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Factors that Influence Community in a Second Grade Performing Arts Classroom

by

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FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COMMUNITY

Abstract

This study explores the factors within a performing arts classroom environment that influence classroom community. Data was collected through student surveys and interviews as well as video observations. The findings show that routines have a positive impact on the classroom community when implemented in particular ways. The findings also show that the classroom environment overall is positive but that particular student relationships are challenging and influence how students work together. Implications focus on the implementation of routines, relationship building, and the understanding that not all classrooms operate the same.

Keywords: *building community, classroom management, arts education*

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COMMUNITY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	6
Statement of the Problem.....	7
Research Question and Subquestions	8
Summary	8
LITERATURE REVIEW	9
Relationships within a Classroom Community.....	9
Routines and Strategies and the Effects on Community.....	12
Summary	14
METHODS	15
Participants and Setting.....	15
Data Collection	16
Data Analysis.....	18
Conclusion	19
FINDINGS	20
Routines, when Implemented Properly, are Beneficial.....	20
Our Classroom Environment is Positive.....	23
Who Works Well Together?	24
Disruptive Students.....	25
Summary	26
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS	27
Routines	27
Positive Classroom Environment.....	28
Students Are Mismatched.....	28
Recommendations for Community Building	29
Limitations	30
Conclusion	30
REFERENCES	32
Appendix A Student Survey Protocol.....	35
Appendix B Student Interview Protocol	36
Appendix C Video Observation Protocol	37

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COMMUNITY

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Data Collection Timeline.....19

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Student-to-Student Relationships.....26

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COMMUNITY

INTRODUCTION

Although arts instruction in public elementary schools is common in the United States (Parsad & Spiegelman, 2011), students rarely experience it daily. In my position, I teach performing arts to Kindergarten through 5th grade which encompasses music as well as drama/theater. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2009-2010, 94% of the nation's public elementary schools offered music instruction and 4% offered drama/theater. Of these schools, 93% offered music once a week and 58% offered drama/theater once a week. As a performing arts teacher, I find it very difficult to create a solid and connected community for all my students when I only see classes once a week or less. I teach all the students in my school—about seven hundred. I meet with the upper elementary students once a week for an hour and the lower elementary students for thirty minutes. All the grade levels, besides second grade, go through a three or four-week rotation and then I do not see them again for three or four weeks. I do my best to set up routines, classroom management structures, and relationships with my students so that when I see them at their allotted time during the week, they know what to do and feel that there is a positive classroom community. I have specific routines in place for my students when they come to my class in order to have a classroom environment with clear expectations. I also incorporate team building exercises and partner work to help strengthen student-to-student relationships.

Given that the arts are often add-on experiences in elementary schools with limited instructional time, challenges with creating community may arise and this has been my case. For example, in the second-grade classroom that is the focus of this study, I feel like the community is weak because I experience a lot of behavior issues. For example, this class struggles with pushing each other and getting into arguments. This occurs when students are finding a seat on

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COMMUNITY

the carpet, finding personal space for an activity, and lining up. A few of the students have a really hard time not being first in line or sitting in the front of the classroom. I also have some students who exclude themselves from the community and choose to not participate. For example, I asked the students to go to a colored caddy group for a coloring activity. One student decided not to participate because he said, “I don’t like the color red.” Although the colored caddy had nothing to do with the activity, the student decided not to participate. This example is a typical occurrence with this class.

There are also student-to-student issues that seem to be a result of a weak community. A common issue, within this class, is students not speaking kindly to each other. During my time with this class, I had three different students complain to me that someone else had said something mean to them. For example, I had one student say to another student, “you are stupid” because the student allegedly cut them in line. I also overheard one student tell another student to, “give [him] the pen because [he was] doing it wrong.” I also notice that in group work, students have a hard time sharing the materials and the work because they just want to do it all themselves. These student-to-student issues are recurring during every class period.

Lastly, there seems to be a lack of connection between me and my students and this might be affecting the overall classroom environment. I have a very short time to meet with them—about 30 minutes a week— so it is hard for me to nurture teacher-to-student relationships.

Statement of the Problem

A classroom community “provide[s] a foundation for instruction, discipline, classroom organization, and all the other pedagogical aspects of classroom work” (Nicholas, 1997, pg. 200). I am concerned that my classroom community is missing some foundation which is making it fractured and in turn impacting students’ learning and experiences with the arts. These

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COMMUNITY

experiences seemed to be affecting the overall classroom environment and seemed to be impacting relationships in my classroom. Through this research, I aimed to better understand what routines were impacting students' experiences and relationships within my classroom so that I could improve on them and build a more positive classroom community.

Research Question and Subquestions

The purpose of this study is to better understand: How do I build a positive community with second grade students who I only meet with once a week for thirty minutes? This research is guided by the following questions:

1. What is my classroom environment like?
2. During what routines are students experiencing positive and negative interactions?
3. How are student-to-student relationships in my classroom?

Summary

This study was designed to observe my classroom environment, current routines and relationships in my classroom to better understand how they affected the students and, ultimately, the classroom community.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COMMUNITY

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature suggests there are many ways for teachers to help create a strong classroom community. This can happen through routines, relationships, community building strategies and management strategies that are teacher or student led. For this literature review, “community” means the positive ways in which students are engaging and working with each other as well as with the teacher. It also refers to daily classroom activities running smoothly. “Routines” are daily occurrences that the students are aware of and used to doing. “Classroom climate” refers to having a classroom community that is important and can positively affect students’ academics as well as their social/emotional well-being in school. “Student-to-student relationships” are the way students are interacting and treating each other and “teacher-to-student relationships” are how the students are interacting and treating the teacher and vis-a-versa. In this review, I describe the literature around creating a strong classroom community and routines and relationships and the effects on community. It more specifically describes how teacher-to-student and student-to-student relationships shape classroom community. It also describes how clear expectations and daily routines positively affect a class community. The literature as a whole will help to more fully identify what goes into creating and maintaining a strong classroom community.

Relationships within a Classroom Community

There are different factors that contribute to a strong classroom community. These include emotional climate of the classroom (Sieberer-Nagler, 2015), teacher-to-student relationships (Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson & Salovey, 2011) student-to-student relationships (Sieberer-Nagler, 2015) and clear and consistent expectations and routines (Reese,

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COMMUNITY

2007). These factors, when integrated properly, the literature suggests can help build strong classroom communities.

Teacher-to-Student Relationships

The literature shows that the relationship between teachers and students contributes to the climate of a classroom community. For example, some scholars believe that a positive classroom community can be established by how well the teacher knows his/her students, praising student involvement and showing a genuine care for the work students are engaged (Sieberer-Nagler, 2015). Others argue that a “one-to-one” connection between the teacher and his/her student is also a way to develop and maintain a respectful classroom climate (Reese, 2017). Brackett et. al (2011) conducted a qualitative study of 2,000 students and 63 teachers in 44 schools from an urban school district examining how an emotional climate of a classroom and student behavior are connected. These schools had a wide range of diverse students. Their research found that teachers who embraced a positive climate in their classroom were well connected with students and genuinely cared about the success of all their students. They also found that the classroom climate was enhanced by how much students respected their teacher. When students had respect for their teacher, it made a big impact on their behavior and the overall class environment, “Teachers who create a healthy CEC (classroom emotional climate) are more likely to foster students’ feelings of connectedness or positive student-teacher relationships and, in turn, better classroom behavior” (Brackett et. al, 2011, p. 28). Another study done in Los Angeles, California showed themes similar to Brackett’s study about how a school and staff can embrace a positive cultural climate. Kratzer (2001) did a qualitative, single-site case study over the course of a year. This specific school was chosen because of their positive community. The study included about 250 hours of classroom observations, school activities, meetings and interviews

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COMMUNITY

with students, teachers, administration and parents. The study found several teacher-to-student factors that contributed to a positive school climate: teachers knowing personal information about students, teachers showing affection through gestures and hugs, and teachers actively listening to, and communicating with, students.

Student-to-Student Relationships

Likewise, the research on student-to-student relationships shows that in order to build those relationships, students must be working toward a common goal in the classroom. Common goals help students to feel a classroom community as they contribute and work together. For example, some scholars describe how “meeting mutual needs” helps to develop teacher-to-student relationships as well as student-to-student relationships Sieberer-Nagler (2015). “Meeting mutual needs” means that students understand that they are working in a team with their peers and their teacher. Sieberer-Nagler (2015) also says that the classroom community should feel like a team; other authors concur (e.g., Self, 2009). These authors argue that teams lead to positive connections and the opportunity to celebrate each other’s strengths much like the qualitative study by Gest Madill, Zadzora, Miller, & Rodkin (2014), students felt a stronger sense of peer community when the teacher used strategies to create a more positive social dynamic in their classrooms. This study showed that teacher implemented strategies can be advantageous in student-to-student relationships.

As the literature shows, relationships in the classroom are imperative to a strong classroom community. Educators must be aware that relationships with their students ,as well as their strategies of managing social dynamics, has a big impact on the classroom community. Educators must also strive to help their students feel like a team by working to reach a common goal.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COMMUNITY

Routines and Strategies and the Effects on Community

There are a variety of routines and management strategies that teachers use in order to engage students and promote good behavior. These approaches are designed to promote a positive classroom climate and include clear behavioral and academic expectations and daily routines. For example, a qualitative study done by Gest, Madill, Zadzora, Miller and Rodkin (2014) researched classroom social dynamics in 54 elementary schools across first, third, and fifth grade classrooms. Data were collected by student surveys, teacher surveys, interviews, and observations. The study found that students were positively affected in the areas of social, academic, and behavior when teachers often used strategies to help manage the social dynamics within their classrooms. Students also showed a stronger sense of peer community with teachers who reduced status extremes in their classroom (Gest et. al, 2014). Likewise, Sieberer-Nagler (2015) states that positively reinforcing wanted behaviors helps so that the teacher does not have to reinforce as often once the behavior is learned. When teachers use these methods, they are typically more successful with student behaviors. Sieberer-Nagler (2015) also describe that with methods such as these, teachers can expect positive changes in their classrooms. In turn, less issues with negative student behaviors can lead to a stronger feeling of a positive classroom community.

Clear Expectations

Setting expectations in the classroom is an important management routine that research suggests helps set up a positive classroom community (Rawlings, Bolton, Allanson & Notar, 2017). The research on clear expectations and daily routines show that teachers who use these approaches create a more peaceful and fluid classroom (Sieberer-Nagler, 2015). Other scholars agree that setting expectations at the beginning of all classroom activities decreases student

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COMMUNITY

uncertainty about what he or she should do. This leads to a positive environment and an improved classroom climate (Gourneau, 2014). A qualitative study conducted by Newberry (2010) used observation, in-class activities, interviews and reflections to explore a relationship with one teacher and one student, examining four stages in relationship building: Appraisal, agreement, testing and planning. The study found that expectations were important in building relationships between the teacher and the student and led to a more positive classroom climate. This idea from the study relates to another scholar who suggests that when communicating, the teacher should use “enforceable statements” (Reese, 2007, p. 26). These statements redirect the poor behavior choices back into the hands of the student. For example, if a student is calling out, a teacher could say, “I am glad you are excited to share and we will be ready to hear what you have to say when you raise your hand” (Reese, 2007, p. 26). The research shows that these kinds of clear expectations, used consistently in conjunction with daily routines and supportive teacher and student relationships, may set up the classroom for a successful and positive environment.

Daily Routines

Scully and Howell (2008) believe that routines and traditions in a classroom help to connect teachers, students, and even parents to have a community feel. These beliefs are connected to a study done by Fink and Siedentop (1989). They conducted a qualitative study in which data were collected from observations of seven teachers in grades first through fifth. Their study found that the teachers who established routines in the first few class meetings were more successful in the smooth operation of their classroom (Fink & Siedentop, 1989). The ideas in this study were further explored in a study by Newberry (2010) where she found that establishing routines is a part of the “agreement phase” of relationship building. This phase is important because this is the time when students agree upon “accepted roles and routines” in the classroom

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COMMUNITY

which helps to create consistency. Reese (2007) also says that having routines builds a “solid foundation and allows the teacher to guide rather than control” (p. 27). These findings suggest that when teachers help to guide their students, it turns management into a positive system and helps to maintain a healthy classroom environment.

Summary

There are many different factors that go into creating a strong classroom community. As the literature suggests, relationships, clear expectations, and daily routines are important practices that help to create and maintain a positive classroom climate. According to the literature and research, methods such as praising student involvement (Sieberer-Nagler, 2015), building a “one-to-one” connection between the teacher and the student (Reese, 2017) managing social dynamics (Gest et. al, 2014), setting clear expectations (Gourneau, 2014) and establishing routines (Fink & Siedentop, 1989) can help to build a foundation in a classroom leading to a strong classroom community.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COMMUNITY

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to better understand the community within one of my second grade classes. I felt that there was a lack of community within a particular second grade class because there were multiple student-to-student and behavior issues every time they came to my class. In order to study this further, my main research question was: How do I build a community with second grade students who I only meet with once a week for thirty minutes? To deepen my understanding of this I have three subquestions:

1. What is my classroom environment like?
2. During what routines are students experiencing positive and negative interactions?
3. How are student-to-student relationships in my classroom?

Participants and Setting

The community in which my school is located is a suburban area. The students come from the neighboring areas where a majority of the families are of lower socioeconomic status. My school is a Title I school and approximately 70% of our students are socioeconomically disadvantaged and receive free or reduced lunches. About 68% of our students are Hispanic or Latino, 17% are White and about 3% are Asian or African American/Black.

The participants in my study are students in one second grade class chosen because I meet with them weekly, which is more than I meet with the other grade levels. This class has 26 students; however, I was only able to research 15 of the 26 students because of lack of parent permission. Of the 15 students, nine were girls and six were boys. The ethnic diversity of my class was 53% Latino/Latina, 27% White, 7% African American or Black and 20% were two or more races. My role as a participant in this study was that I observed and assessed my current approaches, norms, and routines in the class.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COMMUNITY

Data Collection

The instruments used to collect data on this topic were: surveys, interviews, and video observations of lessons.

Class Survey

The first method I used to collect data was a paper class survey (Appendix A). This survey was anonymous and was administered during a normal class day with my students. Four students who turned in their parental consent forms later were given the survey at a later date.

The questions within the survey were written so that I could get a better understanding of how my students feel about my class and were related to my main research question and designed to better understand students' perceptions of the classroom environment, interactions, and relationships. For example, one of my survey questions was, "Do you like doing a warm up before class?" This warm up is a daily routine in my classroom and is designed to help create a calm and focused classroom environment.

Interviews

Another method I used was an interview (Appendix B). Four students who varied in terms of gender, ethnicity, and demographics were selected from the student sample for the interview. The questions were written for lower elementary students and were reworded and explained further during the interview when necessary. My interview questions were designed to help get a better understanding of student perspectives on our class routines, environment, and relationships within the classroom. For example, I asked students about what they enjoyed in my class. This type of question helped to answer how students feel about the classroom environment as well as when they might be experiencing positive and negative interactions during class.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COMMUNITY

Video Observations

I also collected data through videotaping to further understand classroom routines, the classroom environment, and relationships within the classroom. I chose three different lessons to videotape and then re-watched them to write observational notes (Appendix C). I focused on student interactions and routines as well as student-to-student relationships. I took notes while watching the videos to keep track of the data I was looking for. This method of data collection helped me answer two of the research questions: during what routines are students experiencing positive and negative interactions? and how are student-to-student relationships in my classroom? These observations were particularly helpful with sub-question two because I was able to see how routines were affecting my students' interactions from an observational perspective rather than in the moment.

Data Collection Timeline

I collected data for three weeks in February 2019. Below is the table outlining how I informed parents about my study, sent out consent forms and collected data.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COMMUNITY

Table 1

Data Collection Timeline

<u>Dates</u>	<u>Description of activity</u>
January 8	Invitation letter to parents.
January 9	Parental consent letters sent home.
January 16	Letter of assent signed by student. Conduct surveys.
January 31	Conduct 1 interview.
February 7	Conduct 2 interviews and videotape lesson.
February 14	Conduct 1 interview.
February 21	Videotape lesson.
February 28	Videotape lesson.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data by starting with the whole class anonymous survey. I put the questions and answers in a table to identify themes. Through this coding, I was able to have a visual model of the thoughts and feelings of my students on our classroom community. I then looked at the individual interviews to code. In order to code this information, I went through and highlighted parts of the interviews that related to certain themes that I found in the survey as well as any other emergent themes. For example, I highlighted sections about student-to-student relationships and then wrote an analytical memo from the information I collected. For the classroom observations, I watched the videos and wrote observational notes. From the notes, I highlighted relating themes, much like the interviews. I was then able to write analytical memos from the themes that emerged in the observation notes. The themes I found from my research

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COMMUNITY

were: routines, when implemented properly, are beneficial; our classroom environment is positive; and student relationships are mismatched.

Conclusion

This study was designed to better understand my classroom community. Through surveys, observations, and interviews, I explored the perception of my classroom environment, what types of interactions my students were experiencing during routines, and the student-to-student relationships in my classroom.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COMMUNITY

FINDINGS

This research explored how to build community. My main research question was: How do I build a community with second grade students who I only meet with once a week for thirty minutes? To deepen my understanding of this I had three subquestions:

1. What is my classroom environment like?
2. During what routines are students experiencing positive and negative interactions?
3. How are student-to-student relationships in my classroom?

I collected data from 15 students over a three-week period through anonymous surveys, interviews with students, and classroom observations. Through this research and data collection, I was able to find three major themes: routines, when implemented properly, are beneficial; our classroom environment is positive; and student relationships are mismatched. Below, I will discuss, in full, my findings and offer my interpretation of them.

Routines, when Implemented Properly, are Beneficial

The data suggests that routines are an important part of a classroom and they can be beneficial to the classroom environment and student-to-student relationships when implemented properly. This finding helped me to answer all three of my research questions because I was able to find information on my classroom environment, routines and relationships. Through my data collection, I found that the routines I have implemented in my class are constructive for my students. I have also found that one of the routines I use consistently could be more effective with a few changes.

Mindfulness Warm Ups are a Positive Routine

The students do a two- or three-minute mindfulness warm up before each class session. I remind students to take that time to think about how their bodies and minds are feeling and to not

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COMMUNITY

worry about the people around them. The data suggests that the mindfulness routine contributes to students' positive perception of the classroom. For example, in an interview on January 31st with Sam, she told me that she enjoyed doing the mindfulness warm up and stretching in class because it helps the class to be calm and set their minds on what we will be doing in class, noting that it “gets everyone ready to work together.” Similarly, Levi reported in his interview on February 7th that the warm up was nice so that everyone could practice sitting and listening. He also said depending on the type of warm up, it could help the class focus and be better at listening. Likewise, in a February 14th interview, Dylan said he liked our mindfulness warm up because “we get to stretch and feel relaxed.” All four of the students that I interviewed had a common theme of enjoying the warm up routine because it makes them feel calm, relaxed and ready to begin class

Similarly, this theme emerges in the survey data. In the survey, more than 2/3 of the participants felt the warm up routine supported their inclusion in the classroom community. This means that students are experiencing positive interactions during this routine. This information suggests that the warm up routine helps students feel like a part of a community in my classroom because we do this warm up routine at the beginning of each class. This is a familiar routine that students are comfortable with. Looking at both the survey and interviews, the data suggests that the mindfulness warm up routine helps with the overall class environment and is a time when students are experiencing positive interactions. This data tells me that our warm up routine makes students feel ready for class and helps to get the class as a whole ready to work together. It also shows that students do in fact have a positive perception of our class during the warm up routine.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COMMUNITY

Rockstar Slips Lead to Contrasting Feelings

Although the warm up routine seems to contribute to a positive classroom environment, other routines do not seem to have the same effect. For example, at the end of each class, I hand out a behavior slip called the “rockstar slip.” This slip tells the general education teacher how their students behaved during my class according to three different categories: “rockstar” (great behavior), “good performance” (good behavior) or “out of tune” (bad behavior). The students know that this slip is earned by the class as a whole. If a couple of students are misbehaving, it could lead to the class getting a “good performance” or “out of tune.” Interview responses reveal that the rockstar slips lead my students to have contrasting feelings. When asked if the rockstar slip is fair, Levi, a student who has a positive view of the rockstar slip said that he thinks they are fair because, “sometimes we’re not always good, but sometimes we are.” He also said that the class tries to work better together to earn a rockstar slip. Dylan, who also has a positive view of the rockstar slip said that, “it’s fair because the people who don’t behave well don’t get a good slip.” These students think that it is fair for the whole class to get a behavior slip because it is a true reflection of how they were behaving in class that day.

The data also shows that some students do not think the rockstar slips are fair. For example, Sam said that, “People who have a good day should have their names written under ‘rockstar’ because they were doing what they were supposed to be doing. It is fair for the people who are not doing what they should be doing.” Sam thinks that the whole class should not be lumped together because “certain people do not really care” if they have good behavior or not. Destiny, a student who also believes the rockstar slips are not fair, said, “I think you should write down certain names of people who are being rockstars and also who are not.” She also said, “I think some people don’t care about being a rockstar. It makes the people who are good feel bad.”

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COMMUNITY

Taken together, this data suggests that there are contrasting viewpoints on the rockstar slips among the students. These slips may actually be a time when students are experiencing negative interactions with each other and they might have a negative effect on student-to-student relationships. The data reveals that the rockstar slip can be a positive or negative experience for the students who care, but there are also a group of students who do not care and this slip does not seem to have much effect on these students.

Our Classroom Environment is Positive

The patterns in the data led me to the conclusion that, overall, there is a positive classroom environment. This finding helped me to answer my research question addressing the feel of my classroom environment. The survey data shows almost 75% of students in the class enjoy the class and feel included. The interviews further support this line of thinking. Destiny, Sam and Levi each shared that they enjoy doing the mindfulness warm up, coloring, and choosing their own seat on the carpet. These are consistent activities in our classroom that the students are engaged in. In the interviews, I also asked students if they think that I treat some students better than others. Levi and Sam shared the idea that I treat everyone the same. Sam also added that she thinks that “everyone is included in the community.” Dylan shared a similar view that everyone is treated the same unless they are not doing what they are supposed to. He said that I treat people differently when they are being bad because I tell them to be quiet or sit down. In an observation on 2/28, I see students sharing their colored pencils at the green caddy. When I ask students, “who has a pencil sharpener to share with Lily?” Ashley and Valeria raise their hands eagerly to let her use the pencil sharpeners. Collectively, the data suggests that the classroom environment is positive. Students have a positive view of me and the routines and activities they engage in during class time.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COMMUNITY

Who Works Well Together?

Although the data shows that the classroom environment is positive, it does not necessarily mean that student-to-student relationships or the classroom community are strong. There is a certain group of students who I have labeled as “disruptive” because they consistently bring down the positive feel of the classroom community. These are also the students I find myself calling out to correct behavior or asking them to be kind to their peers. One of the subquestions I have been researching is “how are student-to-student relationships in my classroom?” A theme that emerged related to this is that students think they work well with their classmates, but they think that their classmates are not nice and do not work well with them. Despite my efforts to create a classroom community through classroom organization, transitions, and routines, the data suggests that some students just do not work well together. For example, I asked students on the survey, “Do you work well with your classmates in this class?” As shown in Figure 1, 80% said “Yes”, 13% said “Maybe” and 6% said “No”. In the interviews, two of the four students had positive comments about working with their peers. On 1/31, Sam commented that she liked doing team building activities with her classmates and on 2/7, Levi said that he enjoyed sharing with a partner. However, in an interview on 2/7, Destiny said, “I would like to choose my own caddy [during coloring time] because I don’t like some of the people in my class.” She also said that one time during coloring another student was bullying her. The survey data also showed that 11 of the 15 students answered “Maybe” or “No” to the question “Are your classmates nice to you in this class?” Taken together, the data suggests that despite my effort of helping to foster student-to-student relationships, not all students work well together. This may lead to less of the classroom community feel.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COMMUNITY

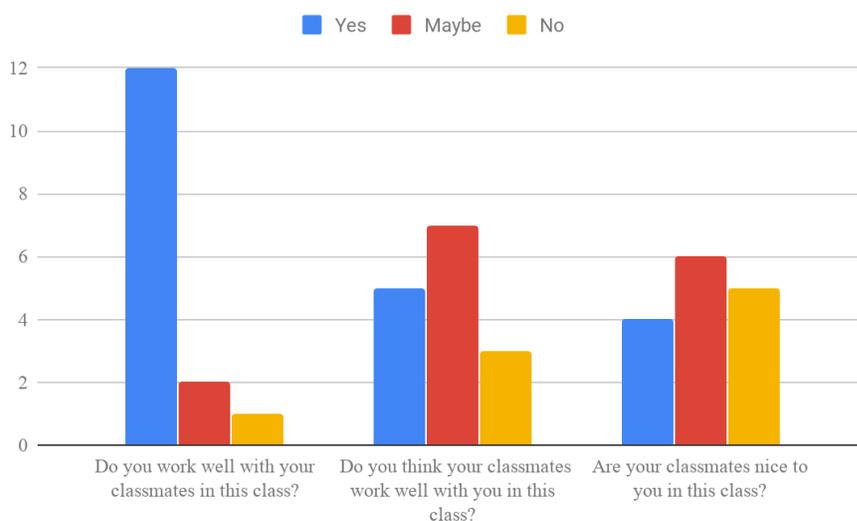


Figure 1. Student-to-Student Relationships.

Disruptive Students

The data suggests that there are certain students who are more problematic and disruptive than others and this shapes the classroom community. These students often make it much more difficult to help cultivate those student-to-student relationships and classroom community. For example, I observed my students working well together on 2/7 during a team building exercise. The students were asked to work together as a team to make a shape that I give them. During the observation, I commented that four different students are giving directions on how to create the shape, but as I count down from 10, students work together quickly to make the shape and have everyone involved. However, during this time, the disruptive students were not a part of the activity. This information leads me to believe that students were able to be successful in creating the group shape because they were not working with those identified as “disruptive students.” In my observation notes from 2/28, I state that “two of my disruptive students are laying on the floor instead of going to their assigned caddy” for an art project. Dylan, one of two students reporting negative relationships with his classmates, stated that “some students act bad no matter

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COMMUNITY

what.” Here he is referring specifically to the students who are often perceived as constantly disruptive and off task. During an observation on 2/28, I tell my students that they only got a “good performance” and not a “rockstar” on their slip for the day because they were too crazy. As I say this, I notice one of my particularly “disruptive” students walking around on his knees at the back of the carpet with his jacket over his head, not paying attention or even noticing what I am saying about the behavior slip. This is also a student who has yelled out “who cares” when I am telling the class what they earned on their behavior slip. This student, in particular, is my most disruptive student and is very defiant to me and his classmates. According to Figure 1, seven of the 15 students are unsure if they think that their classmates work well with them. This information leads me to believe that students are unsure because some of their classmates work well with them while others do not. I can assume here that the “other” students are my students who are consistently disruptive. Regardless of the attempts I have made to create a strong classroom community with solid student-to-student relationships, particular students have a more difficult time building relationships with each other.

Summary

The data showed three major themes from the research: Routines, when implemented properly, are beneficial; our classroom environment is positive; and student relationships are mismatched. The data showed that the classroom environment is in fact positive, but there are disruptive students who may bring down the positive feeling in our classroom. These students are consistently disruptive in class and have a big impact on student-to-student relationships as well as on interactions during routines.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COMMUNITY

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

I chose to do this study on classroom community because there appeared to be a lack of community in a particular class and I wanted to better understand the factors contributing to this. I also believed that it is imperative to students' success to have strong relationships in the classroom as well as to feel a part of the classroom community. I wondered if students in this class had issues with their student-to-student relationships and working with others. I also sought the opportunity to reflect upon my own teaching and the routines present in the classroom environment. In order to further understand the classroom in which I researched, I focused my main research question on: How do I build a community with second grade students who I only meet with once a week for thirty minutes? To help me answer this question and build on my understanding, I used three subquestions:

1. What is my classroom environment like?
2. What times during class are students experiencing positive and negative interactions?
3. How are student-to-student relationships in my classroom?

Through the course of my research and data collection, I came across three major themes that helped to expand my knowledge of community building in the classroom: routines, positive classroom environment, and students are mismatched.

Routines

The first theme supported my understanding in that routines, when implemented properly, are beneficial in the classroom. Not only just for students as individuals, but they help to set up organization and the foundation for student-to-student relationships. Students reported that the daily mindfulness warm up helps them to feel included in the classroom. Another routine that I used consistently is the rockstar slip. Some students liked this routine, but they also had

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COMMUNITY

some suggestions on how to implement better. I feel that these students' suggestions would make this routine more useful and help to build up our classroom community. These suggestions may also help to make the rockstar slip a more positive experience for all students and that could have an impact on student-to-student relationships as well.

Positive Classroom Environment

The second theme was an interesting find. Although some of my students do not get along well and have a hard time working together, I found that the overall feel of the classroom environment is positive. The students enjoy coming to my class and they feel included when they are there. They also enjoy certain routines and activities that they are doing, and they appreciate when I let them sit by and work with their friends. These routines and activities are a time when students are experiencing positive interactions.

Students Are Mismatched

The last finding was that students are mismatched. What I mean by that is that there are many students who work well with others in the class but there are a few disruptive students who are very hard to work with. These students are hard for pretty much everyone in the class to work with. I found that students who I interviewed reported that some students are off task and not doing what they are supposed to be doing consistently during class time. These students seem to bring the positive classroom community feel down. These students are also creating negative interactions during routines because they are off task and bothering the other students.

Regardless of the routines and activities I tried, there are just some students who seem to have a difficult time working well with their classmates. Through this research and a deeper dive into my findings, I feel that I now have a greater understanding of the dynamics of a classroom community.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COMMUNITY

Recommendations for Community Building

I hope that through this study, educators will think about the ways to continue to strive towards stronger relationships and building communities within their classrooms. As Sieberer-Nagler (2015) said, the classroom community should feel like a team. One way to accomplish this is through setting expectations and the class working towards a common goal. As Newberry (2010) found in her study, expectations are set in the Appraisal phase of relationship building. These expectations can have a significant impact on the teacher-to-student relationship and the overall climate of the classroom. Through the themes I found in my own research, consistently engaging my students in classroom routines with clear expectations did lead to an overall positive classroom environment feel. These were routines that the students knew well and understood the expectations. Continuing on the theme of routines, Reese (2007) said that having routines builds a “solid foundation and allows the teacher to guide rather than control.” My hope is that as educators continue to solidify their routines, students will be able to feel that their independent role in their classroom community plays a big part in helping to build that foundation of their classroom.

As for the overall classroom environment, Brackett et. al (2011) found that when students respect their teacher, it has a big impact on their behavior in class. From my own research, I found that I have students in my classroom who are disruptive and experience behavior issues in my class. One reason this may be occurring has to do with the very short amount of time that I get to spend with my students. Relationship building takes time and between the demands of teaching curriculum and the small window I have with this group of students, it is challenging for me to cultivate meaningful relationships with all my students.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COMMUNITY

Limitations

The limitations of my research also played a role in the depth and quality of what I was able to identify. I was not able to collect parental consent forms from all the students in my class and this really limited the scope of my research. There were certain students who I was not able to interview who I believe would have brought a different perspective to my findings and could have broadened my understanding. There were also limitations on time for this study. I believe that with extra time and the ability to do more observations and interviews with students, this study would have also led to a more expansive array of findings. I could have taken the time to delve into the routines and expectations I use with my students and see how the greater quality of those methods impacted my students with a post survey or interview. I also suspect that collecting more data on the significance of the teacher-to-student relationship would have led to some interesting findings on how much of an impact it has on the classroom community. I believe there is a lot more research to be done on this topic and it will hopefully help educators set up successful classroom communities.

Conclusion

It is important for educators to strive to make their teacher-to-student relationships better in order to set a good example of respect and help to nurture a positive classroom community. It is also imperative that educators use specific routines with clear expectations in order to help students build and cultivate their own relationships with their peers in the classroom. Educators need to make their classroom feel like a team and that all students are working towards the common good. There is already a considerable amount of research done on building classroom communities, but educators need to learn how to sort through the available resources and decide what works best for their students and their classroom community. Not all relationships and

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COMMUNITY

classrooms operate the same and it is important for educators to understand how their input and intentions in the classroom greatly affect the way their classroom operates.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COMMUNITY

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FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COMMUNITY

Appendix A

Student Survey Protocol

Survey

1. Do you like this class?

5 (it's the best!) 4 3 2 1 (I don't like it)

2. Does the warm up before class make you feel more included in class?

Yes Maybe No

3. Do you feel included in this class?

Yes Maybe No

4. Are your classmates nice to you in this class?

Yes Maybe No

5. Do you work well with your classmates in this class?

Yes Maybe No

6. Do you think your classmates work well with you in this class?

Yes Maybe No

7. Do you feel safe in this class?

Yes Maybe No

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COMMUNITY

Appendix B

Student Interview Protocol

Today we are going to do an interview about how you feel about my class. Also, how you feel like your classmates treat you and if you feel like we have a good classroom community. Remember, community means that we are all working well together, we're being nice to each other and we all feel included in our class. Be honest with your answers and I can explain any of the questions more if you're not sure what it means.

1. Describe something that you enjoyed doing in my class?
Probe for: specific examples, what about it they liked, individual or group work/activity
2. Are there routines you like in class? Ones you don't like? (For example, the warm up or sharing ideas with a partner)
Probe for: working with others
3. Do you think our warm up routine helps make everyone ready for class?
Probe for: setting up to work well with others
4. Do you think some students are treated better than others in class?
Probe for: examples, everyone being included in the community
5. Do you think the "rock star slip" is fair?
6. Does it help to make everyone work together so your class can be "rock stars"?
Probe for: community feel when "rock star slip" is earned
7. What do you think we could do as a class to make everyone feel included?
Probe for: details on what they mean

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COMMUNITY

Appendix C

Video Observation Protocol

Date _____ Time _____

For each activity of class: observing peer-to-peer relationships (language/actions/body language), student behavior (overall and specific students/groups of students, certain groupings), teacher's directions/language and reaction to "rock star slip"

Warm Up:

Introduction:

Activity 1:

Activity 2 (if applicable):

Closing: