Student-Led Class Meetings:
*Passing the Power to the First Graders*

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**Description of Teaching Context**

I completed my teacher inquiry in my first grade classroom at Panorama Village Elementary School. My class includes 21 first graders between the ages of six and eight. The students live in Boalsburg, which is a rural/suburban area of the State College Area School District. Although there are three Russian students and two black students in the classroom, the majority of the students would be classified as Caucasian. Two students in the class have IEPs (Individualized Education Programs); one for Down Syndrome and one for ADHD. The student with Down Syndrome struggles in the area of social interaction, but does not cause any additional management problems in the classroom. Recently, some of the other students in the class have begun to tease him inadvertently because of his speech impediment. The student with ADHD used to have frequent confrontations with his peers, but now spends his mornings out of the classroom in Learning Support. As a result, he no longer causes major social issues in the classroom.

As far as social interactions, each student in my class seems to get along with at least one other student. However, many of the students have created their own cliques, and sometimes exclude other students. Students are constantly coming up to Mrs. Tranell and me with problems that they are having with their peers. We introduced I-Messages at the beginning of the school year, but students rarely use them without teacher direction. When they do use I-messages on their own accord, the recipient of the message often ignores or responds negatively to the message. Another recent trend in the class is the separation of girls and boys. The boys are competitive with the girls, and the girls gang up against the boys and chase them at recess (against the boys’ will). My mentor and I have also discussed the fact that there are no students in the class who act as positive role
models and leaders for their peers. Overall, the class gets along, but tattling and arguing do occur frequently.

My class also tends to have management issues on a regular basis. While there are no major issues, the class as a whole is talkative at inappropriate times, and many students do not always follow directions or show respect to the teachers in the class.

**Wonderings and Sub-Questions**

As unpleasant exchanges between students in my class became more frequent, I wondered how I could help to improve their interpersonal relationships with each other. In a study conducted by Wilson, Pianta and Stuhlman, it was found that first grade is a crucial grade level for students to begin developing social competencies. This study also claims that “student engagement is positively correlated with a positive classroom atmosphere” (Wilson, Pianta & Stuhlman, 2007). I considered ways to improve my classroom atmosphere for my first grade students, and wondered if increasing their level of participation would give them a greater sense of responsibility for their actions. We had learned about student-led class meetings in our Classroom Learning Environments course, and I wondered if first graders were capable of conducting their own meetings to discuss social issues.

I formed my teacher inquiry based on the following wondering:

**How do student-led classroom meetings affect the sense of community and personal responsibility among the students in my class?**

Along with this wondering came other sub-questions that dealt with the inquiry:
1. How will students (as individuals) respond to being placed in the leadership role?
   a. Will it increase their sense of responsibility?
   b. How will shy students handle the leadership position?

2. How will students react to the meetings?
   a. Will all of the students participate?
   b. What role will I play in the meetings? Will they truly be “student-led”?
   c. Will the students follow through with the resolutions that they create at the meetings?

3. How will students use the box of grievances?
   a. Will they use it on a regular basis?
   b. What types of grievances will they enter?
   c. Will the box of grievances help students refrain from constant tattling?
   d. How will the box of grievances tie into class meetings?

While there are numerous wonderings that I could have explored with my inquiry topic, I chose to explore how the meetings affected students on a personal level, and how they affected the classroom community. These main wonderings were tied to my desire to improve the social atmosphere in the class and to help students become more responsible and aware of their interactions with each other.
Data Collection/Analysis

1. **Observations & Anecdotal Notes** [Appendix C.1]; **Weekly Journals** [Appendix C.II]

   I began to take anecdotal notes of classroom interactions towards the end of January. I recorded observations of both positive and negative social interactions in the classroom that I noticed throughout the day. Because it is difficult to record every instance, I began to keep a weekly journal to reflect on the classroom atmosphere. My perceptions of the classroom community were based on the anecdotal notes that I took throughout the week and the observations that I was not able to write down. My personal journal also reflected how I felt about the class meetings, and what I needed to change for the following week.

   The purpose of the observations and journals was to keep a running record of the atmosphere in the classroom so that I could compare any changes from the beginning of the inquiry to the end of the inquiry. This would help me see if the community improved throughout the course of the five weeks, and how it improved. I used them in my analysis to determine what has changed in the classroom and how it has changed.

2. **Student Interviews** [Appendix D]

   I conducted student interviews before the class meetings began, and then again at the end of my inquiry. The questions were designed to determine how the students felt about our classroom community, and what types of issues they thought were important to discuss. I also asked students how they felt about speaking in front of the class. I interviewed ten students (chosen at random) for
the first interview, and then interviewed the same 10 students again for the follow-up interview. Rather than creating a new interview sheet, I recorded their answers from the second interview onto the same sheet as the first interview.

I used these interviews in my analysis to compare student perceptions of the classroom community before and after the class meetings. In the follow-up interview, I asked students what they thought of the class meetings in terms of their effectiveness. I used this interview to analyze the effectiveness of the meetings according to the students. It allowed me to see if they thought our new rules were working to improve the classroom. For my analysis, I compared each student’s initial response to his/her later response to the same questions. I also used information from the surveys to determine students’ level of comfort in front of the class, and compared it to their performance as class leader. Comparing student responses from their interviews to their performance on the video clips helped to answer my sub-question about how students would react to being a leader.

3. **Surveys** [Appendix E.1 & E.II]

I designed surveys to give me a general idea about how the class perceives the classroom community. The purpose of the preliminary survey was to help verify the need for additional community building in the classroom, as well as, to give me a baseline for comparison after the inquiry was complete. I asked questions that would help me understand what issues needed to be addressed at our class meetings, and how students felt in general about speaking in front of a
group. The final survey was designed to see how students’ perceptions about the classroom community have changed over the five weeks, and to see how they felt about the effectiveness of the class meetings.

I analyzed the first surveys immediately after I gave them to the students by tallying the number of responses to each question. Most students felt that the three biggest problems in our classroom were tattling, not sharing, and when other students do not let them play at recess. These three issues ended up being topics for discussion for three of the class meetings. The other questions on the survey were repeated on the final survey, and I compared the number of tally marks on each answer to help draw conclusions about how the classroom environment has changed from the students’ points of view.

4. **Video and Voice Recordings** [Appendix F]

Before each class meeting, I held a brief meeting with the leaders for the week to choose a topic, discuss the box of grievance entries, and to go over expectations for them as leaders. I recorded each of these meetings on GarageBand. I also recorded each class meeting with a video camera, and then put the film onto my computer to analyze it using Studiocode. My purpose for recording these meetings was so that I would be able to look back and analyze different aspects of the meetings.

To analyze the video recordings, I converted the raw footage to Quicktime and created a timeline in Studiocode for coding. I created one coding button that I clicked each time a student was leading or participating in the meeting. I clicked
another coding button each time I interjected or helped conduct the meeting. I then created individual movies of each of these instances to be able to compare the amount of time that I spent in charge each meeting versus the amount of time that the students were leading and discussing on their own. This helped me answer my wondering that asked if the meetings would truly be “student-led”.

Another way that I used video clips for analysis was to make a tally chart [see Appendix F] for the amount of student participation at each meeting. I reviewed the meetings and make a tally mark next to the name of the student every time they participated. Using this data, I was able to compare the level of student participation at the meetings, and how they progressed. I could also see if certain students dominated the conversation while others kept quiet.

The videos and voice recordings also helped me to analyze how shy students in the class reacted to the meetings because I could review the recordings and make observations that I was unable to make during the meetings.

5. **Tattletale Count** [Appendix G]

I created a tattletale count chart that included a list of common tattletales heard in the classroom. Next to each tattletale, my mentor and I would mark down each time a student came over to us with a particular tattletale. The first count took place over the course of the first two weeks prior to beginning the class meetings. The second count was taken over the course of the final two weeks of the class meetings. This form of data held two significant purposes for my inquiry. First, I used it to determine what the major social issues in the
classroom were according to the students. Second, I used it to compare the social environment in the classroom at the beginning and end of my inquiry.

My rationale for the tattletale count was that it would help me see what kinds of social issues were occurring in the classroom at the beginning and end of my inquiry. To analyze this data, I combined my mentor’s tally marks with my own and added the total number of tallies for each tattletale. I then compared the numbers of tattletales that were brought to the teachers’ attention. From this data, I was able to determine what had changed, which allowed me to analyze the change in the classroom environment over the course of the inquiry.

6. Grievance Box [Appendix H.I & H.II]

During the five weeks of the class meetings, the box of grievances was placed on my desk with slips of paper and a pencil at all times. Students were encouraged to use the box whenever they had a grievance in the classroom. The purpose of the box was to help students refrain from tattling, and to inspire topics for our class meetings. It also helped me keep record of specific social issues occurring in the classroom.

I kept track of the entries in the box on a daily basis by recording what was entered and when on a computer document [Appendix H.I]. As I analyzed my data, I referred to this sheet to see how often the students utilized the box, and what they used it for. I was able to determine when it received the most usage from this data, and thus could easily answer my sub-question about how the box of grievances would tie into the class meetings.
Explanation of Findings (Including claims and evidence)

Claim 1: First grade students are able to create appropriate solutions to social problems during classroom meetings, but do not consistently follow up on their resolutions. Therefore, student-led classroom meetings do not effectively improve the classroom community.

After analyzing my video data, comparing my tattletale charts, and evaluating my anecdotal notes, I do not recognize any noticeable difference in the classroom community as a result of the class meetings. The preliminary two-week tattletale count was 51 tattletales between my mentor and me, and the final count for the last two weeks was 43. This data shows that the number of tattletales brought to the teachers’ attention did not significantly decrease after five weeks of class meetings.

In my analysis of the video data from the meetings, I found specific examples where multiple students volunteered appropriate solutions to the problem being discussed. For example, at the second meeting about cutting in line, Z offered the solution that students “should go to the end of the line if they cut [another student in line].” The day after the meeting (3/20/08), Z was among the many students who cut in line at the drinking fountain after recess [see Appendix C.I]. In addition, two of the entries in the Box of Grievances that week said that cutting in line was a problem in the classroom [see Appendix H.I]. This shows that students created an appropriate resolution but did not all follow through with their promise.

My last source of data for this claim came from the final survey that I distributed to the class on April 10, 2008. The final question on the survey [Appendix E.II] asked students, “Did you think the meetings helped the class get along better?” Out of all 21 students, nine circled yes, two circled no, and 10 circled in between. The results of the
survey show that the classroom community may have improved slightly through the eyes of some students, but most students answered either no or in between.

I asked this same question to five students in my final interviews, and three students answered that they did not think that the meetings affected students, and the other two answered that they thought that they ‘sort of’ helped the students get along better. Two of these students told me that they still see their peers ignoring I-messages and cutting in line, which were two of the topics discussed at the meetings.

Looking at both the survey results and my own observations of the classroom community following the meetings, I do not believe that my classroom community improved much as a result of the meetings because students did not always make a conscious effort to follow through with the solutions that they created and signed off on.

Claim 2: All students in the class demonstrated enthusiasm when they were placed in the leadership role regardless of their proclaimed comfort level about speaking in front of the class.

As I analyzed my data, I noticed a discrepancy between students’ responses on the final survey to questions about their level of comfort in front of the class. In both surveys, I asked the students, “Are you comfortable talking in front of the whole class?” In the initial survey, 12 students answered yes to the question and 6 students answered no. [Note: Only 18 students in the class were present to take the initial survey.] In the final survey, 12 students answered yes to the same question, and 9 students answered no. On the final survey I also asked students if they enjoyed being a leader during the class meetings. The overwhelming majority (19 out of 21) of the students answered yes, one student answered no, and one student answered in between. This response showed a
discrepancy between the way students felt about speaking in front of the class and how they felt about being placed in the leadership role. I wondered if most students failed to make a correlation between speaking in front of the class and being a class leader during the meetings. In addition, Appendix E.II shows a sample final survey from one student in particular. On the survey, she circled that she enjoyed being a leader, but does not feel comfortable speaking in front of the class. Appendix F shows that this same student had the second highest rate of participation across all five meetings. This discrepancy allows me to believe that most students did enjoy being a leader regardless of their feelings about speaking in front of the class.

Further evidence to support this claim came from my anecdotal notes, where I observed on two separate occasions that students acted enthusiastically when they saw their names on the leader board for the week [Appendix C.II]. Also, in the voice recording that I took on GarageBand from the meetings that I held with the leaders before the second class meeting, one student said to me, “Miss Bracken, I have been trying to act like a good leader all week!” when I reminded the students to be good leaders during the meeting. This showed me that some of the students were taking their role seriously as leaders.

**Claim 3:** First grade students need some support to lead meetings, but are capable of holding discussions about social issues on their own.

As evident in my journal entry [Appendix C.II], I was apprehensive before the first meeting about how students would handle the leadership role. After using Studiocode to analyze my video recordings of each meeting, I found that the students and I spent approximately the same amount of time talking during the first meeting
[Appendix F]. The Studiocode analysis shows, however, that the amount of student-led time during each meeting increased over the course of the five weeks while the amount of teacher-led time decreased significantly. By the fourth meeting, I only participated for approximately 4 minutes of the meeting while students were in charge and participating for approximately 10 minutes.

In my Studiocode analysis, I also realized that students did need some direction during each meeting. During the second meeting, I allowed wait time whenever there was a pause to see if students would continue the meeting without my direction. I ended up interjecting and redirecting students multiple times during that meeting. By the fifth meeting, there was still a need for teacher input, but I interjected less and there were fewer pauses during the meeting.

Providing students with a script decreased the amount of pauses and awkward silences during the class meetings. I did not provide the script until the second meeting, and found that it made a great difference in the amount of student participation. The second meeting was approximately four minutes shorter than the first, and thirteen students gave input, with a total of 25 instances of student input. In the first meeting, eleven students participated with a total of 17 instances of student input. I also listened to my Garage Band recordings and found that my directions were more explicit for the second group of leaders than they were with the first group. This shows that students do need some direction to be able to lead meetings.

Appendix F shows that all students participated at least once in at least one meeting. I was pleased to see that no one student dominated any of the meetings; the level of participation was spread among 11-15 students per meeting. From this evidence,
I can infer that the first graders were open to sharing their thoughts and suggestions, meaning that they are capable of holding discussions as a group with little interference from the teacher.

**Claim 4: The leadership role and increased responsibility gave some students more incentive to act like leaders, while it did not seem to affect others.**

Through my analysis of video clips, Garage Band recordings, and certain entries in the Box of Grievances, I found that some students showed more responsibility as leaders. In one of the Garage Band recordings prior to the class meeting, one of the leaders said to me, “Miss Bracken, I have been trying to act like a good leader all week!” In my anecdotal notes, I found one example of a leader from the first week showing incentive when she helped two students come to a compromise when they were arguing over a toy during indoor recess. She first asked the student, “Did you take the stompers from him?” When the student answered “Yes,” and tried to justify his reasoning, the leader quickly inserted, “Is it ever OK to take something without asking?” When the student said, “No,” she asked him to apologize and requested that the two students take turns. This student showed the most initiative as a classroom leader as she was the only student who I saw working to solve classroom problems outside of the meetings.

Other students, on the other hand, did not seem to feel more responsibility as a leader. In my Studiocode analysis, I found that at least one leader at each meeting was off-task at times when they were not in charge during the meeting. In addition, Appendix H.I shows two entries in the box of grievances that claim that a leader did not listen to an I-message.
Reflections and Future Practice

My teacher inquiry gave me insight into how first graders interact with each other and how they handle leadership roles. I found that although the student-led meetings did not necessarily improve the classroom community, it did give students a chance to speak their mind and to practice creating appropriate solutions to problems. Research shows that students’ participation and advocacy in the classroom is positively affected when students are given opportunities to practice communication skills (Boyd, Lillig & Lyon, 2007). I believe the class meetings worked as a way to provide students the opportunity to practice these skills. It also gave students who do not always participate in teacher-led discussions a chance to gain more experience with sharing their opinions.

Student-led meetings are an excellent tool to bring to any classroom. In the future, I would use them more on an as-needed basis for particular social issues as they occur. This may create more incentive for students to follow the solutions that are decided on at the meeting, as they might be more invested in the problem. Another option would be to hold monthly meetings that are slightly longer rather than holding 15-minute weekly meetings. While the 15-minute meetings worked for my purposes, longer meetings would allow for a more in-depth discussion. They would also allow time for additional community building activities during the meetings, such as a fun, cooperative game to set a positive tone.

To bring a more personal tone to the meeting, Donna Styles suggests for students to keep personal journals about how each meeting went so that they can reflect on the meeting and write down anything they would fix or did not feel comfortable saying in front of the class (Styles, 2001). I would use this practice if I were conducting the
meetings with students in higher grades. For the lower grades, I would interview a few students as a follow-up to each meeting to gather their thoughts and reflections.

In the future, I will keep a box of grievances in the classroom, but I would set it up at the beginning of the school year and would enforce its use more strictly. I will explain to the students that its purpose is to help us reflect on the negative aspects of the classroom so that we can find solutions and work on fixing them. I will enforce its use by directing my students to the box to place an entry every time they come to me with a tattletale or complaint (assuming it is not an urgent problem, such as bullying). I will check the entries on a regular basis, and use the frequent complaints and tattletales as basis for discussion at class meetings and/or morning meeting. The box of grievances will help me keep track of the classroom environment as a teacher, and will help my students see what needs to be fixed.

As a teacher, I believe students should take personal responsibility for their actions, and should learn to communicate effectively with each other at a young age. I will continue the implementation of student-led class meetings in the future, but will alter them according to what works for my class at the time. I hope that I can eventually develop a class-meeting structure that will effectively improve the community in my classroom.
References


Appendix A

Inquiry Brief

Context
My inquiry project will take place in my first grade classroom at Panorama Village Elementary School. The class includes 21 first graders between the ages of six and seven. The students live in Boalsburg, which is a rural/suburban area of the State College school district. Although there are three Russian students and two Black students in the classroom, the majority of the students would be classified as Caucasian. One student in the class has Down syndrome and one student has an IEP and has been diagnosed with ADHD. The student with Down syndrome does not cause any added disruption to the class. The student with ADHD does tend to create problems with his peers on a regular basis, but now spends the mornings in another classroom in order to fulfill his educational needs.

As far as social interactions, each student in my class seems to get along with at least one other student. However, many of the students have created their own cliques, and are beginning to exclude other students. Students are constantly coming up to Mrs. Tranell and me with problems that they are having with their peers. We introduced I-Messages at the beginning of the school year, but students rarely use them without a teacher directing them to do so. When they do use I-messages on their own accord, the recipient of the message often ignores or responds negatively to the message. Another recent trend in the class is the separation of girls and boys. The boys act competitive with the girls, and the girls gang up against the boys and chase them at recess (against the boys’ will). My mentor and I have also discussed the fact that there are no students in the class who act as positive role models and leaders for their peers. Overall, the class gets along, but tattling and arguing do occur frequently.

My class also tends to have management issues on a regular basis. While there are no major issues, many of the students tend to be talkative at inappropriate times, and do not always follow directions or show respect to the teachers in the class.

Rationale
As early signs of bullying have become more prevalent among my first graders, I have begun to wonder what will help improve the sense of community in the classroom. My mentor teacher spent a good portion of the first few weeks of school developing a strong classroom community, and many of her community building activities (such as rock buddies) have continued on throughout the year. These activities have not, however, proven to increase the sense of community in the classroom. I have recently witnessed my students excluding other students, using bullying remarks, and constantly tattling on each other. They fail to properly implement I-Messages, and use fighting words and condescending tones of voices.

With this in mind, I seek to help improve the classroom atmosphere. I know that bullying only increases with age, and I feel that first grade is the best time to take preventative action. Therefore, my rationale for this inquiry project is that I am hoping to create a more positive classroom community by giving students more responsibility and more clout as a member of Room A-2. I am also wondering if collaboration among students will improve their relationships with each other.

Wondering
How do student-led classroom meetings affect the sense of community and personal responsibility among the students in my class?

With this wondering, I plan to implement student-led class meetings in my classroom. Each week, four or five students will be “in charge” of the class. They will act as peer mediators for the week, listening to their peers’ problems, and they will be in charge of the weekly meeting for that week. These student-led class meetings will follow a structure that I will introduce to the students in the first meeting. At the meetings, students will receive the chance to share anything important that they wish to contribute, and will also discuss problems that are occurring in the classroom and come up with a solution. I will set up a mailbox by my desk where students can write anonymous grievances that they are having, and those grievances will be brought up at each weekly meeting.
My wondering is two-pronged. First, I am curious about how the meetings will affect students’ relationships in the classroom. Second, I want to see what effect it will have on students when they are placed in the leader role.

**Sub-questions**
- In what ways will the classroom community change? Will classroom management improve as a result of greater community building?
- How does putting students into a leadership role affect their enthusiasm about school?
- How will students respond to being put in a leadership role?
- How will shy children react to this opportunity?
- Do students use the box of grievances on a regular basis? What types of grievances do they put into the box?

**Projected Timeline**
- **February 7-21**
  - Data collecting in the form of two-week tattletale count, observations of classroom interactions, personal journal entries, interviews with students, and a survey
- **February 26-29**
  - First week of implementation-introduce class meeting idea to students
    - Set expectations and introduce format
    - Introduce box of grievances, which will be on my desk at all times during the week. Students in charge that week will read through the box with me at some point in the week before the meeting.
  - Data collecting in form of journal entries, observations, and video taping of meeting
- **March 3-6**
  - First week of implementation-first class meeting
  - 1st Meeting (Week of March 3rd)
    - Leaders:
      - Leader #1: E
      - Leader #2: S
      - Leader #3: H
      - Leader #4: B
    - Topic: Cutting in line
  - Data collecting in form of journal entries, observations, and video taping of meeting
- **March 18-20**
  - Second week of implementation-second class meeting
  - 2nd Meeting (Week of March 17th)
    - Leaders:
      - Leader #1: L
      - Leader #2: T
      - Leader #3: A
      - Leader #4: L
    - Topic: Not sharing
  - Data collecting in form of journal entries, observations, and video taping of meeting
- **March 24-28**
  - Third week of implementation-third class meeting
  - 3rd Meeting (Week of March 24th)
    - Leaders:
      - Leader #1: S
      - Leader #2: Z
      - Leader #3: T
Leader #4: V
  - Topic: Not using manners with each other
    - Data collecting in form of journal entries, observations, and video taping of meeting

**March 31-April 4**
- Fourth week of implementation-fourth class meeting
- 4th Meeting (Week of March 31st)
  - Leaders:
    - Leader #1: A
    - Leader #2: K
    - Leader #3: M
    - Leader #4: AV
  - Topic: Leaving other students out
    - Data collecting in form of journal entries, observations, and video taping of meeting
    - Two-week data collection in the form of tattletale count, observations of classroom interactions

**April 7-11**: Fifth week of implementation-fifth (and final) class meeting
- 5th Meeting (Week of April 7th)
  - Leaders:
    - Leader #1: G
    - Leader #2: L
    - Leader #3: AK
    - Leader #4: I
    - Leader #5: C
  - Topic: Being “mean” to other students
    - Data collecting in form of journal entries, observations, and video taping of meeting
    - Two-week data collection in the form of tattletale count, observations of classroom interactions
    - Second interviews with students
    - Second survey from students
    - Begin writing inquiry paper

**April 12**: Inquiry paper draft due
- Begin preparing inquiry presentation

**April 23**: Final Inquiry paper due

**April 26**: Inquiry Conference

**Data Collection**
- Observations of social interactions in my classroom (beginning end of January)
  - These observations will show the progression over time of the social interactions that I am witnessing in the classroom. It will provide me with a baseline for how the classroom community was when I began the project, and allow me to compare it to the classroom community towards the end of the project.
- Interviews with students (before and after the implementation of my project)
  - These interviews will give me insight into student views about the classroom community. I will conduct interviews both before and after implementation with the same students to see if the students experienced a change in atmosphere throughout the five weeks.
  - I will choose some of the shyer students in the class for the interviews so that I can track their progress and see what affect the class meetings had on their social interactions. This will help answer one of my sub-questions.
- Surveys about classroom interactions (before and after implementation)
  - The surveys will provide me with a general consensus from the class about the classroom community. It will also give me something to compare to so that I can provide evidence as to whether or not my inquiry improved the classroom environment. It will also give me specific information as to what might have improved.
- Video recordings for each class meeting
  - I plan to record the class meetings so that I can review and analyze them. This will allow me to focus on the meetings as they are occurring, rather than taking notes the whole
time. I will use the video clips to record the amount of participation for each student and to note any changes that should be made to the format of the meeting. It will also provide evidence as to what went on at each meeting.

- Ongoing journal that includes my reflections on the community that I see in my classroom at the time
  - This journal will help me account for my own views of the classroom community throughout the project. It will be useful for me to have an ongoing journal so that I can pinpoint when and where the atmosphere in the class changed (if it does).

- Tattling count (two weeks at the beginning of February, two weeks towards the end of March)
  - This tattletale count will give me an idea about what the major problems are in the class according to the students. Mrs. Tranell, Mrs. Russell, Mrs. Schempf and me have all been making a tally each time a student brings a problem that they are having with another student to our attention. I will be doing another tattletale count towards the end to compare the data, but also to see if the amount of tattling in the classroom has decreased. If tattling decreases in the classroom, I will have clear evidence that the community in the class has improved in some way.

- Keeping track of how many grievances are placed in the box from week to week
  - This will help me answer one of my sub-questions that asks if students use the box of grievances on a regular basis. This will help me understand the student participation in the class meetings. It will also give me some idea about the general interest level among the students for the meetings.
Appendix B

Annotated Bibliography


- This article is a review of Donna Styles’ ideas about conducting successful classroom meetings. It includes tips about what the teacher and students should do during the meetings, and how to set up expectations. The most useful part of this article for my purposes will be the quotes by Styles included about how classroom meetings work and what they do for the classroom atmosphere.


- This thesis includes useful research about children and their communication skills, and how they affect their participation in the classroom. It claims “the development of appropriate communication skills will enhance [a child’s] educational experience and prepare him for real-life interactions (25).” This paper will be most useful to me as background information about my inquiry. It will help me back-up some of my own claims as I complete my project, and will be a useful comparison because the authors completed a similar project to my own.


- This website will be useful in planning out the format of our class meetings. It provides a sample agenda, ideas for problem-solving, lessons in encouragement, and a “Secretary’s Binder” sample page. I think I will use the Secretary’s Binder for myself to keep track of what goes on at each meeting because it will be too complicated for the students to fill out themselves. This page will also help me to collect data on each meeting. Another aspect of this page that will be useful is that if you click back to go to the Pro Teacher website, there is a link to teacher testimonials about how class meetings work in their own classrooms.


- The author of this article implements a classroom government into her classroom using committees and giving more responsibility to her students. She claims that these activities help students take more initiative in their learning, and gives examples of how
to set up a classroom government. The most useful section for my purposes is the section with the heading, “Talking the Problem.” This section explains how she uses a seven-step process with her class to help them talk through problems as a group. I plan to take her procedure into consideration as I begin to plan for my student-led class meetings.


- This book by Roxann Kriete includes numerous games, greetings, and activities to help enhance the sense of community in the classroom. One purpose of the book is to try to increase student investment in their schooling, which is one of my purposes for my inquiry. I will use this book for both background research and for ideas for activities for our classroom meetings.


- This article describes how one teacher was able to successfully implement student-led class meetings into her schedule. It makes the claim that student-led meetings lead to more intrinsically motivated students who are able to self-regulate more effectively. It also includes a section about community-building activities. This article was useful to me in choosing my inquiry project, and has helped me to provide a rationale for my project. It will continue to be useful to me as I write my inquiry paper because it will help me to back up any claims that I make and will provide background information on student-led class meetings.


- This website provides ideas about how to set up and conduct classroom meetings. Beth Lewis, the elementary education expert for About.com, explains the importance of putting children in a more responsible role in the classroom. She explains how she sets up the meetings in her classroom, how long they run, and what sort of topics are discussed. She also includes expectations and rules that the students must follow at each meeting. This website has been useful to me in planning the format for my student-led class meetings. It will continue to be useful to me as I make adjustments to my project because I can look to the article for advice on how to successfully implement classroom meetings.


- This resource is a graduate student dissertation about the effects of using a more democratic approach to school discipline. The author, Ann Platt, conducted a four-year study in an attempt to decrease the amount of misbehavior and violence found on the school grounds. She used the method of democratic class meetings, and found that the
amount of violence and misbehavior on school grounds decreased after four years. This paper is useful because it summarizes a lot of background research that Platt completed herself. It also provides ideas about how to run class meetings and how they should look.


- This will probably be my most useful resource throughout inquiry. It is an online copy of Donna Styles’ book about classroom meetings, and while it excludes some pages of the actual book, it contains plenty of useful information for me to use. The book is an thorough guide to the art of the class meeting, including such information as how to set up the room, how to deal with the contents of the class meeting grievance box, how to set expectations and tone for the meeting, etc. Styles also gives insight into the role of the teacher, and how to assess class meetings and their effectiveness. Since it is missing pages, if I can find the book in hardcopy, I will use that instead.


- This journal article includes highly specific research regarding the effect of the classroom community on the students’ academic and social growth. It explains the role of the teacher in developing the sense of community, and the need for community in the primary years of development. This article will be useful as I continue conducting research on community building in first grade, and will be an excellent resource for supporting my rationale for my inquiry project.
Appendix C.I

Sample Observations of Classroom Interactions

1/29/08
• One student tells another student that she is her “ugliest friend” and proceeds to exclude her from her recess game

2/6/08
• During Morning Meeting, I told the class to get a partner to do the “Howdy Partner” greeting. Most students paired up quickly, but some boys refused to be with girls, and T refused to be with A. He said aloud in front of the class, “I don’t want to be with him!”
• At the end of the day, we played a quick game of “Sparkle”. The students turned the game (as usual) into a competition between boys and girls, and booed at each other.

2/7/08
• M yelled at S for washing her hands with sanitizer
• L gave T an apology of action for something he did a few weeks ago (making fun of something she liked)-he gave her a card with a picture and the word “sorry” written on it

3/14/08
• L yelled out that E was annoying him by singing and making noises

3/20/08
• I found a note in M’s folder that had clearly written on it, “I hate K_____ M_____."
• At recess, the boys were playing football together. Once certain boys joined the group, one student began to dictate to the others students which position they would play, and they would not allow A to throw the ball.
• A was upset, and when we came back inside from recess, they fought about it verbally
• Heard the phrases, “You are the one tattling!”
• Four boys came in from recess and cut everybody else in line
• One boy took too long at the drinking fountain and so the other boy turned on the faucet (which makes the fountain water come out slower) and they began to fight
• Students coming in from recess took more than a three snap drink at the water fountain, even when the person behind them counted for them.

4/1/08
• Many students told on each other and claimed that other students were “annoying them”

4/5/08
• Many different students arguing at recess over who has all the bean bags
• M came to me and said that C called her an “idiot”
Appendix C.II

Sample Journal Entries

2/11/08
The classroom community seems to be fairly intact today. My mentor teacher and I have both noticing that the most prevalent times for student conflict come during recess and after lunch. It has also become a regular occurrence that when we put students in small groups of 2 or 3 to work, there is usually a student who says aloud that they “don’t want to work with him/her!” This is especially troubling, as we have been trying to teach manners to our students for the past few months.

2/15/08
One activity that helped improve the community atmosphere in my classroom this week was Valentine’s Day. As a whole, the class was buzzing with excitement, and the students were excited all day about sharing their Valentine’s with their peers. As they opened their Valentine cards, the other teachers in the room and I heard many “thank-yous” and “your welcomes” coming from all around the room. I even witnessed a few kids walk over to different tables to thank their peers for their Valentines.

I also realized this week through my observations that there are not many students in the class who seem to be overly shy. Everyone has at least one friend that they get along with. Some prefer to be alone, but are still social with the other students. I believe it is more the group dynamics that have been affecting the atmosphere in the classroom.

3/5/08
Our first class meeting was a little shaky. In the morning, I met with the four class leaders and we discussed the entries in the box of grievances. They decided that they wanted to change the topic of the meeting to I-messages because of the number of grievances about not listening to I-messages. They seemed to understand their role in the meeting, but I was worried that they would be not be able to carry out their part once the meeting was actually going on.

The leaders were excited all day, constantly asking when the meeting would be (because we had to move it to the afternoon). When we began the meeting, the leaders were slightly shy in calling up the tables to the carpet. I wondered if this was not a good way to begin the meetings. I want to give the students more power in the class, but I am not sure if they are ready for that type of responsibility. I ended up calling the students to the carpet to ensure that we had enough time for the meeting.

I allowed leaders to choose a seat anywhere in the circle, and I sat with them. Jen later suggested that I designate their seats next time because the leaders were off-task whenever they were not leading. I ended up directing a lot of the meeting, which I want to fix for next time. My goal in this inquiry is to give students more responsibility, but it was clear that they were not assuming the responsibility because they were talking when they were not leading.

I posted their solution to the I-message problem on the board, and had the whole class sign in agreement to it. My hope for the next meeting is that the leaders are more leader-like. I want the class to be more engaged in the topic.
Appendix D

Sample Student Interview

1. Do you ever feel sad at school?
   - Yes, sometimes b/c people hurt my feelings and only play with one person at recess (2/26)

2. What is your favorite part of the school day?
   - Writing (2/26)

3. Do you think that you are friends with most of the other students in the class?
   - Most but not all the boys because yesterday they chased me and hid my glove (2/26)

4. Do you ever get left out at recess?
   - No, except once (2/26)

5. How do you feel when you have to talk in front of the whole class? Excited? Nervous? Scared? Happy?
   - Fine (2/26)
   - It was OK with me (4/10)

6. What is your least favorite part of the school day?
   - Guided Reading (2/26)

7. What do you think is the worst problem in our classroom right now?
   - Talking in the hallway (2/26)
   - Talking while the teacher is talking (4/10)

8. What did you think of the class meetings?
   - They were fine. People didn’t really listen to the rules though. (4/10)
   - I liked when I got to be a leader (4/10)
Appendix E.I

Preliminary Student Survey

1. What do you think is the biggest problem in our classroom?
   a. When people cut me in line
   b. When people tattle-tale
   c. When people don't let me play with them
   d. When people do not share

2. Are you comfortable talking in front of the whole class?
   a. Yes
   b. No

3. I think people in the class use their manners...
   a. A lot
   b. A little
   c. Never

4. People in the class are usually....
   a. Nice to me
   b. Mean to me
Appendix E.II

Final Student Survey

1. What do you think is the biggest problem in our classroom?
   a. When people cut me in line
   b. When people tattle-tale
   c. When people don’t let me play with them
   d. When people do not share

2. Are you comfortable talking in front of the whole class?
   a. Yes
   b. No

3. I think people in the class use their manners...
   a. A lot
   b. A little
   c. Never

4. People in the class are usually....
   a. Nice to me
   b. Mean to me

5. Did you enjoy the class meetings?
   a. YES
   b. NO
   c. IN BETWEEN

6. Did you enjoy being a leader?
   a. YES
   b. NO
   c. IN BETWEEN

7. Did you think the meetings helped the class get along better?
   a. YES
   b. NO
   c. IN BETWEEN
Appendix F

Student-Participation Count

Student-Led Time versus Teacher-Led time

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<th>Mtg 5</th>
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<td>~13 min</td>
<td>~16 min</td>
<td>~15 min</td>
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</table>
Appendix G
Tattletale
Count

Morgan Bracken
Inquiry
Tattle-tale instances

I observed my class and took note of the most frequent complaints that students had against each other. Beginning on February 7, I kept track of how many times these instances came to my attention.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tattle Tale</th>
<th>Number of times</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cutting in line</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being “mean”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Tell me to shut up&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making fun of me</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hit me/Pushed me</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sharing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saying a bad word</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annoying me</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telling on someone for something specific they did</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"You're the one tattling!"
Taking too long at drinking fountain
Appendix H.I

Box of Grievance Entries

Week 1 (17 entries)
Wed. 2/27/08
• people on the carpet talking
• talking

Thursday 2/28/08
• touching people
• saying you only want to be with one person
• boys keep teasing me
• being a bad sport
• playing games and making messes
• S is being mean to M
• S is being mean to E

Friday, 2/29/08
• playing a game with someone but not cleaning up with them
• putting their front private parts in someone’s face
• not listening to an I-message when you’re a leader

Monday 3/3/08
• calling someone a tattle tale when you’re a leader!!
• being a tattle tale
• not listening to a quiet sign then when you’re giving them an I-message they don’t listen
• not listening to a quiet sign
• not listening to an I-MESSAGE

Week 2 (3 entries)
• cutting in line
• cutting in line
• talking

Week 3 (no entries)

Week 4 (1 entry)
• taking other people’s paper and ripping it up

Week 5 (no entries)
Appendix H.II

Sample Box of Grievance Entries

playing a game with someone but not cleaning up with them

being a tale.

being a bad sport.

not listening = meshig.
The first class meeting should serve at least two basic purposes: To clarify all reasonable questions students might have relative to the course objectives, as well as your expectations for their performance in class. As students leave the first meeting, they should believe in your competence to teach the course, be able to predict the nature of your instruction, and know what you will require of them. To give you an understanding of who is taking your course and what their expectations are. These two basic purposes expand into a set of eight concrete objectives.