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Abstract

This action research project asks how the teaching of social and emotional skills supports early literacy development. The research claims that the activities embedded within Morning Meeting provide social and emotional support in a whole group setting. One student was chosen for observation of social, emotional, and academic behaviors within Morning Meeting as well as various activities throughout the day. It was found that the daily routine provided the sense of belonging and self-esteem that leads to engaged learning throughout the day. This project supports that Morning Meeting should be used in all classrooms to provide social and emotional support in order for students to be set up for successful learning.

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The Use of Morning Meeting to
Develop Social and Emotional Skills

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Abstract

This action research project asks how the teaching of social and emotional skills supports early literacy development. The research claims that the activities embedded within Morning Meeting provide social and emotional support in a whole group setting. One student was chosen for observation of social, emotional, and academic behaviors within Morning Meeting as well as various activities throughout the day. It was found that the daily routine provided the sense of belonging and self-esteem that leads to engaged learning throughout the day. This project supports that Morning Meeting should be used in all classrooms to provide social and emotional support in order for students to be set up for successful learning.

The Impact of Social and Emotional Instruction in Early Literacy Development

Early literacy provides the foundation for the success of students' future academics. Before children learn to read and write, they must first understand how to communicate and what the purpose of communication is. Communication begins with a child's first teacher, his/her parents, or guardians. In the first years of life, children learn cultural norms and socialization practices from their surroundings at home and through their day-to-day life. Upon entering daycare programs, pre-schools, babysitter care, kindergarten classes, and the like, children begin to socialize and interact with others, therefore creating their circle of influence to grow.

Literacy is found in all aspects of a child's life. It is encompassed within math problems, singing of the national anthem, answering the phone, calendar talk, morning meetings, journaling, reading groups, written narratives, fieldtrips, and countless other activities, most of which we don't typically consider to be literacy activities. But just as literacy events vary in the classroom, literacy events surround language learners outside of the classroom in multiple ways as well. Language, as defined by Kucer (2003), is a meaning-based system of communication. It can then be found that language users participate in various Discourses, or social networks, where language is produced and received depending on the changing participation in culturally meaningful situations (Gee, 1999). In this research paper, the use of language in a variety of educational settings will be discussed as well as the importance of social and emotional instruction in order to provide early language users a solid base for successful academic growth.

The question this project will investigate is whether the instruction of social and emotional practices within the school setting impacts the development of early literacy skills. For this action research project, focus will be on the use of Morning Meeting to provide the social and emotional instruction imbedded in a literacy-rich instructional period.

It is important to explore this topic as children vary in the amount of literacy support they receive in their primary years of life. Those students who have parents supporting their oral and written language at home as well as students that attend a pre-school or day care with the foundation of language and social interaction support have a head start on those who do not receive any of this support. It is important to find out how the instruction of social and emotional interactions impacts young learners and what strategies can be done to provide a solid literacy foundation for all students.

Theoretical Framework

Literacy is the use of language in an assortment of different ways. Individuals use literacy in variety of levels to communicate needs and wants through written form (words, pictures, and images), oral form (phone calls and conversations), and non-verbal form (facial expression and body language). Although the language and skill level of each individual may be varied, the intent is all the same – to share a thought.

The sociocultural theory (Kucer, 2001) places large emphasis on social interactions guiding one's development as well as their cultural beliefs impacting their day-to-day decisions. The meaning and language that one constructs and uses is framed by their own cultural identity. One's identity may be shaped by their gender, race, sexual orientation, religion, culture or many other factors. Based on their surroundings, exposure and social participation, language users create their words, actions and thoughts in a socio-cultural approach. Every individual portrays their beliefs and values through various forms of their unique language in order to communicate with one another. Vygotsky (1978) believes that language development is a social process, where participants interact with others (peers, adults, teachers, etc.) to make progress towards their own intellectual development; first, between subjects and then within the

child. Classrooms that use a Morning Meeting allow for social interactions that are developmentally appropriate, curriculum based and guided by the teacher. These social interactions that Vygotsky explains as a child's first phase towards their intellectual development are fostered in this Morning Meeting environment through greeting, sharing, group activities and a morning message. The skills that are practiced as a group then extend towards the individuals as they encounter other activities where their own applications of specific skills are required. The group atmosphere and shared participation provide a ritual of learning from others social and academic behaviors.

As children participate in a literate society, such as the classroom, they acquire language rules through a scaffolding process. Vygotsky (1978) states that every function in a child's development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level. Every aspect of what students see and do together with their peers, teachers, and adults leads them to formulate new understandings about written, oral and non-verbal language. These new understandings in which the child makes, allows the teacher to give that extra push to guide the student further into their zone of proximal development (Larson & Marsh, 2005). Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) developed from his socio-cultural theory and states that students will make the most gains academically when they receive support to complete work that is just beyond what they could do by themselves. Therefore, the individual language user is not solely responsible for their level of literacy abilities, but it is the social world they participate in that is the main influence for that one person as they develop their language and their ability to use it in order to share their thoughts. Morning Meeting provides students the ability to socially interact in an academic setting, modeling and guiding them to either continue the learning socially in various activities throughout the day or apply learned skills on an

individual level. Ideally, Vygotsky's belief is that these social interactions will lead to the independent mastery of skills.

Young students enter their first years of schooling and are presented with social situations that will guide their literacy growth. As these students participate in the classroom activities, it is crucial for educators to acknowledge the socio-cultural theory within their instructional objectives. Framing a day that encourages positive language use through direct instruction (teacher performs the task, group performs the task together with teacher, and finally the student performs the task independently) allows students the opportunity to develop their literacy in a socially supported environment. The Morning Meeting allows individuals to learn from one another in that the students accommodate their own behaviors as they are presented with a variety of new and different situations. A classroom where students are comfortable and encouraged to use written, oral and non-verbal communication will foster literate children who take social and academic risks as they continue their development in a literate society. It is so important for these students to take these steps forward, to engage in a ZPD as they imitate academic and social behaviors of their peers and educators.

Research Question

Based on the theoretical framework that literacy is a social practice and learning occurs during social interactions, this action research project asks, how does the teaching of social and emotional skills support early literacy development? The research explores the components of Morning Meeting and provides support in how the attention to social and emotional teaching during this instructional time supports students' language development. Detail will be given to the different types of involvements and how early experiences support a child's participation in literacy activities.

Literature Review

The following review of literature in the field of literacy will explore the position oral language plays in the development of a child's literacy, the importance social and emotional education, and how the implementation of Morning Meeting in classrooms supports students' oral language and social and emotional needs in order to prepare for academic success. This study is important to investigate, as oral communication is the foundation of literacy (Gee, 2001). Communicating involves engaging oneself into relationships using emotional and social skills to continuously partake in various roles that support meeting one's needs. The articles presented in this literature review support the use of Morning Meeting in the classroom for the reason that many opportunities are embedded within this instructional period that support language as well as the instruction and application of social and emotional skills. I will first discuss how oral language is the foundation of literacy and how the benefits of developing oral language in social situations will positively impact students. I will provide research on the development of communication as well as provide support for child-centered language within classrooms. Then I will define social and emotional learning and the impact that this type of instruction has on students. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs will be directly associated with explaining the needs students present and how the Morning Meeting meets these needs. Finally, I will go into detail about the components of Morning Meeting, explaining how each activity supports social and emotional skills and how social and emotional skills impact oral language development.

Oral communication as the foundation of Literacy

Language is used in everyday encounters to communicate ideas through both oral and written forms. Many of us are taught how to read and write the written language, but the spoken language is something acquired without the need for formalized instruction (Gee, 2001). This communication process requires those involved being able to understand the language presented. Communication seems to be a simple task, but as Freeman and Freeman (2004) explain, it is a rather complex process.

To share an idea, humans must encode the idea into language. This encoding process requires one to produce a variety of phonemes (meaningful sounds) using their brain to manipulate their lungs, vocal chords, tongue and lips together to produce expressive words (Akmajian, Demers, Farmer, Harnish, 1979). In turn, the listener must decode the sounds into language and interpret the idea through their brain (Freeman & Freeman, 2004). This process is practiced repetitively, constantly evolving the speaking and listening skills of the language user. Children that are provided with consistent models of language use and opportunities to use that language, develop skills that enhance their abilities to succeed in academic settings (Dockrell, Stuart and King, 2010).

Success in formal education relies on many variables. Ready to Learn: A Mandate for the Nation (Boyer, 1991) identifies such factors as the following: health and physical development, emotional well-being, social competence, approaches to learning, communication skills, and cognition, also referred to as general knowledge. Boyer continues by saying “deficiency in language” within communication skills has largely been the factor that most limits children’s school readiness. Hadley, Simmerman, Long, and Luna (2000) found that spoken language abilities were not adequately developed to provide a foundation for formal academic learning according to kindergarten teachers in Phoenix, Arizona. Their theory is supported in assessment

data, as 86 kindergarten students participated in the Individual Proficiency Test finding 35 students (41%) were identified as having limited English proficiency. Dockrell, Stuart and King, (2010) conducted a study in England that found the need for early language intervention beginning in preschool leads to academic success in later years. It can be concluded then that children require language-enriched settings with multiple models and supports in the beginning years of life and into schooling to assist their abilities to use expressive and receptive language. Classrooms must engage students in an environment where problem solving and shared communication are tasks in which children are presented with through stories, playtime, turn-taking, math explorations, and science investigations with the assistance of adults to provide enriched vocabulary and models of appropriate behaviors.

With the complexity of language use, both as a listener and speaker, it is important that children are presented with models of appropriate forms of communication as well as opportunities to express themselves. Wasik (2010) created an oral language checklist that educators could use to reflect on their implementation of effective language and literacy strategies and practices in their classrooms in order to promote the development of children's language, vocabulary, and pre-literacy skills. The checklist was provided as part of a professional development program titled Exceptional Coaching for Early Language and Literacy. The checklist focused on four key areas for teachers reflect on in order to promote and language enriched classroom (Wasik, 2010) that are crucial to be considered as educators create their daily lessons and activities. The key areas of focus encouraged a high frequency of conversation that was held with children to show genuine engagement as well as inviting children to tell more information, in turn formulating conversations. Coaches pushed for the presence of open-ended questions that prompted an extended response rather than one word. Much of the language

prevalent in the classroom should be equally shared among teacher and child talk. Also, the quality of language provided by the teacher needs to be rich in vocabulary and a variety of language elements (nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs). The four areas of focus in this program help to push students towards using language that is just above the level of communication and thought processes they typically do by themselves.

The program provides many important instructional strategies that support language development in the classroom where children are guided towards success. This teaching style supports Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) – which is the theory that students will make the most gains academically when they receive support to complete work that is just beyond what they could do by themselves. Most emergent communicators will opt for the easiest path to complete a task such as providing one word answers and simple utterances to obtain something desired. Educators that follow a model similar to Wasik's (2010) oral language guide, help push students into the ZPD, prompting for explanations and encouraging productive student language in a well-planned language environment (e.g. a specific theme such as Autumn presented with books in a variety of genres, phonological awareness activities, art centers and picture/word cards available for instruction and student choice activities).

Social and Emotional Learning

Social and emotional learning is the process through which children can learn to recognize and manage their emotions, problem solve effectively, and create and maintain positive relationships (Zins & Elias, 2006). Children today face many factors that affect their social-emotional competency and in turn affect their academic success in critical literacy. Zins

and Elias include factors such as increased teacher and student standards, high-stakes testing, socio-economic status, and family stability. It is essential to provide support to children that come from homes with such difficulties through nurturing and consistent interventions that promote early learning of social and emotional routines (e.g. discipline, nurturing experiences, social interactions) (Hanson et al., 2011).

The needs of humans can be explained through Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1979). The very top level of this pyramid, the overall objective of success in meeting one's needs, is that need of self-actualization. Self-actualization includes characteristics of morality, problem solving, and acceptance –skills that a social and emotional learning environment address. Many students struggle to meet the preceding four levels of need including needs of esteem, love/belonging, safety, and physiological. When students cannot meet these bottom, more basic needs, the task of becoming socially and emotionally competent students becomes much more difficult.

The first two levels of need are the physiological and safety needs in which some students are faced with the question whether or not they will have these needs met outside of the school. In turn – the school must provide this basic need the best they can if they desire students to reach the highest level for performance. The importance of physiological and safety needs gives argument to explain why many children from low socio-economic status (SES) struggle in school. Hanson,et.al. (2011) conducted a research study on the influence of economic hardships on young children's developmental outcomes using academic and social skills as the determinant. Their study sampled 1,006 four year old children from schools in urban populations (35%), suburban populations (42%) and rural populations (22%) and discovered that economic hardship was a significant predictor of both letter knowledge and mathematic academic

outcomes from the Woodcock-Johnson (WJ) Letter-Word Identification subtest, the WJ Applied Problems and the WJ Quantitative Concepts A math subtests. It has also been found that students from high poverty homes negatively related to the number of positive problem-solving solutions children expressed on the Wally Game – a measure of social skills (Hanson et al., 2011).

The main focus of this paper is not on the bottom two levels of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) but on the top three levels that are associated with social and emotional skills leading to success. It is important to address though, that the presence of physiological and safety needs of students are important factors that educators often must meet and understand on an individual basis before they can ask students to respect and respond in socially acceptable ways throughout their learning. Students coming from low income homes are placed at a higher disadvantage than other students with a higher SES status of meeting those higher level needs and require a great deal more support in this process.

The levels of love/belonging, esteem, and self-actualization are areas in which schools are able build upon to help create responsible citizens. With research supporting the benefits of having a social and emotional learning (SEL) program in schools, educational leaders need to recognize the positive impact it can have and adopt these programs rather than focus on just academics (O'Brien, Weissberg & Shriver, 2003). These programs are significant in preventing negative behaviors and should be revisited each year to reevaluate their positive and negative contributions to the school day.

The No Child Left Behind Act that was put into place in 2001 has greatly contributed to the academic and social development in schools (Benninga, Berkowitz, Keuhn & Smith, 2006). With heightened pressure on student performance, many teachers are left to focus on the

academics. It is imperative that districts, as well as states and our country, support school-wide social education programs to foster high academic achievement incorporating that academic and social/emotional goals can co-exist. According to Shriver and Weissberg (2005), emotional learning and academic learning are interconnected and when SEL programs are implemented, test results improve with heightened attendance and a decrease in disruptive classroom behaviors. In order to achieve the high standards placed upon students, their social and emotional needs must be met in schools.

Taking a look to how SEL programs are implemented across America in the past decade, Doolittle, Horner, Sugai, Bradely, and Vincent (2007) analyzed the mission statements of all 50 states' Departments of Education. The search was conducted to find specific goals for students' social behaviors, school-wide behavior support, and initiatives to improve student social behaviors. The study found that only 16 out of the 50 states (31%) included a focus of student social behavior in their mission statements (Doolittle et al., 2007). This low percentage alarms educators that policy makers do not value social-emotional development in the success of schools. More than half of the 50 states lack a focus on student's social behavior in order for our schools to be positively impacted. Student learning is a sociocultural process that requires positive interactions with peers and adults to make academic gains (Vygotsky, 1978). Implementation of a social and emotional learning program such as the Morning Meeting provides students the social support to improve skills needed to make the required academic gains.

Morning Meetings

With early educators striving to integrate social-emotional learning (SEL) with the mandate that all students must meet rising standards, they struggle to find balance (Horsch, Chen & Wagner, 2002). Many classrooms around the nation use the Responsive Classroom (RC) approach to build social-emotional skills within the classroom while providing academic instruction as well. This model of instruction has been used with great success in creating environments conducive to learning while creating relationships that are proactive approaches to discipline (McTigue & Rimm-Kaufman, 2011). The RC consists of seven principles to guide educators in their planning of academic days. The Northeast Foundation for Children (McTigue & Rimm-Kaufman, 2011) explains these essential ideas as the following components: (1) academic and social curriculum receive equal emphasis; (2) how children learn is as significant as what they learn; (3) cognitive growth stems from socialization; (4) critical skills in child-centered learning are cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control; (5) children are to be known individually, culturally and developmentally; (6) familiarity with students' families; and (7) working relationships amid adults at the schools are vital. With the focus on these principles, schools can be created conducive to learning.

The Schools Project has provided a great deal of success in the implementation of RCs (Horsch, Chen & Wagner, 2002). The project began partnering with schools and the Erikson Institute in Chicago to provide a program that trained teachers to focus on how best to optimize student learning opportunities through the use of school-based interventions that were developmentally appropriate educational practices. Participating teachers began to move towards child-based learning styles with the support of The Schools Project, but became concerned with the presence of negative behaviors (e.g. inappropriate socializations, physical and verbal aggressions, not attending to demand tasks) that were exhibited by students. Their theory was

that these behaviors, and the effect it had on their learning, were due to some combination of: stressful/unstable home life, lack of sleep, poor health, and stressors caused by peers. Members of the Schools Project reviewed the existing model of the Responsive Classroom (RC), to be conclusive in striving to develop ethical students with the desire and knowledge to act in caring ways. The nine schools involved in the Schools Project yielded varying results based on the school communities and their willingness to adopt this teaching approach. Those that were successful in becoming caring, respectful learning communities had administrative leadership as well as support.

One component of the RC approach that fostered both SEL and students' reading and oral skills was the Morning Meeting (Horsch, Chen & Wagner, 2002). Morning Meeting is composed of four main elements that begin the academic day. Students and classroom staff join together to take part in the following routine: (1) a face-to-face greeting as they welcome each person; (2) structured student sharing; (3) a team building activity; and (4) reading classroom news and announcements (Kriete, 2002).

Kriete's (2002) text is a teacher resource guidebook, *The Morning Meeting Book*, which demonstrates how Morning Meetings can be implemented in a variety of grades and settings to promote SEL and academic achievement. Kriete opens guidebook, with a strong implication to the readers.

Elias et al (1997) state:

It simply makes sense that if we are to expect children to be knowledgeable, responsible, and caring – and to be so despite significant obstacles – we must

teach social and emotional skills, attitudes, and values with the same structure and attention that we devote to traditional subjects. (foreword)

As seen by the success of RCs, Morning Meetings can play a substantial part in student success. One purpose of Morning Meeting is to set a tone for respectful learning and establish a climate of trust. In turn, this tone and climate is intended to expand throughout the rest of the academic day, becoming expectation rather than an isolated activity (Kriete, 2002). The way students perceive a classroom (i.e. the layout, the peer interactions and the teacher's behaviors) inevitably sets the initial tone learning as well as the expectations (Bondy & Ketts, 2001). The second students of a RC classroom step through the door; they feel a sense of belonging. The Morning Meeting ensures that students receive that impression with a greeting showing students that every person matters (Kriete, 2002). Maslow's (1942) Hierarchy of Needs explains that the third level of human needs is a sense of belonging and acceptance. Maslow states the feeling of belonging and acceptance is so strong a need that it can actually overshadow the levels of physiological need and safety. Bondy and Ketts (2001) surveyed students that had participated in Morning Meeting throughout the school year and found that a well-crafted and positive Morning Meeting environment made students feel a sense of home, acceptance, safety, and security "that provided the only family 'breakfast table' they (the students) had known" (p. 147). Creating caring and meaningful friendships as well as establishing an environment in which each child is considered an important part of the group, contributes to achieving this level of belonging and acceptance.

Such a classroom safety net, one where students share their joys and pains safely within the sharing component of Morning Meeting, fosters a basis for children to build up their self-esteem. The responsive classroom promotes an environment of caring and empathy, such as

when students are asked to actively listen and respond to their peers' situations, individuals show respect for others and themselves (Horsch, Chen & Wagner, 2002). Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) focuses on the need for esteem as the fourth level towards self-actualization. In order to receive this respect, it is important for students to engage themselves so that they can be recognized as a member of the classroom community. As students become more familiar with Morning Meeting and its' components, a comfort level is established where students can step outside of the box.

School curriculums are developed with the underlying promise that children will make academic and social gains through teacher instruction. Morning Meetings allow students to learn and practice social and academic skills that are often difficult for young children to acquire. Such skills may include speaking in front of others, active listening, providing appropriate responses in question and comments, working together and synthesizing formal instruction (Horsch, Chen, Nelson, 1999). The supportive environment of Responsive Classrooms allows teachers to guide students into their zones of proximal development, where their social and academic efforts will be embraced, and fostered by their peers and teachers (Vygotsky, 1978). The ZPD that students encounter within Morning Meetings provides the support from both adults and students as they test their language abilities. This process is recursive and requires continued instruction and modifications. As a classroom engages in conversations that are not dominated by teacher talk, the development of children's language will emerge as they test their roles as a social member of the community (Wasik, 2010).

Within a Morning Meeting, students are also asked to use knowledge from previous lessons such as rhymes within the morning greeting, using describing words in a share session, finding objects that go together in the activity and filling in missing words in the morning news

and announcements (Kriete, 2002). The forum of Morning Meeting allows students to test their understandings of new concepts in a form of familiar play and participation – tapping into their ZPD and enhancing their holistic learning. Moyer (2001) emphasizes play as not just the use of fun materials, but using words and ideas to promote literacy and cultivate thinking skills.

Children who participate in Morning Meeting are excited to come to school and start their day together as they play, explore and welcome each person to their class (Bondy & Ketts, 2001).

When students are excited about their learning, it often does not feel like *work*. Murphy (2010) states, “a foundation of play supports the house of higher learning” (p. 22). Moyer (2001) states that when play is viewed as a process for intellectual development, it is the most dynamic opportunity for learning.

McTigue & Kaufmann (2010) find that incorporating the complementary objectives of academic achievement and socio-emotional learning receives much support from the RC approach. Within the classroom, teachers using the RC strategies provide high quality reading instruction as well as developing children’s social and emotional development, helping them to become and remain engaged in instruction. Fenty, Miller and Lampi (2008) support this finding in their article that addresses twenty ways to incorporate social skills instruction. Their first instructional suggestion is to use the RC model of Morning Meeting, where the curriculum involving social and academic goals are equally significant.

The research studies cited help to support my research question by showing the benefits of classrooms that provide academic, social and emotional support, specifically classrooms that use the Morning Meeting, on the developmental needs of children. Social and emotional learning is critical in laying the foundational skills needed to engage in respectful learning.

Method

Context

The research for this action research project will take place at Heights Elementary School (pseudonym) located within an urban school district in New York State. As of the 2009-2010 school year, the district had an enrollment of 31,653 students. Heights Elementary School enrolled 390 students at this time with an average class size of 20 students. The percentage of students eligible for free or reduced lunch was 88%. The racial/ethnic origin of this particular school is as follows: 88% Black or African American, 6% Hispanic or Latino, 1% Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, and 5% white. The make-up of classes within the school varies. My research will be conducted in a general education kindergarten classroom in which I am also the classroom teacher. The classroom is composed of 23 students. Of these, 22 children are African American and one child is Hispanic. The class has 10 females and 13 males.

Participants

Student

This was a qualitative research study that focused on one student in particular, as their behavior and oral language developments were of particular interest to my research. For the purpose of the study, whole class meetings and specific times of interactions with peers and adults were recorded and observed. The student involved in this study is an African American female who is five years and five months old named Septa (pseudonym). Results from the kindergarten screening conducted during the first month of school showed that Septa is a typically developing kindergarten-aged student, whose scores are within average range in gross and fine motor skills, expressive and receptive language, concepts, self-help development as well as social development.

Septa is the youngest of seven children and is the only female child. She lives with both her biological mother and father in an urban neighborhood that is eight miles from school. She is very independent and can successfully complete many of the required tasks in the instructional day. She attended preschool as well as a day care program that provided educational components within its' previous to her attendance at Heights Elementary. Septa was selected for this study based on her behaviors observed during adult and peer interactions the first two months of school that I observed while in the role of classroom teacher. She had much difficulty transitioning to the classroom the first few weeks of school and would refuse participation, throw tantrums with yelling, stomping and throwing furniture, and cry excessively. I worked with her grandmother, parents, and three siblings within the school to help ease this transition. Her grandmother made a visit to the classroom after one tantrum to calm her down. I also held numerous conversations with both her mother and father through phone calls and written notes in her communication log. Her siblings would drop her off at the classroom each morning and provide encouraging words to have a great day and that they would be in school learning as well. The behavior specialist and the school principal were involved due to the violent behaviors of throwing writing utensils and flipping chairs. Since then, Septa has made much growth with displaying a level of comfort in the classroom, vocalizing emotion and forming friendships. It is important to note that this study focuses on the impact of Morning Meetings on social and emotional learning and that Morning Meeting is a component of the school day that has been implemented since day one. Some of Septa's improved behaviors may have been impacted by these meetings, but there is no data to support these meetings during the months previous to the study at hand.

Staff provided direct instruction and/or care to Septa during the times of my research observations. Although they are not involved in my study they were informed about the

observations of the student. These adults include the music teacher, prevention support staff (literacy coach and behavior specialist) as well as the lunchroom aides. While observing in these situations, I acted as a privileged, active observer (Mills, 2011).

Researcher Stance

I am the kindergarten classroom teacher as well as the author of this research study. I have taught two years of first-grade before moving to kindergarten for the 2011-2012 school year at Heights Elementary. Prior to this experience, I taught in a second-grade classroom and a third-grade inclusion classroom at different elementary school building within the same district. I received New York State certification in both Elementary and Special Education (grades 1-6) from the State University of New York at Geneseo. I am enrolled in St. John Fisher College's Graduate School of Education from where I will be granted certification in Literacy ranging from birth through grade six.

As Septa's classroom teacher as well as the researcher of this study, I would like to state that some biases may occur due to my relationship with the student and involvement in the classroom. My role will be that of an active participant observer. Mills (2011) defines this role as one that teachers partake in by the act of educating. It consists of monitoring the results of our teaching and modifying instruction accordingly. I control the activities presented in the classroom as well as set the tone for behavior and work production expectations based on my observations of previous lessons (Mills). I am not able to take extensive notes while teaching, so much of my data has been pulled from short hand notes and video recordings.

Method

For this study, I focused on Septa's behaviors (peer and adult interactions, and problem solving strategies) throughout the school day. I observed during various times of the day during

Morning Meetings, music class, learning lab sessions (exploration of classroom manipulatives such as blocks, sand table, puzzles, play kitchen, library, etc.) and lunch periods. My observations centered on Septa's use of Morning Meeting to enhance her literacy skills of oral communication, making real world applications of previously learned skills, and showing empathy and/or interest in other students' situations through language and/or action.

In order to complete this research study, I had to apply much thought and consideration as I analyzed the components of Morning Meeting and their effect on the student. I recorded two Morning Meeting sessions and transcribed the sessions as a form of observation notes. I focused on Septa's involvement, the involvement of the group as a whole as well as the type of instruction provided. Each session ran approximately 30 to 45 minutes depending on the activities planned and involved the whole group. I also observed Septa's behaviors while she was not receiving my formal instruction during a half-hour music class, three 10-minute learning lab stations (two to three students) and two 30-minute lunch periods as to find areas in which she was applying her social and emotional strategies from Morning Meeting.

I conducted an informal interview with Septa in order to gain insight on her feelings about school, learning, friendships and Morning Meetings. This interview was recorded and transcribed. It is important to note that as the teacher of Septa, some responses may have been influenced by the fact that I am the one that presented the questions. It was explained to Septa that she should answer exactly how she feels.

Trustworthiness of Research

As Mills (2011) notes, in order to establish trustworthiness of a research study, one must address credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I have made sure that all areas were met in the study. Credibility, as defined by Mills, is providing a study that takes

account of the complexities found in the data. Credibility was addressed in this action research project by collecting a triangulation of data through active participant observations (experiencing), informal interview (enquiring), and audio and video recordings (examining). This triangulation of data allowed me to compare different methods of peer and adult interactions in order to cross-check any patterns that are difficult to explain (Mills). Transferability in action research projects help the reader understand the framework of the study so it is able to be applied to similar situations (Mills). The transferability of this study involved using multiple settings (classroom, lunchroom, music class, and learning labs) with multiple interactions of peers and adults to allow me to make a general statement that can be used towards students and classrooms outside of the study.

It is important that my data holds stability in order to be dependable. Mills (2011) defines dependability as creating a research study that can be repeated by another person and obtain similar results. I have done this by using multiple forms of data collection that can be used to support generalizations. Having both the video recordings of my own Morning Meetings and observation field notes from music class, learning labs and lunch periods allowed me to find a deeper understanding of behaviors and generalizations in each activity. The interview questions (Appendix) also allow another person to ask and search for similar feedback. To show that the research study holds the characteristic of confirmability, I remained objective in analyzing the data. Mills defines confirmability as identifying underlying assumptions of the researcher. After reviewing the field notes taken during observations, I listened to the audio recording to ensure the data holds factual information.

Informed Consent and Individual Rights of Those Involved

The participants involved in this study have remained anonymous so to protect their rights. The names of the students as well as the school in which the study will be conducted have been changed to pseudonyms. The letter requesting consent from the parents explained the study and the rights of the parents and child. It has been explained to all participants and their parents that no compensation is being offered other than the benefits of the study itself on future instruction. When the entire class was asked if they would like to participate in the research, they all gave verbal consent. Only the individuals that returned parent consent have been used in this report. Septa was asked individually if she would like to help with the research and verbal consent was given. Confidentiality has been guaranteed to all subjects at the request of St. John Fisher as well as at the request of the school in which the research study was conducted.

Data Collection

As described above, various forms of data collection have been used for this research study. I observed the behaviors of the student throughout the school day during the period of two weeks. I video recorded the two Morning Meeting sessions, as I was not able to take detailed field notes while teaching. The recordings served as a form of video and audio evidence. I also took field notes during three 10-minute learning lab sessions, one half-hour music class, and two 30-minute lunch periods.

I used the interview mentioned above to provide documentation of Septa's feelings about school, peer interactions and Morning Meeting. The interview questions were created for the purpose of the research study (Appendix). It was given one-on-one by the researcher. It was given during the student's lunch period in the student's classroom. Not only did the answers provide data but the conversations surrounding the interview were audio recorded for information pertaining to peer and adult interactions.

The last piece of data that was collected was the lesson plans pertaining to the week in which Morning Meetings were observed. These lessons were included to provide insight towards the planned social and emotional instruction provided as well as the literacy skill focus. It was important to reflect on the objectives that each session held and compare how the Morning Meetings met or did not meet intended outcomes as well as if each Morning Meeting provided any additional social, emotional or academic developments.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, I investigated the research that I collected to find similarities and differences. I looked for elements that were consistent with the student behaviors and oral communication during Morning Meeting sessions (approximately 30-40 minutes each) as well as interactions in the lunch room (20 minutes), music class (30 minutes), five learning labs (12 minutes each) and the student interview. The video recordings of the Morning Meetings were both transcribed and behaviors were noted upon reviewing the video. The learning lab, music and lunch data collection all took the form of observational notes. The student interview was recorded and transcribed. Having collected all this data, I was then able to make observations that led me to several conclusions about social and emotional learning.

Analyzing the data required looking at the multiple resources. First, each of the Morning Meeting transcriptions were analyzed to specify which social and emotional skills were taught and/or reinforced during the group learning. Additionally, each of the Learning Lab sessions' observational notes were compared to the social and emotional lessons taught through the Morning Meetings observed in order to compare the instruction and social learning of Morning Meeting to how Septa applied the skills independently. I also compared the social and emotional aspects of the observational notes in her lunch period and music class to lessons taught from

Morning Meetings. It was also important that I analyzed Septa's participation as a group member in the Morning Meetings observed. This was important as I questioned how Septa learned new skills and if she was able to apply the learned skills in a large group atmosphere compared to a small group or independently. Finally, I analyzed the student interview, reflecting on the relevance of Septa's answers to the behaviors observed.

Findings and Discussion

I examined the variety of data sources (Morning Meeting transcriptions, learning lab, music, and lunch observational notes, and student interview), and discovered three themes that appeared throughout. The first theme that emerged was the demeanor in which the student interacted with peers and adults. Key instances were observed both in the oral language as well as the body language of the students observed during whole group Morning Meeting and individual encounters. Another theme that presented itself in the data was student's empathy expressed towards peers and adults. The data supporting this theme included instruction of this skill during Morning Meetings, brief interactions as well as extended play during Learning Labs. The third theme found was the use of social, emotional and academic skill extension opportunities presented by peers. These interactions were observed when students appeared to be teaching their peers through language and interactions without adult assistance. With the use of multiple data sources, the triangulation of research and data analysis provided comprehensive evidence for the themes of student demeanor towards others, level of empathy expressed towards peers and adults, and social, emotional and academic skill extension opportunities presented by peers. By investigating the similarities and differences, I was able to generate 3 themes that emerged and are discussed below.

Interactions with Peers and Adults

During Morning Meeting, a time where students are welcomed and experiences are shared with the direct supervision and lead of the classroom teacher, Septa was observed welcoming others to the carpet and moving to make space in the circle for others to sit. She was also observed moving away from peers that were having a difficult time sharing a close space. In the student interview, Septa stated that it was important during Morning Meeting to stay in your bubble so that accidents don't happen and you don't have to say that you're sorry (student interview, November 2, 2011). This maturity is very different from Septa's words and actions in the beginning of the school year. Septa was chosen for this action research study due to her negative behaviors and refusal to join group activities previous to the study. In September of the same school year, Septa would turn her body away from the group or take her sneakers off and place them next to her so that others could not sit by her. Her mother even came in to partake in Morning Meetings with the class to encourage Septa's participation and appropriate behaviors. Although not all Morning Meeting sessions were documented in the months prior to the action research study, it was to the benefit of the researcher that careful observations and reflections occurred previous to the research study as a responsibility of the classroom teacher. The routine of Morning Meeting and all components have continued since the first day of school. Since then, Septa has made much progress and is often the model during various components of Morning Meeting. This could be attributed to the environment established by the rituals embedded in Morning Meetings. Septa has become a strong member of the classroom community in various ways. Septa arrives each day and greets not only her teacher as she walks in the door, but other students arriving in the morning. She then participates in yet another greeting session in Morning Meeting, she will take a turn to share about her life as well as pose questions about her peer's experiences. She has become comfortable in the classroom to now interact socially and apply

social and emotional strategies to her interactions. When asked in the student interview (November 2, 2011) about her negative behavior in the beginning of the school year, Septa stated that she didn't like school and did not want to come, but quickly followed the response by stating that now she wants to come and never miss out on her learning. She provided that she did not like school because she didn't know anyone but now she has lots of friends. Morning Meeting was able to establish this belonging and socialization skills.

Septa was observed outside of whole group Morning Meetings during a learning lab activity, with two other students. Septa began building a house out of building blocks and when another student attempted to join her, she quickly told him to go back to his 'thing' (observation notes, November 3, 2011). This unwelcoming behavior contradicts her demeanor towards peers that has been observed during Morning Meeting sessions. She was also observed while at the classroom library lab reading a book by doing a retelling as she paged through the pictures. The observer, who also happens to be the teacher, was nearby and when another student approached the group to show off a task completed, Septa quickly told that student to stay away and go back to their own station. Once again, this behavior is contradicting to her appropriate manners to greet someone or solve a problem that were observed during the whole group Morning Meeting. At a separate time during the same library learning lab, she offered to leave her chosen activity to help another student that was having technology difficulties. This observation proved to positively correlate with her Morning Meeting social behaviors. These varying interactions could be explained as Septa testing out her application of appropriate social skills on an individual basis as opposed to the group interactions. This evidence is supported as Vygotsky (1978) claims learning is a social process that the student first acquires skills socially before applying the specific skills on an individual basis. In the group Morning Meeting setting, Septa was provided

with peer support as well as adult scaffolding in learning appropriate ways to approach emotions and interact socially. When working with limited peers and the lack of support, Septa had to make the choice how to respond. Her varied responses prove that she is not proficient with positive peer interactions as opposed to her positive peer interactions that were observed during whole group Morning Meetings. With continued support through Morning Meetings and the opportunities given during the school day, it is hopeful that Septa will eventually be able to use the desired behaviors on an individual basis.

During an interview with Septa (November 2, 2011), she was asked about her feelings about school and the Morning Meeting. When asked how she helps the class with activities they do together, she exhibited knowledge about turn taking stating “you put that one away and I’ll put that one away (student interview, November 2, 2011).” This ability to express turn taking is a product of the SEL program in the school that supports talking about problems and taking turns. O’Brien, Weissberg, and Shriver (2003) found that schools with SEL programs are significant in preventing negative behaviors. Septa also shared that during different times of play, she prefers to play with a particular student, “I like to play with, I try to get to work with Jodin (pseudonym), but we can’t,” (Interview November 2, 2011). When asked what happens when she can’t play with Jodin, Septa stated, “I just say, oh man. I’ll do it again.” This response is significant to point out as the emotion of disappointment is an aspect that was explored and taught in the specific Morning Meetings observed. Although no specific observations were made of Septa applying this known emotional strategy that she expressed in her interview, she used the same wording from a peer that was dealing with disappointment in the observed Morning Meeting.

The Morning Meeting begins with a greeting, focusing on each individual being recognized in order to feel a part of the group. Shriver and Weissberg (2005) state that emotional

learning and academic learning or interconnected. Through this greeting, many areas of social and academic learning take place. The Morning Meetings that were observed had students greet two friends using a hand shake one day and a high five another day. Before the students completed this task, the expected behavior was modeled with the teacher. Septa was chosen to demonstrate how to greet someone with a high five (transcription, November 4, 2011). She stood up, walked to the middle of the rug and gave me a high five while saying, "Good Morning Miss Williams." (observation notes, November 1, 2011) The teacher followed the greeting with praise to Septa about using the person's name while greeting them. Two other students were selected to model the greeting and each of them used names as they said good morning and giggled the whole time. The teacher followed this with praising the name use as well as noting that they were both smiling and greetings are supposed to make you feel happy. The students were then asked to greet two friends thinking about the strategies discussed and modeled. The classroom then erupted with greetings. The social interactions during Morning Meeting that are practiced in a group with support from peers and the teacher provide the stage for future interactions on an individual basis. From observations during arrival time, students continue to use greetings upon entering the classroom to their peers and adults. Peers that arrive late to school consistently receive a greeting by one or more students in the class. These welcoming behaviors support that Morning Meeting makes a positive impact on students' social skills.

Level of Empathy Expressed Towards Peers and Adults

Morning Meeting is a daily ritual that teaches social and emotional skills and strategies through a variety of activities in a group setting. Conversations take place about where to sit and how to handle problems with peers during group activities and sharing. Morning Meeting also provides a stage for students to share their likes, dislikes, and stories in an atmosphere that their

peers listen and respond. Students engage in active listening, and develop an understanding of similarities and differences among themselves and others. Students that participate in Morning Meeting are practicing and shown models using empathy. Empathy can be considered the act of having awareness of other's thoughts and opinions and responding positively. When I observed Septa in the library learning lab, another student had walked up to me and told me that the iPad was not working and needed some help. Immediately, Septa asked me, "Do you want me to go help her?" (observation notes, November 3, 2011). Septa was in the middle of a book that she had picked out and gave up her time to help another student. She quickly fixed the problem and stayed to watch the child play until she was reminded to come back to her station. This action is an example of empathetic behavior and Septa putting others first before herself. Morning Meeting provides the foundation for this skill when topics emerge about caring about others. Sharing time often can be guided questions for the students to respond with their own experiences. It is important to reflect to the Morning Meeting that occurred the day before Septa's empathetic behavior (November 2, 2011). During the sharing time, students were asked to share about a time they helped somebody else. The teacher provided an example of helping another person and how the people involved felt. The students followed with similar stories and were asked to help someone out that day. Although Septa was not directly participating in this conversation, she was present to hear student and teacher responses. Applying helpful behavior the next day was an example of Septa taking the group lesson and relating her own situation. Septa told me during the interview (November 2, 2011) that she likes to "help people because people help her. And if she doesn't help people she won't get help." (student interview, November 2, 2011) This level of trust that Septa has built lies in her classroom environment and Kriete (2002) states that the level of trust then extends throughout the academic day. I also took

notes on Septa's behaviors during lunch period. She quietly walked with the class to the lunch room and said "Thank you" to the lunch staff when receiving her plate and utensils. As she continued down the line, she dropped her utensils and the student behind her picked them up and gave them back to her. Once again, Septa said, "Thank you." As she sat down, she asked me to help her open her milk, but before I could answer, another student volunteered to help and Septa said, "Thank you" again (observation notes, November 1, 2011). The use of manners is practiced with a manners song that the children sing during Morning Meeting. Although Septa's kind words cannot be directly correlated by her knowledge of this song, it is important to note that her application of manners is a social skill that students are explicitly taught during Morning Meeting. Septa's respect for adults and peers is applying the social behavior of using manners.

Social, Emotional and Academic Skill Extension Opportunities

The sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) supports that literacy is a social practice and learning occurs during social interactions. Students learn from one another and it is so important that proper social and emotional skills are taught and practiced in a supportive classroom environment. As students interact, opportunities for new understandings arise, putting students in the position to teach their peers. During Morning Meeting, each day three students are given the opportunity to share a personal story with the class. Following the story, classmates then respond with questions or comments. Upon my observation notes (November 2, 2011), one student shared that he got a lot of candy on Halloween. As students responded, one boy connected Halloween with going to scary house and told the sharing student that he "went to scary houses." I then phrased the statement into a question and asked if the sharing student went to any scary houses. He responded by saying he "went to a *haunted* house." With minimal teacher support, these students communicated their knowledge of a synonym for a scary house not only to each

other, but to the class. Morning Meeting establishes an environment where learning is a social event. These students helped extend vocabulary by socializing amongst each other.

During that particular week of Morning Meetings, the teacher was working on different words to describe movements and asked specific students to jump or crouch. One student was absent the previous day and did not understand the word crouch when instructed to make the movement. Another student helped to clarify for her peer and demonstrated the action and said that “you need to bend your legs.” (observation notes, November 3, 2011) The teacher extended this initiative by clarifying that they are to keep their bottom off the floor. This vocabulary instruction was led by students. Morning Meeting When the students are collaborating and synthesizing formal instruction to apply it to their everyday life, they build their social and academic skills (Horsch, Chen & Nelson, 1999).

Another instance of peer led instruction in the Morning Meetings was observed during singing of the days of the week. Since the beginning of the school year, students have practiced this song as they participate in calendar.

- Teacher: *(to the tune of Adaam’s Family)* Days of the week... /ch/ /ch/
- Class: Days of the week /ch/ /ch/, days of the week, days of the week, days of the week /ch/ /ch/ *(one student substitutes the /ch/ for the ‘oink’ sound)*
- Class: There’s Sunday and there’s Monday, there’s Tuesday and there’s Wednesday, there’s Thursday and there’s Friday, and then there’s Saturday. Days of the week /ch/ /ch/, days of the week ‘oink’ oink’, days of the week, days of the week, days of the week ‘oink, oink’ *(laughter)*

One student substituted the word ‘oink’ for the sound /ch/. As he continued, other students caught on and joined in with the substitution. Students were applying a phonemic awareness skill to substitute sounds and words that was completely led by a student. Not only did the class practice this skill with laughter and fun, they learned it from a peer. The students in this situation

were guided to their ZPD as they received support from both adults and students as they tested their language abilities (Vygotsky, 1978).

Implications

This study implies that students participating in Morning Meeting receive a level of social and emotional instruction that fosters academic learning. It is important that instruction of social and emotional skills are explicit, with specific time allowed to practice, as well as high levels of reinforcement during instruction and related activities. This is supported by the work of Vygotsky (1978) that students learn in two phases; first socially then followed by applying the skill independently. Morning Meeting provides an atmosphere for students to learn academic, social and emotional skills in a group setting. Educators that integrate this program must continue to support the skills worked on each morning throughout the school day so that students make gains on an independent level.

I found that the use of Morning Meeting on a daily basis provided students with the grounds to explore social and emotional interactions with the teacher scaffolding instruction, guiding and monitoring behaviors seen not only during Morning Meeting but throughout the school day. The four elements of Morning Meeting (greeting, sharing, activity and an interactive message) allow for a variety of opportunities to build the classroom community, set expectations, and practice new skills and behaviors. Having this routine established in my classroom allows me and my students the assurance that all of us can start our day on a positive note that encompasses learning, practicing and applying targeted academic, social and emotional skills. Teaching students expected ways to interact with one another and themselves will decrease the altercations that interfere with instruction, create a classroom environment that cooperates and

solves problems together, as well as ensure that all students feel comfortable to voice their thoughts and understandings. This approach is supported by Dockrell et al (2010) and Wasik (2010) in that success in academic settings depends on children receiving models of language use (both from peers and adults) and having the chance to apply new understandings. Knowing how to react to a problem or what to do if directions were unclear are situations that are learned socially through experience. With the use of Morning Meetings, these situations can be determined by the teacher to be that day's skill to focus on. The class then supports and/or negates options for similar situations and receives guidance from the teacher.

I found that the element of a daily greeting welcomes each student into the classroom letting them know they are recognized and an important part of the classroom. This ritual meets the third tier of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1979) of needing friendship, family, and a sense of connection. Septa now enters the room and immediately greets her classmates even before coming to Morning Meeting. She has also arrived late for school and numerous children will go out of their way to say hello. The greeting also sets the tone and brings students together to work and play. It provides the time for explicit instruction about respecting others and experimenting with new sayings or gestures. Most importantly, it allows time for students to socialize under the guidance of an adult in an appropriate manner. This element of Morning Meeting supports sociocultural learning, where students are presented with opportunities to interact and respond to others in order to learn various social skills such as cooperation, acceptance and respect.

The second element in Morning Meeting allows students to share about themselves to the class using an established routine that provides respect and assurance that their words are valued. Having this sharing time also allows peers to inquire or make connections to that person's life.

When students show that they have a genuine interest in a peer's story, an amount of trust is established and their relationship with each other is strengthened. Although many students' questions and comments go unheard due to time restraints, the social event seems to expand beyond this small sharing time frame and into a variety of activities throughout the day. I found that the use of sharing in a whole class setting is an important activity for creating a classroom with empathy and the ability to understand a variety of experiences.

As I explored the make-up of Morning Meeting, I discovered how important the activity element of this ritual is to establishing social and emotional skills. This is a time that the class works together, taking turns, building on each other's strengths and often involves a great deal of play. It is important that classrooms promote social activities that allow for both the teacher and students lead participation. This element fosters an environment where conversations are created around successes and failures and how to deal with the emotions that follow. I found that student decisions on solving problems rather than teacher decisions created the best environment for academic as well as social and emotional growth.

Ending the Morning Meeting with a message allows students and teacher to look ahead at the day, post any announcements and work together for guided writing and reading. I have seen that students will read the message before it is even discussed. The routine that has been established of reading a class note encourages students to make the connections within this message to their expectations for the day. When the message involves using a skill that is beyond the student's abilities, the social environment it is introduced in allows for peer learning as well as motivation to step into their ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978).

Morning Meeting effects the rest of the day as skills that are introduced as a whole are then used throughout the day and skills that are introduced outside of Morning Meeting are revisited during a variety of methods. These skills include academic skills such as sharing about individual's parents careers, finding a partner that has a matching rhyme card, conducting a class survey or searching for sight words within a message. They also include social and emotional skills such as showing concern when a student shares a sad story, celebrating successes and dealing with failures, as well as establishing acceptable behaviors for classroom interactions. The skills described above, as well as many others, help teachers to integrate skills across the curriculum. Morning Meeting provides daily exposure to a variety of academic, social and emotional skills and is an excellent method to foster sociocultural learning.

Educators of all levels would benefit from implementing the Morning Meeting into their classroom routine. Morning Meeting provides a predictable routine that develops a feeling of safety for students. Facilitating Morning Meetings in classes helps to build community and improve academic as well as social and emotional skills. Not only will the mornings be filled with learning opportunities embedded within this set time, but the respectful learning will continue throughout the day. Using Morning Meeting is a wise investment of time that will provide many benefits throughout the school day as well as the school year.

Overall, this research supports my data in that students that are provided with social and emotional learning experiences, are prepared to engage in a literate society where oral communication holds the forefront, and written and non-verbal communication are built upon to support academic growth. Students that engage in social and emotional learning experiences are provided with opportunities to learn from their peers not only social and emotional skills, but also academic skills. Students that can successfully participate in a classroom filled with a

variety of cultures, belief systems and abilities make the most academic growth as they use their surroundings to support their understanding. Vygotsky (1978) states that learning is a sociocultural event and much growth is made as students enter the ZPD, applying learned skills with the least amount of guidance needed.

Conclusion

My research question was to determine if the implementation of Morning Meeting into a classroom routine supported social and emotional learning. I also looked at how the Morning Meeting supported literacy development, including verbal and non-verbal communication as well as written communication (reading and writing). Explicit social and emotional instruction in the classroom as well as opportunities to practice taught skills benefit students in that they are able to learn from social interactions as well as experiment with learned skills independently.

Based on my research, I have found that when social and emotional situations were discussed and practiced as a class, the student increased their knowledge and ability to monitor their own appropriate behaviors. With the social and emotional skills, students are able to approach academic tasks with time spent on task, willingness to try new skills as well as making connections to their learning through questioning and application of learned curriculum. Educators should foster the sociocultural learning environment by setting students up for success. They can do that by explicitly teaching ways for students to meet their social and emotional needs as a class so that they can meet their social and emotional needs without support. Morning Meeting establishes a set time for introduction and forum to extend new understandings.

After conducting my research and collecting data, it would have been beneficial to collect data from additional students within the classroom of focus to obtain a more in depth understanding of student perceptions of Morning Meeting. I also wish that I would have observed and interviewed students from a similar setting (kindergarten class in the same district) that did not participate in Morning Meeting to gain insight on similarities and differences among student's social and emotional skills. Another aspect that I would like to look into is the amount of support students received before entering kindergarten such as pre-schools and day care since all students present different cultures and belief systems as well as different experiences of social and emotional skills.

To build upon the data collected, it would be beneficial to research the amount of interactions students have with peers outside of school and how it effects the student's social and emotional development. Students that play with siblings, cousins or neighborhood friends before or after school would have more experiences to use social and emotional strategies. Would Morning Meeting have as much effect on highly social students as opposed to those that have limited interactions? It would also be valuable to determine if socio-economic status played a role in the child's social and emotional development. Maslow (1978) states that the most basic needs that must be met before one moves up on the hierarchy are needs of food, water, shelter, clothing, health, safety, and security. One's SES would most likely affect student's fulfillment of these needs and impact their ability to move towards needs that the Morning Meeting targets of love, belonging, self-esteem and self-actualization. Would one's SES influence the impact Morning Meeting has on student's social and emotional development? Overall, through my research and data collection, I have found that the involvement in Morning Meeting provides explicit teaching opportunities for social and emotional skills that lead to academic success.

Classrooms that use this Responsive Classroom approach foster students that show respect for others and themselves in a learning environment where each student is set up to reach their highest learning potential. By giving adequate attention towards instruction of social and emotional skills just as educators do for other academic areas, students can excel in academics as learning is a sociocultural event.

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Appendix

Student Interview Questions

1. Do you like coming to school? Why?
2. What are some times that you **are** happy to be a part of this class?
3. What are some times that you **are not** happy to be a part of this class?
4. Do you have friends at school?
5. Have you ever been bothered by a friend at school?
6. What do you do when that happens?
7. Do you learn while you play together?
8. What are some things you like to play at school?
9. How do you feel when it is time for Morning Meeting?
10. Morning Meeting has greeting time. What is a greeting? How do you greet someone?
11. Do you like when it is your turn to share?
12. Do you like when it is other students' time to share?
13. When the class does a song, dance or activity together, how do you help?
14. What other parts of Morning Meeting do you like? not like?
15. What have you learned from Morning Meetings?