tribes* program raises academic achievement, decreases discipline problems, increases more time to teach in the classroom, motivates students, focuses on socialization and intellectual development, supports students learning critical thinking and collaborative skills, involves students in classroom management such as problem solving and keeping the learning environment positive, creates a caring community culture that encourages character values and respect for diversity, and creates safe, non-violent environments in schools.

Gibbs (2006) presents that the majority of schools today continue to host programs and curriculum that reflect the needs of an era passed, The "Industrial Age," where people were trained to do repetitive tasks and not to make changes. Today, students need 21st century skills, that include critical thinking and collaborative skills, to be successful in the new era, the "Information Age." The entry into a high tech/high touch age requires not just the basics of reading, writing, and mathematics, it requires social components as well.

The U.S. Department of Labor Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) reports that schools must teach a new set of skills in order for young people entering the work force to be successful (Gibbs, 2006). This new set of skills is "21st Century Skills" and includes "Basic Skills, Thinking Skills, and Personal Qualities" (Gibbs, 2006, p. 33). The "Basic Skills" of reading, writing, mathematics, listening, and speaking are congruent with what the "Industrial Age" asked and needed from its students and workers. With the shift from "Industrial Age" to "Information Age" the "Basic Skills" are no longer sufficient. "Thinking Skills" and

"Personal Qualities" are required for success in the future. It is imperative that these skills be present and taught in schools to support the success of our students. "Thinking Skills" involve Creative thinking, decision making, problem solving, seeing things in the minds' eye, knowing how to learn, and reasoning. "Personal Qualities" include responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, integrity/honesty. One often sees the "Basic Skills" being focused on in schools today when "Thinking Skills" and "Personal Qualities" are not included in the focus (Gibbs, 2006).

In American families there has been a change in dynamics, leading to a disappearance of family history, values, and expectations. A majority of families are no longer helping their children to "gain a sense of identity and self worth, learn shared cultural values, and bond to significant others" (Gibbs, 2006, p. 36). Due to the dramatic changes in families many children are no longer learning the social skills they need from their families at home. This leaves the responsibility to the schools to socialize the children and teach them the necessary skills to be successful in the 21st century. Children spend the longest amount of time each day in school, with their teachers, and because they are not spending this time with their family role models at home, the school is the most apt place for this learning to take place. "Out of necessity schools must teach pro-social attitudes, principles, and skills. If for no other reason, so that students can learn how to read and write, and get along well with others. This fact alone calls for a new curriculum, a curriculum that develops identity, self-worth, social responsibility, and bonding to positive groups" (Gibbs, 2006, p. 36).

The Importance of Developing Social Skills for Students in Elementary Schools

Rashid (2010) performed a study in elementary and high schools in Pakistan to determine if students had learned important social skills such as: accepting criticism, showing respect, solving problems, accepting rights and responsibilities and tolerance of individual differences. The study shows that the students are not successfully learning or developing important social skills at home, in their communities, or at school as expected. The study's research shows that parents, communities, and schools are not teaching social skills effectively or at all. The author suggests that social skills should be integrated into the academic curriculum at school to ameliorate the situation. Direct instruction is needed to develop and improve these skills (Rashid, 2010).

Omeroglu, Buyukozturk, Ayodogan and Ozyurek (2009) launched a study of developing a scale to measure problem solving, stating that problem solving is a skill that holds an important place in the achievement of social targets and success in the learning processes. During primary education, in which the authors claim that the building blocks of personality are laid and certain habits and social values are gained, the most important years for learning problem solving and other social skills are present and therefore are a crucial time in a child's education. "Ensuring that children become good problem solvers is important in terms of the solution of personal, professional and social problems by using their cognitive skills" (Omeroglu, et. al., 2009, p. 1).

The Benefits of Building Community and Giving Students Purpose in the Classroom

Through detailed classroom examples, Halaby (2000) explains how important leading community-building meetings in elementary classrooms are. Her meetings focus on building a safe and comfortable community in the classroom where every student is heard and held responsible for his/her actions. Through this community work the students' investment in the

classroom and their fellow students grow and positively affect all aspects of the classroom. Her meetings support the students in working on problem solving together as a community, building respect, empathy and social skills. Halaby (2000) states that these meetings are just as important as academics like science, math, reading, and writing.

Halaby (2000) explains that before these classroom meetings the behavior and environment in her classroom was not positive or conducive to successful social and academic progress. She shares that it is not easy to facilitate these meetings and that it takes patience and skill, however they are worth the energy and effort. These meetings give students a community to belong to and a sense of ownership and responsibility in the classroom.

Alan November (TedxTalks, 2011), an educator and leader in technology education, speaks about the importance of shifting the roles and relationships in the classroom to empower students and give them purpose. November sees students needing to feel purpose in their work and to be contributing members of a community. In school, November recounts that usually students' work is given to them, largely without purpose. November believes that there is a need to shift the ownership of learning to the students and to help create a community environment that they can be a part of. Every student needs to feel that they can make a meaningful contribution every day to their classroom community. There is a shift in roles and relationships and the students will now possess a feeling of empowerment and ownership and the students' work will improve and have meaning for them.

Statistical Information

The Professional Learning Support Division and Instruction and Learning Support Branch of the California Department of Education provided a Statewide Professional Development for

Nonprofit, Private Schools 2011-2012 Annual Report. This report details the professional development that teachers, administrators, and other education professionals attended during the 2011-2012 academic year and how many attended. The majority of the professional development was focused on academics and 832 people attended these programs.

In accordance with federal law, the California State Budget Act of 2011-12 allocated $500,000 in Federal Title II, Part A funds to provide professional development for private school teachers and administrators. These programs must be based on scientific research and improve student academic achievement. Examples from the report of eligible programs are as follows:

- Improving the knowledge of teachers, principals, and other educational personnel in one or more of the core academic subjects and in effective instructional teaching strategies, methods, and skills

- Training in effectively integrating technology into curricula and instruction

- Training in how to teach students with different needs, including students with disabilities, limited English proficiency, and gifted and talented students

- Training in methods of improving student behavior, identifying early and appropriate interventions, and involving parents more effectively in their children's education

- Leadership development and management training to improve the quality of principals and superintendents

- Training in the use of data and assessments to improve instruction and student outcomes (California Department of Education, 2012, p. 2)

The California Department of Education and the California Private School Advisory Committee identified the top needs for instructional staff as assessment, math, and writing. The top need for administrators was identified as leadership. According to the 2011-12 report, the professional development that the educators attended was focused mainly on academics. The programs that they attended were: "Monitoring Student Progress using Data and Assessments to Drive Instruction," "Building a Strong Elementary Math Program," "Five Easy Steps to a Balanced Math Program," "Harness the Power of Nonfiction Writing in Every Classroom," "Leading School Improvement Using Data, Assessments and Differentiation," and "Administrator Training Program for Nonprofit, Private School Administrators" (California Department of Education, 2012, p. 4). Two of these programs focused on math, one on writing, one on assessments, and two on administrator leadership. This report shows that the leadership in school policy is placing the emphasis on academics. The social and emotional areas of development are ignored.

Summary of Research Literature

The research literature showed that classroom meetings support building a strong community in the classroom as well as building important social skills. This community and social skills in turn positively affect the academics in the classroom.

Kriete and Bechtel's (2002) Morning Meeting supports learning social skills and building community in a classroom. Gardner (2012) supports the positive outcomes of hosting Morning

Meeting in the classroom. Her study shows that Morning Meeting successfully affects relationships and behaviors throughout the academic and social day at school. Grant and Davis (2012) support a classroom meeting curriculum, much like Morning Meeting, because it produced a greater community and increased social skills among the students.

Kagan, Robertson, and Kagan (1995) promote creating community through getting to know each individual in the classroom and learning to celebrate their diversity and to work respectfully together. This reflects similar beliefs to Morning Meeting. Through creating this cooperative learning community the students learn important social skills that will support them in life and the future.

With a curriculum similar to Morning Meeting, Webster, Stratton, and Reid's (2004) study demonstrates that through student training, modeling, and practicing, important social skills can be learned. They also state that through learning these important skills the students' academics improved as well.

The research literature also showed that there is a shift occurring in educational needs in the 21st century. Darling-Hammond (2010), Pink (2006), and Gibbs (2006) all demonstrate through their work that there is a need to teach 21st century Skills in schools. Gibbs (2006) states that the way to do that is through positive classroom environments and cooperative learning communities where students learn and develop the necessary social skills. Morning Meeting could serve as a framework for this desired outcome.

The era in which the world is currently in, The Information Age, no longer only requires "Basic Skills" to be taught to students. "Thinking Skills" and "Personal Qualities" are now also

required for social and academic success. Morning Meeting focuses on developing all of these. Through the work of Morning Meeting on social skills and community development in the classroom, fewer discipline problems will arise and therefore there will be more time to teach in the classroom. Because of the lessons within Morning Meeting, academics will improve because of the fewer interruptions that will occur. Academics will also flourish in the supportive and safe environment that Morning Meeting helps to create.

Some of the research literature expresses the importance of developing social skills for students in elementary schools. This substantiates the theory behind the importance of hosting Morning Meetings daily in the classroom. Rashid (2010) found that social skills are lacking in students in schools. His study suggests that children are not being taught social skills effectively at home or in schools and that direct instruction and implementation of social skills into the curriculum is needed. This study supports the theory that a program like Morning Meeting is necessary in classrooms in order to teach the important social skills required of students to possess.

As Webster-Stratton and Reid (2004) explored in their study of a social skill-building program in the classroom, children do not automatically develop important social skills. Because of this, explicit and intentional teaching is needed. A program such as Morning Meeting can work in the classroom towards providing this needed social education.

Additional research literature supports that there are benefits to building community and giving students purpose in the classroom. Hosting Morning Meetings in the classroom can achieve these two things. Both Halaby (2000) and November (TedxTalks, 2011) emphasize the need for a shift in education that focuses on building community and purpose. These two authors

express their beliefs in the importance of creating a strong sense of community for students and to offer the students chances to feel purposeful in the classroom and to find purpose in their schoolwork.

Morning Meeting is a forum in which the sense of both community and purpose can be deepened in the classroom. Teachers are needed who foster the learning and implementation of the 21st century skills that will allow these students to think outside of the box, to work collaboratively, to think critically, to problem solve, and to give purpose to their work. Teachers can use the Morning Meeting model to accomplish this.

The statistical data presented in this study shows that there is a continued focus on improving academics in the classroom and that there is no emphasis on social emotional or character education. As the research shows, academics benefit from increased social skills in the classroom, therefore a specific emphasis on supporting social skill development in the classroom through a program like Morning Meeting would be beneficial to the educational programs in all schools.

Chapter 3 Method

Research Approach

This study explores the framework presented by Responsive Classroom's *The Morning Meeting Book* that details daily classroom morning routines that support social skill development and community building in the classroom. My research relies on interviews with California private elementary school teachers who host Morning Meeting in their classrooms. I also observed Morning Meetings in two elementary classrooms.

Ethical Standards

This paper adheres to ethical standards in the treatment of human subjects in research as articulated by the American Psychological Association (2010). Additionally, the research proposal was reviewed by the Dominican University of California Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS), approved, and assigned number 10134.

Sample and Site

My target subjects were a third grade elementary school teacher and a fourth grade elementary school teacher at a private elementary school in California.

Access and Permissions

Observations were conducted within the bounds of the class's daily Morning Meeting time. Teachers involved in the interviews and observations received written and verbal explanations of the observations and interviews prior to their participation.

Data Gathering Strategies

I observed both teachers one time each in their classrooms as they led Morning Meetings with their students. I gathered data by taking detailed notes while they hosted these meetings. I privately conducted an interview with each teacher about his experiences and thoughts on Morning Meeting and I utilized voice recording and note taking to gather data.

Data Analysis Approach

Information was gathered using the data from the interviews and classroom observations. The interview conversations were voice recorded and transcribed and notes were taken during the classroom observations. Recurring themes from student responses and personal researcher observations were noted. Interview responses and observations were analyzed. Similarities and differences were identified and compared in order to determine whether Morning Meetings support community building and social skill learning in the classroom.

Chapter 4 Findings

Description of Site, Individuals, Data

The site is a private, K-8 school, founded in 2002 in Northern California. The school is based on the Quaker education tradition. Quaker values are: simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality, and stewardship. The school incorporates these qualities into daily life at the school. There are 431 students, 46 teachers, and 32 administrators and staff. There are 39% students of color, 27% students with adjusted tuition, 32% staff/teachers of color, 9% single parent families, and 12% LGBTQ staff (California Department of Education, 2013).

The individuals in this interview are two elementary school teachers, Teacher A and Teacher B. Teacher A (personal communication, March 12, 2013) is a Caucasian male. He is a fourth grade teacher and has been teaching for 24 years. This is his seventh year teacher fourth grade. Teacher A has earned a masters in fine arts (MFA). Teacher B (personal communication, March 13, 2013) is an Asian-European male. He is a third grade teacher and has been teaching for 14 years. This is his twelfth year teaching 3rd grade. Teacher B has earned a bachelors degree in liberal studies.

All the teachers in the school are trained in Responsive Classroom and host daily Morning Meetings in their classrooms. The teachers' Morning Meetings follow the structure presented in Responsive Classroom's book *The Morning Meeting Book* (Kriete & Bechtel, 2002).

Interview with an Expert

On March 12 and 13, 2013, I interviewed two teachers at a private elementary school in Northern California who have been hosting Morning Meeting in their classrooms for many years. The school supported these teachers both financially and professionally to integrate this program into their classrooms. They were both sent to a Responsive Classroom conference where they were trained in Morning Meeting. Both teachers host Morning Meeting daily in their classrooms.

The following interview questions were asked to each teacher separately and privately:

1) What is your background with hosting Morning Meeting in your classroom?

2) How long have you been hosting Morning Meeting?

3) In your experience, have you experienced any other character education programs?

4) How were teachers at your school trained or supported in Morning Meeting?

5) How have you seen the community environment in your classroom change due to Morning Meeting?

6) Do you teach and model social skills during Morning Meeting?

7) Have you noticed any increase in social skill knowledge in your students due to Morning Meeting?

8) Do you see your students exhibiting 21st century qualities such as: respect, empathy, critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration?

9) Have the academics in your classroom improved due to your work with Morning Meeting?

10) Have you received any feedback, positive or negative, from other teachers, administrators, or parents regarding your work with Morning Meeting?

11) What has Morning Meeting done for your classroom and students?

12) How do you see the role of Morning Meeting in the elementary classroom?

Both teachers communicated the following about Morning Meeting in their classrooms:

- An increase in social skills in the students has been noted due to the work with Morning Meeting

- 21st century skills are being taught and practiced in the classroom due to Morning Meeting

- Academics have improved in the classroom due to Morning Meeting. A few examples of this are: students can act more independently, they exhibit more awareness, they practice problem-solving on their own before asking for the teacher's help, they want to be a part of the solution, fewer disruptions and poor behavior occurs, they respond to redirection more easily, they are more flexible and cooperative, they are more efficient and productive in an academic period, time is saved, and finally, more academics can be covered by the end of the year due to the ground work being laid with Morning Meeting.

- Evidence of work with Morning Meeting from the previous grades is visible and the current teacher can build on the existing background in Morning Meeting

- The teacher models the leadership behavior in the beginning of the year and then passes the role onto student leaders to lead Morning Meeting.

- Morning Meeting is an important ritual in the classroom.

- Morning Meeting takes time to do but pays off in dividends. Putting in the work at the front end of the school year to teach and model Morning Meeting and its components as well as hosting it consistently throughout the year pays off at least 2 fold by the end of the year in both social and academic success.

- Morning Meeting is the only time in a busy academic day to address important issues that affect the students and community inside and outside of school.

- When Morning Meeting is not held daily, one notices its absence and the negative impact that has on the community in the classroom.

Summary

Morning Meeting is an effective tool to promote social and emotional intelligence in the classroom. Classroom community and environment improved due to the presence of Morning Meeting in the classroom. Social skills and 21st century skills were taught, practiced, and learned during the Morning Meetings. These skills transferred over from the meeting into social and academic situations, helping the students to navigate these settings more successfully. Academics improved and more academics could be covered due to the community, environment, and skills that Morning Meetings helped to create. When Morning Meeting is not hosted the teachers noticed a negative effect on their classrooms and students.

Chapter 5 Discussion /Analysis

Summary of Major Findings

Using the *Responsive Classroom's* Morning Meeting strategies and theory, the classroom teacher can act as the model to facilitate social growth in areas that are integral to students' success inside and outside the classroom. Through these meetings students can practice and learn important 21st century skills that are needed for their success in the future social and professional world.

The work accomplished during Morning Meetings positively supports both social and academic settings in the classroom. Through Morning Meeting, students are able to practice skills that help support their work during academic periods in the classroom. These skills support the students in becoming more independent and efficient, able to solve problems on their own, thinking critically, respecting fellow students and teachers, and reacting to situations and people with empathy and kindness.

There is a shift in the classroom environment due to these skills. The environment becomes a safe, trustworthy and supportive space where students can create a community of learners together, focusing on and practicing important social skills that are preparing them for the 21st century world that awaits them after school.

Limitations/Gaps in the Research

This study was limited by the number of interviews that were conducted. The author interviewed only two teachers at one school. The data are limited to the experiences of the two teachers in

that particular school. Interviews with more experts may have provided additional insight. Interviews with students, parents, and administrators in schools that host and do not host Morning Meeting could provide more perspective.

Implications for Future Research

This study invites further research on the effects of structured classroom meetings on the garnering of 21st century skills for students. Further research on classroom meetings and how different structures and components of those meetings benefit social skills and community building is warranted. More research and comparison is also warranted on different social skill building and character education programs that may have similar success as the Morning Meeting program, such as Gibbs' (2006) *Tribes* and Halaby's (2000) *Belonging.* The findings of this study suggest that there may be further benefits to schools adopting character programs, such as the Morning Meeting, that encourage community building and developing 21st century schools.

Overall Significance of the Study

Creating a strong and healthy community environment that improves students' social skills in one's classroom can positively affect the academics in the classroom. Creating this base in the beginning of the school year paves the way for smoother navigating through academics and work periods in the classroom.

Schools should invest first and foremost in professional development that educates and supports educators to host Morning Meetings in their classrooms in order to establish and foster environments of community and social and emotional growth. Only once this has happened

should a school move forward in other focuses such as academic curriculum, assessments, etc. because these programs will be more successful with a solid base of community and social skills that come from programs such as Responsive Classroom's Morning Meeting.

About the Author

Lily Allen-Hughes is a teacher in a public elementary school in California. She led her grade level team as the Grade Level Coordinator and has worked closely with teachers and administrators in her district to improve curriculum and procedures. Lily Allen-Hughes hosts Morning Meetings in her classroom and is scheduled to lead her colleagues in learning more about Morning Meetings during their professional development period.

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