

Northwestern College, Iowa

NWCommons

Master's Theses & Capstone Projects

Education

Summer 2019

Morning Meeting: An Examination of its Effect on Student Behavior and Peer Relationships

Allison Dooley

Follow this and additional works at: https://nwcommons.nwciowa.edu/education_masters



Part of the [Elementary Education Commons](#)

Morning Meeting: An Examination of its Effect on Student Behavior and Peer Relationships

Allison Dooley

Northwestern College

An Action Research Project Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Education

August 2019

Dr. Sara Waring Tiedeman

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	4
Review of the Literature	6
Meeting Student Needs	7
Responsive Classroom	10
Origin of Morning Meeting	11
Morning Meeting Components	12
Advantages of Morning Meeting	12
Builds community	13
Promotes social skills	14
Supports learning.....	15
Disadvantages of Morning Meeting	17
Lack of time.....	17
Ineffective strategies	18
Morning Meeting Implementation	18
Getting started	18
Teacher responsibilities	19
Student responsibilities	19
Component one – greeting.....	20
Component two – sharing	20
Component three – group activity.....	21
Component four – morning message.....	21

MORNING MEETING	3
Conclusion.....	22
Methods.....	22
Participants.....	23
Preparations.....	23
Research Protocol.....	24
Measurements and Calculations Performed.....	25
Discussion.....	28
Limitations.....	30
Further Study.....	30
Conclusion.....	31
References.....	33

Abstract

The purpose of this research was to determine the effects Morning Meeting has on student behavior and peer relationships. Data was collected on student behavior through observations in a first-grade classroom. Negative student behaviors decreased as a result of the implementation of Morning Meeting. Analysis of the data collected suggested the positive impacts Morning Meeting has on student behavior and peer relationships. Positive student behavior and peer relationships create a positive classroom community, increasing student performance. Therefore, Morning Meeting should be a consistent strategy in lower elementary classrooms.

Morning Meeting: An Examination of its Effect on Student Behavior and Peer Relationships

Education is constantly transforming as new curriculum is mandated, teaching strategies change, and new technology is integrated. Despite these changes, the need for classroom management and a classroom community remain constant pillars in education. Teachers continue to look for methods to manage a classroom that are simple yet effective. “Responsive Classroom practices gives teachers concrete ways to make academics engaging manage classrooms effectively and create a positive climate in which children feel safe to take the necessary risks for learning” (Kriete & Davis, 2017, p. 4). With a well-managed classroom, teachers can focus on what really matters – the students’ needs in academics and social/emotional skills.

Teachers are facing increased pressure over student performance; as a result, there is often little time for anything outside of the core curriculum. However, Morning Meeting, which is part of Responsive Classroom, provides teachers an opportunity to create a positive learning environment while incorporating academics. Starting each morning with Morning Meeting sets a positive tone to the day. “Morning Meeting allows us to begin each day as a community of caring and respectful learners” (Kriete & Davis, 2017, p. 2). Starting each day with these positive interactions sets an expectation for the rest of the day.

Researchers have studied the importance of classroom management and classroom community as seen in *Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs*, which helps educators understand the needs of their students (Caraccio, 2017). There are differing views on how to assist students in fulfilling those needs. Before implementing a new strategy in their classrooms, teachers want to know the research and possibilities. Daily meetings, like circle time, have been part of early

elementary classrooms for a long time. However, Morning Meeting is relatively new in education. While there has been previous research on Morning Meeting, its effect on student behavior and peer relationships remains vague and could be further explained. If Morning Meeting were shown to be a key component in successfully managing a classroom and building community, teachers would be more likely to implement this strategy. This paper will examine how Responsive Classroom's Morning Meeting can affect behavior and peer relationships in an early elementary classroom, in addition to exploring its history, advantages and disadvantages of its implementation as well as possible instructional strategies.

Review of the Literature

Students spend most of their day in school. Therefore, schools need to be a place where students feel safe, supported, and respected. Morning Meeting can assist educators in fulfilling these needs. Research has shown that a positive classroom environment supports students to be successful academically, socially, and emotionally. "There is general consensus among researchers in the field that students' sense of belonging is one of the basic psychological needs that when this need is met, positive educational outcomes can occur" (Sari, 2012, p. 2). Without a positive relationship, little learning will occur. Not only does Morning Meeting create positive environments, the strategy also improves social skills. Teachers can scaffold conversations and interactions, ensuring students are successful in this experience. Morning Meetings are also working to connect academics with social-emotional learning. "During Morning Meeting, the social and academic curricula are equally important" (Fenty, Miller, & Lampi, 2008, p. 188). Morning Meeting is a strategy that encompasses all aspects of a school day. This strategy stems from the Responsive Classroom approach.

Meeting Student Needs

Before being able to master academic content, students' needs must be met. Caraccio (2017) examined Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory of human motivation. The pyramid consists of five levels in the following order: physiological, safety, belonging, esteem, and self-actualization (Caraccio, 2017). Caraccio found that the most fundamental needs are at the base of the pyramid. As each need is fulfilled, the individual pursues needs in the next tier.

The Hierarchy of Needs starts with the base of basic needs. In a school setting, this could be ensuring all student have breakfast and lunch. If the basic need of food is not met, the student will not be able to work towards the next tier. Another example of a basic need is sleep. All students' backgrounds are different. Some students get at least eight hours of sleep each night after a full meal in a loving, safe home. Others come from homes where they get little sleep, because they assist in taking care of siblings. If a student is not fed or well rested, they will not be ready to focus in school or advance towards achieving higher needs. To meet the physical/physiological needs, teachers can keep classrooms at comfortable temperatures and schedule breaks (DeMarco & Tilson, 1998).

Once the first tier of basic needs has been met, students will search for safety. This is where a positive relationship with a teacher is essential. Without a solid relationship with the teacher, the student will not see the classroom as a safe place. Teachers must strive to create relationships that allow students to feel secure starting at the beginning of each year. Safety, both physically and emotionally, should be the teacher's most important concern. According to Bondy and Ketts' (2001) research, learners must feel safe. A feeling of threat and stress is a large contributor to flawed academic learning. They explain the connection between emotion

and cognition. Students emotions push students towards new learning. “Morning Meeting helps to create and maintain a climate of trust, respect, and belonging. As a result, it promotes student learning” (Bondy & Ketts, 2001, p. 146). To meet safety and security needs, teachers can prepare and instruct well-planned lessons that are consistent (DeMarco & Tilson, 1998).

Once safety needs are satisfied, students will work towards meeting their psychological needs. The third tier addresses an individual’s need for a sense of belonging and friendship. “Belonging was an essential and prerequisite human need that had to be met before one could ever achieve a sense of self-worth” (DeMarco & Tilson, 1998, p. 93). This feeling is essential in a classroom. For example, if a student feels like an outsider with no friends, they will be less likely to participate in classroom experiences, take risks, and practice social skills. Morning Meeting is a beneficial strategy to address psychological needs that allows students to build relationships with each other. To meet belonging needs, teachers can encourage cooperation and collaboration, be patient, and have a positive attitude (DeMarco & Tilson, 1998).

Morning Meeting can also be beneficial in addressing the fourth tier: Esteem and Respect. The feeling of respect gives students the status and recognition to fulfill the fourth tier of needs. Students, even in early childhood, understand the feeling of respect from others. In a classroom, students should feel supported and respected in the risks they take. Teachers continually strive to create an environment where students feel safe to take risks and attempt new challenges. As these tiers are more difficult to reach, teachers must take extra steps to get students to these goals. Teachers should, when necessary, discipline privately. Applying a routine of awards for positive behavior or work gives students the feeling of respect from others.

The final tier of the pyramid hierarchy is self-actualization. This is when the individual has the desire to reach their highest potential and purpose. “The person has a motivation to spend his/her time fulfilling those needs the individual perceives as his/her life’s purpose” (Caraccio, 2017, p. 16). Teacher’s should encourage students to become intrinsically motivated, so they can succeed in their purpose. Some adults never make it to this stage on the hierarchy of needs. In the classroom, teachers can challenge students to reach this tier by making learning meaningful and connected to real life. Students should be involved in the creation of classroom projects and experiences. While self-actualization is difficult to reach, teachers can do their best to help their students get to the top tier.

According to Caraccio (2017), as soon as the lower needs are satisfied, the individual will begin to work towards the higher needs. However, an individual can still work towards the highest needs without the previous needs being fully met. For example, two students are in the same first grade class. One student got eight hours of sleep and had a full breakfast. The other student got five hours of sleep, because he had to watch his baby sibling while his mother went to work evenings. At the start of school at 8:00 a.m., all students are eager to get started on the first activity. By 9:30 a.m., each student is independently working on an animal research project. The first student who had their needs fulfilled in Tiers one through three is ready to tackle the new task, because he is motivated to do so. He sees his potential. He has been successful in similar tasks, and he enjoys the positive response from his peers.

The second student has become tired and hungry. He is less focused on the task and thinking about how he will entertain his sibling at home later tonight. The second student is aware he is falling behind the other students academically, which makes him nervous. Because

of his background, he struggles making friends. He does not have the sense of belonging with his peers. This scenario is a common occurrence in classrooms across the country – urban and rural. Each student is at very different stage on Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs pyramid. Their priorities and needs are vastly different, which could have a great impact on their academic success. To create a level playing field for all students, regardless of their backgrounds, teachers must ensure the needs of all students are satisfied, starting at tier 1. While this objective at first glance appears to be simple it is much more complex. One approach for teachers to accomplish this objective is the implementation of a Responsive Classroom.

Responsive Classroom

“Developed by classroom teachers at Northeast Foundation for Children, The Responsive Classroom approach to teaching consists of specific practices for bringing together social and academic learning throughout the school day” (Kaufman & Sawyer, 2004, p. 324). Responsive Classroom understands how classrooms are complex and require more than just academic instruction. “Responsive classroom is an evidence-based approach to teaching that focuses on engaging academics, positive community, effective management, and developmental awareness” (About Responsive Classroom, 2019, para. 1). The four key domains of Responsive Classroom are engaging academics, positive community, effective management, and developmentally responsive teaching. The first domain, engaging academics, ensures that educators are providing learning experiences that are purposeful, interesting, and interactive. Second, in a positive community, the teacher creates an atmosphere where students feel safe to take risks, collaborate with peers, and feel a sense of belonging. Third, teachers have effective management when students can focus on learning in a structured way. Lastly,

teachers must use their knowledge of child development to create a successful environment.

Extensive research has been performed on Responsive Classroom. “Independent research has found that the Responsive Classroom approach is associated with higher academic achievement in math and reading, improved school climate, and higher-quality instruction” (About Responsive Classroom, 2019, para. 2). While Responsive Classroom understands the importance of academic work, the social curriculum is equally as important (Winterman & Sapona, 2002).

Origin of Morning Meeting

While the official strategy of Morning Meeting is from the Responsive Classroom approach, unofficial morning meetings have been happening in classrooms all through schools. The history of Morning Meeting stems from the belief of the importance of young children’s socialization. Early childhood students require structure and routine for interactions. “Researchers have noted the importance of classroom rituals in the establishment of community. A critical piece of community building is beginning each day with a classroom meeting” (Gardner, 2012, p. 62). According to Allen-Hughes (2013), Morning Meeting evolved from the early childhood ritual strategy of Circle Time. During this time, students sang, counted, shared, and interacted with a calendar and weather. “Morning Meeting builds upon this, understanding a child’s need for social guidance, structure, and interaction” (Allen-Hughes, 2013, p. 12). Without explicit instruction, young children will be unsuccessful when interacting with other students. Teachers must take the time to intentionally instruct each social and emotional skill to allow students to fully understand.

Morning Meeting Components

One of Responsive Classroom's most popular strategies is Morning Meeting. "Morning Meeting is a microcosm of the way we wish our schools to be – communities full of learning, safe and respectful and challenging for all" (Kriete & Davis, 2017, p. 4). Morning meeting has four essential components: greeting, sharing, group activity, and morning message. Students greet each other by name, occasionally including a high five, handshake, etc. Next, sharing allows students to share news or information about themselves. Students can respond to their peers in a positive way. The sharing component allows students to express their feelings in a safe and supported way. The group activity builds inclusivity by allowing the entire class to participate in an activity. These activities focus on building collaboration and reinforcing learning. Lastly, the teacher posts the morning message, or a note about the day. Students practice reading and discussing the contents of the note. Morning Meeting must be implemented daily with a fidelity to structure for its benefits to be reaped.

Advantages of Morning Meeting

Most teachers are not willing to implement a new strategy into their classroom without knowing the possible advantages. The research conducted on Morning Meeting has highlighted several advantages when the strategy is implemented in the classroom. Morning Meeting can build a positive classroom community. Its structure promotes social skills for students, while supporting learning. Teachers who implement the major advantages to the implementation of Morning Meeting is the building positive classroom community, promotes social skills, and supports learning. Morning Meeting with fidelity will notice these advantages.

Builds community. A sense of community in a classroom is essential for a successful year. Teacher-student and peer-to-peer relationships are important. These positive relationships and environments do not come automatically. Morning Meeting is the scaffold to create this environment. Held at the start of each school day, Morning Meeting begins the day on a positive note. Students can participate in fun greetings, share something about themselves, and engage in an activity. Implementing this strategy in a structured format allows students to get to know each other and see their similarities. When students see commonalities between themselves, they are more willing to take risks around them, collaborate, and feel comfortable. As a result, students feel accepted and respected because their peers listen and engage with them. With trust and respect between peers and the teacher, learning will begin to happen. If students spend most of their day with us, we want it to be a place they look fondly on. A positive attitude towards school can start a snowball effect in a positive classroom. With a positive classroom community, students feel empowered to take ownership of their learning. Students collaborate with others and meaningful learning happens. All of this can only happen with a solid sense of community. “Morning Meeting is a quick, yet powerful tool used by classroom teachers to build a caring classroom community” (Bornstein & Bradley, 2007, p. 26).

Classrooms are full of students with different backgrounds, cultures, families, and lives. A positive classroom community allows all students to embrace their differences and learn from each other’s. Winterman and Sapona explain the benefits Responsive Classroom and Morning Meeting have on students with special needs. In a solid classroom community, all students are liked and respected. “When students with disabilities are liked, accepted, and chosen as friends, then inclusion becomes a positive influence on the lives of all children in the class”

(Winterman & Sapona, 2002, p. 35). Building a positive classroom community means with all students and adults. Everyone is included. Morning Meeting gives teachers the structure to create these powerful classrooms.

Promotes social skills. Today, the focus in the majority of classrooms is academics. To create more time for academics, schools are cutting recess, which takes away the students' time to relax and learn in a physical way. Schools are also cutting fine arts, which diminishes the opportunity for students to be creative. The elimination of non-core curriculum not only takes away from the success and enjoyment of school; it also increases the pressure on teachers. Teachers feel immense burden from these changes. In addition, teachers face a growing demand for higher scores on standardized tests from school administration and the government. While teachers focus on academics to ensure their students are meeting benchmarks, time still needs to be made for the instruction of social skills.

Various skills, like typing or tying your shoe, can be learned independently or with little assistance. Social skills can only be practiced with others. Teachers must find time to instruct all students on various social skills and give them a chance to practice. While it can be up to thirty minutes each day, Morning Meeting is worth the time because it allows students time to practice social skills that can be transferred into real life situations. According to Fenty, Miller, and Lampi (2008), the entire Morning Meeting experience can be an opportunity to teach social skills. Teachers can use this time to explicitly instruct on appropriate social skills. For example, during the greeting, students are taught how to greet classmates and adults. During sharing, students can explain how they used a social skill in the past. "The teacher can model such skills as taking turns, cooperative play, and problem solving" (Fenty, Miller & Lampi, 2008, p. 188).

Researcher Allen-Hughes (2013) studied with a class of fifth graders. During his observations, Allen-Hughes (2013) noticed the students used social skills that were taught in isolation, and then transferred the skills into their everyday environment. “These skills help build a community of learners that demonstrate cooperation, respect, responsibility, empathy, and appropriate social skills while working together” (Allen-Hughes, 2013, p. 14).

In another study, Allen-Hughes (2013) analyzed students in a first-grade classroom. At the beginning of the day, Allen-Hughes (2013) observed that students were unaware of how to interact appropriately. Students needed direct instruction on how to cooperate. As part of the study, daily classroom meetings, like Morning Meeting, were implemented. After the implementation of daily classroom meetings, positive benefits were evident. Students were able to solve conflicts, communicate more effectively, and be respectful. The relationships between the students and teacher also improved.

Morning Meeting sets an expectation for students and their social skills. Students are directly instructed on how to address situations. When implemented with fidelity students will become comfortable interacting with peers using the skills they were taught. Social skills training will provide students a solid foundation for as they grow and become part of a variety of societies. Morning Meeting has a great impact on the classroom community and social skills of the students. However, it does more than just provide the opportunity for community building and social skill development. Morning Meeting also supports student learning, which is a top priority at all schools.

Supports learning. With all the requirements teachers must meet, they need to find a way to teach cross curricular with time limitations. There is not enough time in a school day to

explicitly teach every subject. The most effective strategy is to interweave curriculum areas into non-curriculum instruction time. Responsive Classrooms and Morning Meeting provides teachers that platform. Having a way to intentionally instruct on specific academic skills during Morning Meeting is beneficial. Morning Meeting can be used as a formative assessment. Teachers can review prior concepts to assess students understanding. Through observations during Morning Meeting, teachers can identify students who need extra assistance with a specific academic skill.

Morning Meeting directly affects student learning through the skills used, especially in reading and writing. For example, during the Morning Message component, students are asked to read text, accurately and fluently. Teachers might place misspelled words for students to notice. The morning message is in the form of a letter, allowing students to observe the format of that type of writing. Students are introduced and reminded about the formation of sentences in spoken and written text. Wasik and Hindman (2011) studied the impact the morning meeting message has on students' academic improvement. They shared that their "suggested guidelines will help early childhood teachers promote print awareness and writing in an effective, developmentally appropriate fashion and to support young children's knowledge about print" (Hindman & Wasik, 2011, p. 188).

While Morning Meeting impacts student learning directly, it also provides other indirect benefits. The Morning Meeting model was designed to "set the tone for respectful learning" (Dabbs, 2013, p. 1). When students are respectful of each other, they are respectful of their learning. Decreasing distractions and interruptions enables students to focus on their learning. A teacher's main goal is for their students to be successful, academically, socially, and

emotionally. Morning Meeting provides the structure to target all those areas by setting a positive tone at the beginning of the day.

Disadvantages of Morning Meeting

The majority of research finds Morning Meeting to be a positive experience for students and a classroom's community. However, like anything in education, critics give opposing views. The first major disadvantage is the lack of time for non-core curriculum in elementary classrooms. Another major concern is the use of ineffective strategies. Morning Meeting is not government mandated, therefore, is not a top priority based on academics. Being aware of the possible disadvantages ensures smooth implementation.

Lack of time. As previous stated, schools face a major time constraint. Schools are cutting recess and fine arts to have more time for academic core work. This has left teachers to question how they can find up to thirty minutes a day to implement Morning Meeting. Unfortunately, the demands of teaching each subject becomes overwhelming. Teachers are forced to drop the experiences that are not required, like Morning Meeting.

Another reason educators see Morning Meeting as a disadvantage for their classroom is the amount of time and effort needed to implement this routine. The routines in Morning Meeting do not happen overnight. It may take weeks or months to get students to follow expectations. Once the routines and expectations are in place, teachers must continue the strategies. Some teachers find it overwhelming to continue this throughout the entire year. However, if the strategies are discontinued, the undesired behavior may become evident again. The classroom community, social skills, and academic support may be lost. Teachers must fully commit to the strategy to ensure the advantages of Morning Meeting continue.

Ineffective strategies. As with any instructional strategy, if educators are unaware or not properly trained on how to implement the strategy, it will be unsuccessful. Some teachers complain of Morning Meeting being ineffective in their classroom. In this situation, teachers have usually begun Morning Meeting without committing enough time. They are unaware of what it takes to make the strategy successful. Another issue is teachers have not done enough research to know how to implement it, or teachers may know the four components, but are unsure on how to implement them. For example, a teacher may have the four components incorporated in the day, but rush through the start of the implementation without setting expectations. If clear expectations are not set for the greetings (how to properly greet someone), sharing (what they can share), group activity (how to collaborate with others), and reading the morning message, the strategy will be less effective. The best way to bypass these disadvantages is to prepare for the implementation of Morning Meeting. Learning about strategies will lead to a smooth and successful experience. In the following section, effective instructional strategies for each component will be shared.

Morning Meeting Implementation

The implementation of Morning Meeting can be intimidating to teachers. Each component is essential in its success. However, looking at the components individually can be daunting. According to research, there are a few things teachers can do to make the transition smooth. A smooth implementation allows the positive effects to begin sooner.

Getting started. According to Kriete and Davis (2017), there are a few essential things to do when implementing Morning Meeting. First, Morning Meeting should be a set schedule every day. Knowing each day is going to start with 20-30 minutes of Morning Meeting

experiences will help students recognize the schedule and expectations. The space used in Morning Meeting should be large enough to gather in a circle. Teachers should build routines and expectations that will be consistently used throughout the year. For example, placing a fist in the air to signal students the teacher needs their attention.

Planning is essential for successful Morning Meetings. Planning helps ensure academic content can be brought into the Morning Meeting. Roser (2016) explains in her text what she sees as the three keys to planning successful Morning Meetings. She emphasizes the importance of looking at time and what experiences you can do accordingly. Also, consider the learning objectives for your day and identify ways they can be incorporated. Lastly, think about the students' strengths and challenges. Decide what students could benefit from, the skills that could be practiced, and where they are in development. The responsibilities in Morning Meeting start with the teacher and have the potential to be passed on to students.

Teacher responsibilities. Teachers are the leaders of Morning Meeting, especially at the beginning of implementation. *The Morning Meeting Book* by Kriete and Davis lays out the responsibilities of the teacher during this time. First, ensure all students can participate. Plan Morning Meetings that support academics and social and emotional skills. Teachers should scaffold the experiences so children can be successful. Students enjoy talking and sharing things about themselves. The teacher is responsible for keeping things moving. It is the teacher's responsibility that all students are included and feel safe enough to participate. While there is a lot for teachers to manage, the students also play a critical role.

Student responsibilities. Student awareness of their responsibilities is important. Kriete and Davis (2017) give students four responsibilities to ensure it moves along. The students' first

responsibility is to arrive at the Morning Meeting on time and safely. Students are responsible for their full participation. This includes listening, contributing, and responding to peers. Next, students are responsible for interacting with an assortment of students. Greeting the same students repeatedly is discouraged. Lastly, students must conclude Morning Meeting and follow the teacher's directions to the next activity. Students' responsibilities are just as important as the teacher's responsibilities, but it is the teacher's role to instruct students on how to be successful in those responsibilities.

Component one – greeting. Morning Meetings begin with a greeting. “Purposes of greeting sets a positive tone for the classroom and the day, provides a sense of recognition and belonging, helps students learn and use each other's names, and gives practice in offering hospitality” (Kriete & Davis, 2017, p. 52). The greeting gives student's skills on how to greet a peer or adult appropriately. Giving students the chance to hear their name in a greeting keeps them engaged and excited to be a part of the learning experience. The greeting can vary in complexity. It could be as simple as giving a high five or rolling a ball. Alternatively, it can become more complex and connect to academics, like Skip Greeting. Students skip count to identify who they will greet that morning. The greeting is the best way to start the day on a positive note.

Component two – sharing. Children love to share about themselves, their family, pets, and other random bits of information. Morning Meeting is a great place to share and listen. “Purposes of Sharing helps students to know each other, develops important social and emotional competencies, teaches thinking, listening, and speaking skills, and strengthens language development and reading success” (Kriete & Davis, 2017, p. 87). Sharing is an activity

that students need explicit instructions. Brainstorming ideas, using sentence stems, giving clear directions, and using think alouds are all strategies to support students in their sharing skills. Teachers must set a limit on what the students can share and how long they can take. This helps move the process along. Sharing is a great opportunity for students to make connections and practice life skills.

Component three – group activity. The group activity allows the students to build unity. “Purpose of group activity: contributes to the class’s sense of community and group identity by building a repertoire of common songs, games, changes, and poems, fosters active and engaged participation, encourages inclusion and cooperation, help students learn the value of persistence and practice, and strengthen academic and social skills” (Kriete & Davis, 2017, p. 133). It’s recommended that teachers start with simple group activities. This ensures success and requires little preparation. Kriete and Davis (2017) say group activities need to be engaging, but do not need to be childish. Instead of trying to entertain students, engage them.

Component four – morning message. The morning message is a way for teachers to inform students about the upcoming events of the day. “Purpose of morning message: builds community through shared written information, develops and reinforces language arts, math, and other academic skills in a meaningful and interactive way, eases the transition into the rest of the day and builds students’ excitement about the day’s learning” (Kriete & Davis, 2017, p. 170). The morning message might serve as instructions as they come into the room and be an outline of the day ahead. Each morning message should include a greeting, date, the body of the message, related interactive tasks, and closing and signature. It is empowering for students to read the message independently and as a group. Teachers are beginning to use digital tools

to relay the morning message. Using technology instantly engages the students, but also helps students develop technological skills. This gives the teacher the opportunity to explain and demonstrate various digital tools for future student use. Not only does the morning message practice valuable academic and social skills, the morning message is a perfect transition from Morning Meeting to the rest of the day.

Conclusion

Prior research shows the power of Morning Meeting. Morning Meeting's advantages include building community, promoting social skills, and supporting student learning. While Morning Meeting might be an overwhelming strategy to start, the time investment is well worth it. There are a variety of resources to assist teachers in the implementation of this strategy. Since students spend much of their day in school, educators need a strategy to create a positive learning environment. Through this research, we understand the power of Morning Meeting can have on creating a positive learning environment. The research below outlines how the implementation of Morning Meeting can affect behavior and peer relationships in an early childhood classroom.

Methods

As seen through the Literature Review, research supports the implementation of Morning Meeting in an early elementary classroom. While the research demonstrates its effectiveness on building a classroom community, its effect on student behavior and peer relationships was less evident. The goal of this research was to determine the effects Morning Meeting had on the interactions between students and their behaviors in the classroom. The

research also studied the effect the teacher had on the building of those relationships. The research relies on observations, notes from observations, and a teacher research journal.

Participants

The participants of this study were from a first-grade general education classroom in the Dallas Center-Grimes School District at South Prairie Elementary. Dallas Center-Grimes School district is made up of two Des Moines suburbs. According to the Iowa Department of Education, the district's student population is 90% White, 4% Hispanic, and 2% Black. The district's Free and Reduced Lunch percentage is 14.92%. At South Prairie Elementary, 86.8% of the student population is White, 5.68% Hispanic, and 4.55% Black (Iowa Department of Education, 2018).

The first-grade class consisted of 10 boys and 11 girls. Two students were on Individualized Education Plans (IEP). One for all academic areas and behavior. The second student had a behavior IEP. The two students shared a paraprofessional who was in the classroom full time. Four of the students came from split families or single-parent homes. All students participated in Morning Meeting, a normal classroom experience.

Preparations

Preparations for this study were extensive. The classroom was rearranged to accommodate the large space needed for Morning Meeting. The format of Morning Meeting was analyzed, and lessons were planned. Kriete and Davis' book, *The Morning Meeting Book: K-8*, was used to originate ideas for the experiences. The daily schedule was arranged to fit in the 30-minute block for Morning Meeting. The researcher observed other classrooms that incorporated Morning Meeting as part of their practice. The notes from those observations were referenced when planning the Morning Meeting experiences.

Because students participated in a normal educational activity, they were unaware this study was being conducted. However, like all new experiences in the classroom, expectations were set. These expectations were created by the students through conversations with peers and teacher. Each component of Morning Meeting was explained to the students. Once the planning process was complete, implementation began. To make it less overwhelming, the four components were introduced one at a time, week by week, over a period of four weeks.

Research Protocol

Overall, the protocol was to use observations as the primary source of research. Students would be observed before the implementation. Then, Morning Meeting would be implemented, with quick, unofficial observations during implementation. The final official observation will be like the first, observing the same skills and behaviors. The entire time, the students were unaware of their role in this process.

To begin this process, the researcher reflected and analyzed the most important social skills students must have to be successful in cooperating with peers and what skills are needed to build relationships. South Prairie's student behavior expectations (respectful, responsible, safe and caring) were chosen as the skills to focus on. Observations prior to the implementation of Morning Meeting revealed the social skills students had mastered or required extra practice. Students were observed during a group work time. The notes from this observation were used in the planning of Morning Meeting experiences. This same observation process was conducted at the end of the implementation of Morning Meeting. The second observation was to identify if the Morning Meeting skills taught were being used in real life situation. During this entire

experience, observations and reflections were recorded in a teacher research journal. This provided a space to analyze thoughts and adjust current practices.

Measurements and Calculations Performed

With 21 students, an in-depth observation of the entire class required extra help for the researcher who simultaneously had teacher responsibilities. The Instructional Coach at South Prairie Elementary, Melissa White, assisted in the observation process. First, the researcher and Melissa White created a Google Document Form for entering data. The Google Document was an easy place to reference the collected data. The data was input during the first and last observations. The behaviors and skills were calculated based on frequency. The calculations made comparing the data simple.

Results

Before the implementation of Morning Meeting, Melissa White initially observed student behavior in the classroom during a small group math exploration time. Students were in small groups collaboratively using math manipulatives. During this time, Melissa took note on student behavior and peer engagement. During the twenty minutes, she observed twenty predetermined negative behavior and peer interactions. Not engaged with their partner/ disengaged with the activity was the most evident behavior at twelve (N=12) responses. Followed by blurting at three (N=3), failure to maintain personal space at two (N=2), disrespect or incorrect use of materials at one (N=1), arguing with peer (N=1) at one, and other at one (N=1). Twelve (N=12) of twenty-one (N=21) students were found displaying the negative behaviors or peer interactions. One student had four (N=4) of the behaviors. Followed by two

students who each had three (N=3) responses and one student who had two (N=2). Eight (N=8) students each had one (N=1) response.

Table 1

Initial Observation

	Not engaged with partner/disengaged with activity	Blurting	Failure to maintain personal space	Disrespect or incorrect use of materials	Arguing with peers	Other
Student 1	1				1	
Student 2						1
Student 3		1				
Student 4	1	1	2			
Student 5	3					
Student 6	1					
Student 7		1				
Student 8	1					
Student 9	2			1		
Student 10	1					
Student 11	1					
Student 12	1					
Total Behavior(s)	12	3	2	1	1	1

Four weeks into the implementation, Melissa White observed twice during Morning Meeting. During each of the five-minute observations, the observer's focus was on a different student every five seconds. During that time, a plus (+) for on task behavior or minus (-) sign to indicate off-task behavior was given. The purpose of this observation was to identify the amount of student engagement during Morning Meeting, leading students to an understanding of the skills taught during this time. During the first observation, fifty-seven (N=57) of the sixty (N=60) marks indicated on task behavior. Therefore, 95% of the time, students were engaged in the Morning Meeting experiences, demonstrating desirable behaviors. During the second five (N=5) minute observation, fifty-eight (N=58) of the sixty (N=60) marks indicated on task behavior. 96.6% of the time, students were on task and engaged during Morning Meeting.

After six (N=6) weeks of using the Morning Meeting format, Melissa observed during a math manipulative work place, gathering data on the same predetermined student behaviors. During the twenty (N=20) minute observation, fourteen (N=14) behaviors were observed. Not engaged with partner/disengaged with activity was the most evident behavior with six (N=6) responses. Blurting was the next most evident behavior at four (N=4). Disrespect or incorrect use of materials and arguing with peers each had two (N=2) responses. Of the twenty-one (N=21) students in the class, the behaviors were observed from seven (N=7) students. Five (N=5) of the students were also students who demonstrated a negative behavior during the first observation. One (N=1) student had four (N=4) of the behaviors. Two (N=2) students each had three (N=3) responses. The final six (N=6) behaviors were from six different students.

Table 2

Final Observation

	Not engaged with partner/disengaged with activity	Blurting	Failure to maintain personal space	Disrespect or incorrect use of materials	Arguing with peers	Other
Student 1	1					
Student 2	1					
Student 3		1		1	1	
Student 4		2		1		
Student 5	2	1			1	
Student 6	1					
Student 7	1					
Total	6	4	0	2	2	0
Behavior(s)						

Discussion

This study was implemented to analyze any change in student behavior and peer relationships after the implementation of Morning Meeting. It is next to impossible to completely eliminate all negative student behaviors in a classroom. However, Morning Meeting's goal is to create a community where students can work through complications using

the taught skills. While almost all behaviors were evident in both observations, the amount of each behavior varied. During the first observation, there were a total of twenty-one (N=21) behaviors. At the second observation, fourteen (N=14) behaviors were observed. The negative behaviors were down thirty-three (N=33) percent. Because each behavior was a focus during some point of Morning Meeting, the data shows the impact Morning Meeting can have on student behavior and student relationships. While the total amount of behaviors increased, it is essential to analyze each behavior and reflect on the emphasis each skill was given during Morning Meeting instruction. As seen in Table 1, the student behavior that required the most attention was “not engaged with partner/disengaged with activity” at twelve (N=12) occurrences. This skill became a major focus during Morning Meeting. Students participated in structured conversations and activities where engagement with others and focusing on the task at hand were the focus. Within the six (N=6) weeks, students were given multiple opportunities to put the skills into practice. During the second observation, the frequency of this student behavior decreased by fifty percent. The amount of focus spent on directly instructing on this skill gave students the support to do this on their own when interacting with peers. While this behavior decreased, the behavior of blurting increased. While this was directly instructed on during Morning Meeting, it was not given the emphasis as the student engagement. This was also the case for “disrespect or incorrect use of materials” and “arguing with peers”. These skills were not as much of a focus. However, Morning Meeting’s goal is to build a classroom community and arguing is not part of a positive classroom culture. Through other, less official observations, a growing amount of compassion and trust were evident, even if not shown during this official observation. Through this action research, the benefits of Morning Meeting

were confirmed. Students used their Morning Meeting experiences during their independent experiences. While eliminating all negative behaviors is almost impossible, Morning Meeting lessened the frequency of the behaviors and allowed students to build relationships.

Limitations

This study has potential limitations. While many unofficial observations were done throughout the six weeks, little to no data was collected during this time. Therefore, insufficient amount of data to analyze is possible. Providing hard data, instead of solely using personal observation without recording data observations would have been beneficial. If a future study was conducted, the researcher would suggest incorporating more official observations to show the progression of the study. More points of data to reference would allow a more enhanced understanding of the effect Morning Meeting has on student behavior and peer relationships.

Further Study

Through this study, one can see the impact Morning Meeting can have on student behavior and peer relationships. However, more research should be done on the effects of Morning Meeting. Student opinions on Morning Meeting and its effectiveness on their behavior and relationships would be a beneficial study. Understanding how students feel about this strategy would allow educators to enhance their experiences. More research should be done at varying grade levels. This study was done on a first-grade classroom. The effectiveness could be different at the upper elementary levels. Lastly, Morning Meeting made a positive impact on this classroom. More teachers need to become aware of the possibilities of Morning Meeting. Identifying a way to share information to more teachers would be beneficial. More research

done on Morning Meeting will increase its use in education, creating more positive classroom communities in school systems.

Conclusion

Morning Meeting provides teachers a strategy in creating a positive classroom environment. These environments are essential in students' academic, social, and emotional success. Due to the need of classroom management strategies, educators are implementing Morning Meeting to provide direct instruction on social skills that create a desired classroom environment. Previous research supports Morning Meeting's ability to build a classroom community, promote social skills, and support learning. While some teachers argue there is a lack of time and possible ineffective strategies, the benefits of implementing Morning Meeting in the classroom is much greater. The implementation of Morning Meeting can be overwhelming and time consuming to begin. However, once routines and expectations are set, the teacher and students will appreciate the Morning Meeting experience and the skills that are taught.

Most of the research done on Morning Meeting has proven its effectiveness on building community, promoting social skills, and supporting learning. During this study, student behavior and peer relationships were the main focuses. Student behaviors were observed before and after the implementation of morning meeting. After six weeks of complete Morning Meeting implementation, students' negative behaviors had decreased. Therefore, not only does Morning Meeting build community, promote social skills, and support learning, but also, increases desired student behavior. This study supports similar studies of the effectiveness of Morning Meeting.

Even with the changes in education, classroom community and classroom management will always be essential. Teachers desire strategies that are simple to implement but will benefit their classroom. The Responsive Classroom approach and Morning Meeting provide teachers the structure to create a positive classroom environment and community. Educators are aware of the stress negative classroom culture and negative student behaviors can have on student success. Morning Meeting allows teachers a designated time to address these behaviors and instruct on skills students need to be successful members of their community. Providing more education and training would increase the number of teachers adopting Morning Meeting as part of their everyday classroom routine.

References

- About Responsive Classroom. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/about/>
- Allen-Hughes, L. (2013). The social benefits of the morning meeting: creating a space for social and character education in the classroom. (Master's Thesis). Dominican University of California, San Rafael, California.
- Bondy, E. & Ketts, S. (2001). "Like being at the breakfast table: The power of classroom morning meeting. *Childhood Education*, 77, 144-49.
- Bornstein, J. & Bradley, J. (2007). Time to circle up: Using morning meeting in professional development. *YC Young Children*, 62(4), 26-27.
- Caraccio, M. (2017). An investigation of the relationship between academic achievement and high school students' perceived level of satisfaction of needs in selected southeast Tennessee schools. (Dissertation). The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, Tennessee, United States
- Dabbs, L. (2013, September 18). The Power of the Morning Meeting: 5 Steps Toward Changing Your Classroom and School Culture. Retrieved from <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/morning-meeting-changing-classroom-culture-lisa-dabbs>
- DeMarco, M., & Tilson, E. (1998). Maslow in the classroom and the clinic. *Radiologic Technology*, 70(1), 91.
- Fenty, N. S., Miller, M. A., & Lampi, A. (2008). Embed social skills instruction in inclusive settings. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 43(3), 186-192.

Gardner, C. (2012). Morning meeting and science--A winning combination. *Science and Children*, 50(1), 60-64.

Hindman, A. & Wasik, B. (2011). The morning message in early childhood classrooms: guidelines for best practices. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 39, 183-189.

Iowa Department of Education Public Reporting (2018). *District Reports: Dallas Center-Grimes Community School District*. Iowa: Iowa Department of Education.

Kriete, R. & Davis, C. (2017). *The morning meeting book: K-8*. Turner Falls, MA: Center for Responsive Schools.

Rimm-Kaufman, S. & Sawyer, B. (2004). Primary-grade teachers' self-efficacy beliefs, attitudes toward teaching, and discipline and teaching practice priorities in relation to the "responsive classroom" approach. *The Elementary School Journal*, 104(4), 321-341.

Roser, S. L. (2016). *80 morning meeting ideas: For grades K-2*. Turners Falls, MA: Center for Responsive Schools.

Sari, M. (2012). Sense of school belonging among elementary school students. (*Cukurova University Faculty of Education Journal*) Cukurova University, Adana, Turkey

Winterman, K. G. & Sapona, R. H. (2002). Everyone's included. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 35(1), 30.