

CLASS MEETINGS: TEACHERS AND YOUNG CHILDREN CO-
CONSTRUCTING PROBLEM SOLVING

by

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family and friends.

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ABSTRACT

Class Meetings with a teacher and group of young children (ages 3-5) provide a forum for creative group problem solving, both establishing a community of learners and developing oral language skills. The construction of a child's oral language and problem-solving skills is far reaching and is an underlying theme in many areas of social and emotional growth including moral development, character development, conflict resolution, identification of values, self esteem, and academic improvement. The theoretical framework for this study is based on various scholarly sources including those concerned with early childhood group learning, oral language, and problem solving.

During this 12 week action research study, both teacher-talk and children's problem solving strategies were addressed to answer the following research questions: What roles do teachers play in Class Meetings? What types of teacher talk are used to influence student thinking and talk within Class Meetings? What problems are identified in a Class Meeting with young children? What problem-solving strategies do young children develop within Class Meetings? The research design and methodology include videotaping, audio taping Class Meetings and transcribing these interactions with preschool children in an early childhood classroom setting.

Results indicate that during this study, attendance at the Class Meetings increased, and that young children, when given the opportunity to self-select, chose to attend the Class Meetings over other available activities. Also, this study suggests that the Class Meeting model and effective teacher–talk support student oral language, the use of positive communication, problem identification, and the development of problem solving strategies. Implications for early childhood educators, teacher educators, policymakers and researchers are discussed.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

State standards throughout the country provide detailed expectations and outcomes for student emotional development. Ironically, in this age of high-stakes testing, there is little methodology available to assist classroom teachers in supporting and assessing student social and emotional growth. The construction of a child's oral language and problem-solving skills is far reaching and is an underlying theme in many areas of social and emotional growth including moral development, character development, conflict resolution, and identification of values, self esteem and academic improvement.

Students need support to acquire the capability to work through issues related to self-esteem and social interaction. According to the National Center for Children in Poverty (Johnson & Knitzer, 2005), "social and emotional skills and competencies are the foundation for success in school. Yet reports from all over the country suggest that many young children lack these skills, while a larger number struggle with even more distressing behaviors"(p.1). Furthermore, the increasing phenomenon of violence in schools serves as a catalyst for promoting curriculum and teacher training on problem solving, communication skills, and mutual understanding. If these concepts were incorporated within the domain of early childhood education, we might be able to reverse some of the distressing trends that are exhibited by our nation's youth.

Educators across the nation are being pushed to meet the demands created by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) and the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA, 2004), legislation that attempts to improve student success in various academic areas. These academic areas do not adequately address the development of well-rounded, socially adjusted individuals. Furthermore, due to high stakes testing, teachers report that they have neither the time nor energy to focus on student social and emotional development. The lack of attention given to social and emotional needs must be addressed because research clearly demonstrates that we are not effectively approaching and assessing the developmental needs of our children.

The goals of my research are personal, practical, and intellectual while focusing on the documentation of the effects of teacher-talk during Class Meetings, creative student problem solving strategies, and oral language skills. Reviewing the literature pertaining to this topic, I realized that more information was needed to provide the classroom teacher's perspective to support school implementation. Initially, that was what propelled me to co-author two books about Class Meetings (Vance & Weaver 1995, 2002). Unfortunately, with the expectations of the NCLB (2001) and the implementation of state standards, teachers have less time to interact through dialogues, dyads, conversations, and group discussions with their students in order to build a classroom learning community.

Glasser (1969) introduced the term Class Meetings as a “non-judgmental discussion about what is important and relevant” (p. 122) to students. Class Meetings as demonstrated in my study extend this definition to establish group forums for communication and problem solving (Vance & Weaver, 1995). There are many variations of the Class Meetings (Glasser, 1969, Nielsen, 2006). However, in this study I incorporated a format developed from previous kindergarten work utilizing four components: opening the meeting, acknowledgements, problem solving and challenges and closing the meeting. (Vance & Weaver, 2002) These Class Meetings differ from circle time because circle time frequently serves as an opening or closing activity for the school day (Nielsen, 2006). Often, circle time is highly scripted functioning to primarily focus on the daily routine, calendar, weather, sharing (toys or accomplishments), to calm children and signal to them that their school day has begun or is about to end. Overall, Class Meetings are activities that occur within the day, usually before or after lunch or an outdoor play period. Although numerous pedagogical goals are achieved within the Class Meetings, in my study their primary function is as forum for developing problem solving and communication skills. Class Meetings are distinct from literature circles in that the focus of Class Meeting discussions are on the “living text” of the on-going experiences of the children rather than a discussion emerging from children’s literature.

Providing scholarly research related to the topic of teacher-talk during Class Meetings and the problem identification and problem-solving strategies young children

create supports the use of Class Meetings in schools, as well as promotes student emotional growth and communication skills.

A personal goal was to demonstrate that the time used for the Class Meetings positively impacts the entire school day and allows teachers to work with their students with fewer interruptions or distractions such as behavior problems. I know this to be true from my own practical sense and that of others including the early childhood educators from Reggio Emilia; however, there are limited empirical data showing the benefits and effects of Class Meetings with young children. In order for group decision-making, Class Meetings, and communication skills to be valued for curriculum use within the school environment, further research is required.

Another practical goal was to illustrate how disruptive behavior or interpersonal problems are turned into instructional ends in the context of the Class Meetings and are addressed at a specific time during the school day. Having used daily Class Meetings in my kindergarten and early childhood classrooms, my interest in documenting their use provides the nucleus for a conceptual framework. This research project has given me an opportunity to combine the role of classroom teacher with that of a collaborative classroom-based study grounded in action research to explore the use of Class Meetings in relation to teacher-talk, children's problem solving strategies, communication skills, language development, in order to improve my teaching practice.

An intellectual goal was to complete field research on this topic utilizing this collaborative, classroom-based study grounded in action research methodology in concert with technology as investigational tools to highlight this under-utilized forum for classroom communication. “Multimedia tools promote both the making of discoveries about the subject one is studying as well as the communicating of discoveries” (Goldman-Segall, 1992, p. 258). This study utilized various forms of technology as a means of documentation during the investigation and paved the way for future research on the importance of Class Meetings,.

Research Questions

The construction of a child’s oral language and problem-solving skills are far-reaching themes woven into many theoretical areas of social and emotional growth including moral development, character development, creative problem solving, conflict resolution, life skills, values, self-esteem, language acquisition, and academic improvement. The research questions for this study focus on investigating the use of Class Meetings with young children to gain insight into children’s problem solving strategies, verbal and non-verbal language use within the meetings and to explore the types of teacher talk. For this purpose, the following research questions guided the work:

- What roles do teachers play in Class Meetings?
- What types of teacher talk are used to influence student thinking and talk within Class Meetings?
- What problems are identified in a Class Meeting with young children?

- What problem-solving strategies do young children develop within Class Meetings?

Study Background

During my 35 year, bilingual, early childhood teaching career, I valued student interaction and fostered creativity, student responsibility, and mutual respect for diversity to establish a safe and caring classroom community.

Growing up within a family where I was appreciated and trusted as having the potential to meet any goal marked the beginning of my journey toward helping young children do the same. Unfortunately, not all memories are positive. A nightmarish experience occurred in seventh grade when I was told that as a result of taking the California Achievement Exam and scoring poorly that I should consider a career in cosmetology. Even though I mustered enough courage to explain to my counselor and the vice principal that I was planning to go to college to be a teacher, my words fell on deaf ears. I will never forget how difficult it was to be marginalized and go unheard. That memory reminds me of how I was able to reach within to utilize my own resiliency, skills of determination, motivation, positive self-talk, and perseverance to move forward toward my goals.

In the first years of my teaching career, I realized that many of the standard teaching practices including the use of basal readers, textbook lessons, worksheets, and having children sit in rows to facilitate listening to their instructor were ineffective in meeting the needs of my high-risk student population. I explored alternative ways of

working with students such as the language experience approach, interesting field trips, daily silent reading, and journal writing and group discussions. Furthermore, I observed the positive effects of these methods on my students through their participation, engagement, and progress in their social skills and academic abilities.

After teaching elementary students for 16 years in the Sunnyside School District, I moved to Tucson Unified School District's Safford Elementary School in 1986. A year and a half later, I transferred to Drachman Primary Magnet School. The school was located a few blocks from the city's largest low-income housing project. The student population was over 70% Hispanic, high-risk students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Due to low test score achievement, the school district administrators along with the principal encouraged the faculty to embrace new classroom management approaches. Through the leadership provided from a visionary school principal, I began utilizing many innovative teaching practices that influenced my teaching style and epistemological framework. Class Meetings were introduced into the daily routine. Along with employing Class Meetings, I embraced the use of portfolios as a way of documenting children's growth, project work to embrace student's interests, and I was inspired by the Reggio Emilia Early Childhood Approach. The Reggio Emilia approach (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998) was greatly influenced by Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory and Lilian Katz and Silvia Chard's project work that utilized group meetings encouraging young children's interaction in small and large group dialogues, conversations, and discussions as a vehicle for problem solving and communication. I

found these various methodologies related and interconnected, and they helped to shape and refine my Class Meeting model.

For more than 10 years, I facilitated Class Meetings on a daily basis, with over 140 kindergarten children and observed their impact on language, learning, and socialization. I was able to witness a multitude of positive student outcomes including behavioral changes, the demonstration of respect for others, creative problem-solving strategies, conflict resolution, collaborative learning, pattern recognition, and the use of questions and positive talk. Class Meetings supported increased student communication and oral language development, second language acquisition among my English language learners, reduced stress, fostered an appreciation for diversity and served as a framework for building a caring classroom community.

I was encouraged to write and share my findings with my colleagues. I began co-authoring a book on class meetings in 1992 that was completed in 1995. In 2001, I was asked to write another book for the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) with a focus on early childhood education. This was completed and sent to members of this professional organization in 2003.

Co-authoring two teacher resource books on the subject of Class Meetings and working with the editors of the NAEYC in Washington, DC provided an in-depth exploration of this topic and the opportunity to document anecdotal experiences (Vance

& Weaver, 2002). I also became aware of the power created when expressing one's thoughts and ideas in writing about a topic of relevance.

I will never forget having lunch at a conference in Chicago when someone sitting next to me asked me my name. I told her, "Emily Vance," and she replied, "I know you. Didn't you write a book on Class Meetings? I quickly responded, "yes" and she said, "I love that book!" The personal power that resulted from discovering that I had touched this fellow teacher without personally knowing her was both euphoric and motivational.

Along the way, I have realized the importance of my role as an educator and decided to embark on another path of my journey to combine my classroom knowledge with the perspective and skills of a researcher. As a result of my in-depth, advanced, educational studies, I was motivated to delve deeper to discover more information on possible contributing factors to changes in my classroom. Because I observed such a wide range of developing student skills and the changes among my students that took place in the Class Meeting context, I am naturally biased in favor of the use of this forum for classroom communication. I was highly motivated to delve deeper by creating research in this area because there has been a limited amount of research to date on the topic of class meetings with young children. It is therefore an underlying assumption that my research will be of value no matter what the findings reveal because it will lead to better understanding of the importance and use of classroom communication forums. To date, the strategies young children use to resolve their conflicts have not been fully explored. I

wanted to begin bridging this gap with this collaborative, classroom-based study grounded in action research.

My experience with educational research is rooted in my belief as an educator and researcher. In 1987, I began learning about the Reggio Emilia Schools (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998) in northern Italy and the importance they placed on teachers as observers of children's abilities and the way in which they document children's learning. Their philosophy is grounded in the theoretical principles derived from Vygotsky, Dewey, Piaget, and Montessori (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998). Loris Malaguzzi, the founder of the Reggio Emilia early childhood programs, was a psychologist and journalist who became interested in a women's movement in the town of Reggio Emilia, which sought to develop preschools separate from the Catholic Church. Working collaboratively with the mothers of Reggio Emilia, Loris Malaguzzi founded a system of preschools focusing on the rights of the child, the parents, and the teachers. The Reggio Emilia educators embraced the ideals that fostered the image of the child, young children's creativity, negotiated learning, beautiful environments, and "schools as a system of relationships" (Edwards et al., 1998, p. 297). In fact their slogan "*Io chi siamo*" or "I am who we are" signified the "possibility of reaching beyond the individual through the mutual exchange of others" (p. 297) to establish a shared conception of education or community.

Thus, the words of Loris Malaguzzi, (As cited in Rinaldi, 2006) “knowledge is like a tangle of spaghetti.” (p. 7) impacted me greatly, and I share his notion that knowledge cannot be defined or expressed by one theory, but rather is a mixture of a multitude of ideas and perceptions.

Theoretical Framework

A long historical perspective provides the over-arching umbrella for this study established through the works of Dewey (1916), Vygotsky (1978), Piaget (1972), and Bronfenbrenner (1979).

In the early 1900s, John Dewey established his laboratory school at the University of Chicago. Based on democratic principles, John Dewey’s (1916) ideal of a society is one that is composed of individuals interacting in a democratic environment: “Members of the group share ideas about important things and learn from one another” (p. 83). Dewey believed that all individuals should have an equal voice in our culture. That principle and those ideas must be embodied in education and the forms of education. The problem is “to extract the desirable traits of forms of community life” (p. 83) to use them to critique what is undesirable. Schools should not be isolated from the community but rather integrated into the larger life of the community as “isolation makes for rigidity and formal institutionalizing of life, for static and selfish ideals” (p. 86).

For Dewey (1916), a democratic society must fulfill its need to promote the free intercourse and exchange of ideas through its educational system and in a “deliberate and

systematic [way because] a democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (p. 87). The vision that Dewey developed in the early 1900’s for democratic education and the creation of community schools has remained influential for a century.

During this same period of time, two Russian theorists, Vygotsky (1978) and Bronfenbrenner (1979), developed interrelated theories. Lev Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory, also developed in the early 1900’s, along with other semiotic constructivist notions, serves as a historical support for the use of creative group problem solving and the potential for impacting student learning. Parkay and Hass (2000) provided a useful characterization of these elements in the following translation and reflection of Vygotsky’s thinking, “Language provides the child with her first interaction with a symbolic system. Imaginative play then allows the child to develop symbolic systems of her own” (p. 168).

Vygotsky laid the framework for eliciting prior knowledge and information from young children on topics of interest to them. In addition, this information provided a baseline and served as a foundation for teachers to build learning experiences. His theory focused on how learners make sense of new information, and on “how they construct meaning based on what they already know” (Parkay & Hass, 2000, p.168).

Classroom discussions, group discourse, and Class Meetings focus on social and emotional development allowing children to extend language and play in the context of a

supportive social environment. In these discussions, the teacher uses the zone of proximal development to build upon skills already acquired and challenges the students to move in new directions (Vygotsky, 1978). Additionally, teachers using a constructivist approach value the importance of observing a child's thinking processes and encouraging children to develop their own theories and descriptions relating to their own learning development. The focus is not on the products or outcomes that a child produces; rather, the followers of constructivism concentrate their attention on the course children go through in the construction and reflection of their own learning theories. Simply put, the focus is on the child's progression in gaining knowledge and not produced products.

It is important to note that along with Vygotsky, Jean Piaget (1972) shared insight into the development of thought processes. Bordrova and Leong (2007) state that, "Piaget placed thinking at the center of child development," and that Piaget and Vygotsky "agree that a child's development is a series of qualitative changes that cannot be viewed as merely [sic] an expanding repertoire of skills and ideas" (p.29). Both theorists concurred that knowledge was constructed in the mind and that children constructed their own understandings that were "restructured with age and experience" (pp. 29-30).

Cazden (1988) extended this emphasis relating to a child's development and understanding by stating, "We have to consider how words spoken in classrooms affect the outcome of education: how observable classroom discourse affects the unobservable thought processes of each of the participants and thereby the nature of what all students

learn” (p. 99). Cazden further posited that Vygotsky’s (1962) *Thought and Language* should be interpreted as “thinking and speech” (p. 99) in order to place the emphasis on thought as a thinking process rather than a product and to speech as the use of language in social interaction. Cazden argued that there were distinctions between teacher led or expert speech events and “interaction among peers” (p. 99). She further illustrated and explained that a common method researchers use for analyzing classroom discourse is to categorize teacher questions using a cognitive scale. The challenge is to create different categories and question types.

Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) expanded on the work of Dewey (1916), and Vygotsky (1978) through his Ecological Systems Theory, which Paquette and Ryan (2001) state was focused on a “child’s development within the context of the system of relationships that form his or her environment” (p. 1). Bronfenbrenner defined “complex ‘layers of environment’ each having an effect on a child’s development” (p. 2). This newly renamed “biological systems theory” emphasized the interconnectedness of a “child’s own biology, his immediate family/community environment and how the societal landscape fuels and steers his development” (p. 1). Bronfenbrenner described five environmental systems, microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem and suggested that changes or conflict in any tier created a ripple effect throughout the layers (Paquette & Ryan, 2001).

In a related approach over the past 20 years, Howard Gardner (1983,1993, 1999) identified intelligences or ways in which people learn or acquire knowledge in his Multiple Intelligences theory. Of particular interest for this study are Gardner's (1999) interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences. "Interpersonal intelligence denotes a person's capacity to understand the intentions, motivations, and desire of other people and consequently, to work effectively with others" (p.43). Gardner also revealed that although intrapersonal intelligence relates to the "understanding of oneself" (p. 43) and the appreciation of this information in regulating one's own life, it also leads us to a path of self-inquiry where the real self develops out of interactions with the environment and significant others.

In 2006, Goleman extended his emotional intelligence theory to include social intelligence, "an emerging new science with startling implications for our interpersonal world"(p. 1). Goleman rejected an old perspective of "social intelligence as the application of general intelligence to social situations—a largely cognitive aptitude" (p. 332). Indeed, Goleman stated that social intelligence is the interconnection of "being intelligent not just *about* relationships but also *in* them" (p. 11). Goleman continued his argument stating, "Schools themselves are a very recent artifact of civilization. The more powerful force in the brain's architecture is arguable the need to navigate the social world, not the need to get A's" (p. 334). Goleman further suggested that we look at social intelligence as the umbrella over general intelligence.

The combination of Goleman's (2006) social intelligence with inspiration from the Reggio Emilia Early Childhood Centers and their views on creativity heightened the importance for schools to focus on social emotional development along with academic standards. In Reggio Emilia, the child's inner speech, language practice, and internalization are supported through the use of Class Meetings, peer conversations, and dialogues (Edwards, et. al, 1989). Mercer (2000) called this kind of collective communication "inter-thinking" (p. 1) and made the point that more attention must be paid to the use of language and thinking together for collectively making sense of experience and solving problems. The Class Meeting format provides children with the opportunity of thinking together to establish mutual respect and create "a sense of community" (Vance & Weaver, 2002, p. 4). Simultaneously, these collaborative, transformative experiences provide students with what Vygotsky termed *perezhivanie* or opportunities to "perceive, experience and process the emotional aspects of social interaction" (Wells & Claxton, 2002, p. 49). Expanding on this idea, Moll and Whitmore (1993) identified the "collective zone of proximal development." This collective thinking provided an opportunity for the participants to elevate ideas beyond the abilities of one individual to incorporate their prior experiences or "funds of knowledge" to support and create a community interconnectedness (Greenberg, 1989). Moll and Greenberg (1990) documented through their ethnographic research the importance of teachers incorporating students' prior social and learning experiences derived from their home, family, and culture.

Steven Krashen's (1981, 1987) notion of the "affective filter" and comprehensible input as related to second language acquisition can be expanded to encompass the emotional influences in group decision making. Krashen's view took into consideration the impact emotion played on the role of learning. Krashen maintained that learners with high motivation, self-confidence, a positive self-image and a low level of anxiety were better equipped for success.

Thus, as Mercer (2000) stated, "Language enables us to set up intellectual networks for knowledge" (p. 15). It is important to note that language development, collective thinking, and intellectual networks take time to develop, following consistent use of dialogues, conversations, and class discussions along with the expectations that children's thoughts and ideas are valued, meaning is created, language is reinforced, and a classroom community is established. The literature supports the importance of children's social and emotional development. Educators need research to support effective learning environments and the use of group problem solving to ensure each child has the potential to make a difference in our world.

Related Studies

In investigating the literature pertaining to group discussions, conflict resolution, peacemaking, and classroom discourse, references are continually made to the legacy of government reports and mandates establishing a lengthy history of an inadequate United States educational system. This government (National Commission on Excellence in

Education, NCEE, 1983) compiled information including the Coleman Report (1966), *A Nation at Risk* and more recently the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), along with individual state teaching standards. All of these documents repeatedly make the argument for educational reform.

The significant studies that support or are related to the use of Class Meetings as a vehicle for problem solving, peer negotiation, conflict resolution, and the development of communication strategies are identified in this section from the literature, cited or linked to other studies. The descriptor words used to locate these studies included *class meetings, problem solving, peer mediation, social-emotional development, conflict resolution, young children, classroom community, and communication*.

The literature is comprised of two groups of related studies. The first group consists of studies by Rowe (1998), Styles (2001), Donahue (2001), and Angell (2004). This information is qualitative and descriptive, focusing on the teacher's perspective of Class Meetings, teacher-student interaction, and the definitional format for the meetings. The second group is quantitative in its methodological orientation. It includes investigations by Johnson, Johnson, Dudley, and Maguson (1995) and Sandy and Boardman (2000) as well as further exploration by Johnson and Johnson (2004).

In 1988, Rowe suggested the importance for examining teacher talk. Rowe revealed the circularity of change that occurred from "kidwatching" (Goodman, 1985)

within school literacy experiences including the introduction of text sets, frequently stationing a teacher in the classroom book center to read and hold informal book discussions, and making connections between reading and play by adding toys and props to the reading center. After reviewing the videotapes of book reading events, Rowe discovered that her teacher talk sanctioned only some aspects of children's play; in fact, one encounter gave the implicit message that dramatic play was inappropriate. This led Rowe to teacher watching and paying close attention to the dialogues and conversations she had with students. Rowe (1998) stated that through this experience, she discovered "the power of teacher-talk" and that "talk fills the gap between curricular plans and curricular experiences" (p.106). Simply put, "Talk makes events come to life and our professional roles and beliefs are made real through the micro-patterns of our everyday talk in the classroom" (p.106). It is the habitual ways of talking with students that teachers are most likely unaware of. She posits two professional questions: How can I learn to talk differently with my students? What other changes in the classroom environment are necessary to support changes in my talk and that of my students? Rowe then reflected on Halliday's (1974) suggestion that language is learned in context, and its use is linked to social situations in powerful ways. Rowe concluded by stating, "An analysis of classroom talk provides an important window on my teaching and the learning of my students" (p.107).

Styles (2001) used a narrative, ethnographic approach, and described how to implement a Class Meeting. She introduced the notion of the "encouragement circle"

where third grade students offered the meeting leader encouraging comments. Styles identified sections of the meeting as old business and new business, thank you's, and compliments. She also defined the group roles, leader roles, and teacher roles for the class meetings. Styles focused on the implementation of Class Meetings and useful strategies.

In Donahue's (2001) study on an examination of the development of classroom community through class meetings, the setting was a second grade classroom in a stable, upper-middle-class neighborhood in Toronto, Canada. Twenty-eight students participated with a range of behaviors, abilities, and learning styles whose first language was English. Several students were labeled gifted, and a few were identified as learning disabled. Some were capable of working independently, and others needed extensive teacher assistance.

The selected purpose of this year-long research focused on the development of community in various settings. As a result of 14 years of teaching, high interest in a collaborative classroom community and extended experience using Class Meetings, Donahue participated in the action research group, the Developing Inquiring Communities in Education Project (DICEP).

This ethnographic study utilized a teacher-as-researcher approach to determine how to create a classroom of inquiry. Weekly Class Meetings lasting about one-half hour were used to explore, improve, and reflect on building focus and making connections

through an inquiring community. Videotaped Class Meetings along with transcribed minutes of 25 meetings provided the data. Donahue's Class Meeting components included celebrating positives, listing reminders, and dealing with business. Positives represented something the students enjoyed, reminders were anything relating to routines or special events the students needed to remember, and business was something the child wanted to implement or change such as a question, a problem, or a situation that bothered him/her.

The research focus was identifying the important characteristics of a classroom community, including the values and expectations of such a community. The findings based on student responses revealed the importance of routines such as choice of seats, taking turns, communal pencil use, and establishing class rules. The students suggested more active involvement in the leadership of class routines and more time for student choice activities. Donahue stated that a sense of community was strengthened through this type of learning approach and the reciprocity of applying the listening process with students and their feedback prompted teacher reflection in planning a more effective and motivating program.

In Angell's (2004) article, *Making Peace in Elementary Classrooms: A Case for Class Meetings*, the setting was a self-contained magnet school within the Denver, Colorado school system. Participants were students from urban populations throughout the city comprised of a relatively even ethnic ratio of one-third Caucasians, one-third

African Americans and one-third Latinos. One of every five students was eligible for the free lunch program, and most of the students were transported to and from school on a bus. The average class size was 30 students.

This case study purposely addressed the following questions: How do Class Meetings in elementary classrooms influence students' attitudes and behaviors, both individually and collectively? Can regular opportunities to participate in collective problem solving educate students for peace making and alter the social dynamic of the classroom?

Angell addressed the two questions by examining Class Meeting minutes that were transcribed from her public school Montessori classroom. Whenever possible, the student language was recorded verbatim. Angell illustrated her Class Meeting format as consisting of reminders, announcements, questions, acknowledgments, apologies, and suggestions. She described students' attitudes and stated, "Class Meetings in my public classroom have served, first of all as a communication event, bringing together students of diverse backgrounds and different social perspectives to talk to each other in a safe setting" (p. 102). After reviewing two years of transcriptions, Angell discovered that of 100 motions made during these Class Meetings only 6 were ultimately voted on or moved the conversation event into a decision-making process.

A quantitative study by Johnson, Johnson, Dudley & Manguson (1995) focused on -training elementary school students to manage conflict. The study setting occurred in

mid-western school with six grades, 2-5 classes in each grade level. Two hundred twenty-seven students and 22 of 28 teachers participated.

The main purpose of this study was to determine whether the students mastered negotiation and mediation procedures following the use of conflict-resolution skills in a total school program versus a small cadre of peer monitored students who supported problem solving. The claims of effectiveness were based primarily on anecdotal evidence. Both distributive and integrative approaches were incorporated; the distributive approach maximized one's own gains, and the integrative approach maximized the gains of both parties. Advocates of the Teaching Students to be Peacebuilders Program (TSP) claimed a reduction in student suspensions, principal referrals, and absenteeism as a result of applying these peer- mediation procedures. Procedure: The following dependent variables were used: a Total Recall Post Test given to observe the student's written responses and ability to retell the step by-step method for conflict resolution, a Delayed Total Recall Assessment administered at the end of the year to measure the student's written ability to recall conflict-resolution procedures both of these indicated trends a Conflict Scenario Written Assessment that had students listen to a problem and then write an essay on what they would do to solve the problem, and a Conflict Scenario Interview Measure where students were presented with a problem and asked to assume the role of the person in conflict and tell an interviewer how they would solve the problem. The interviewer recorded the answers of the 69 students who were administered this measure, a Teacher Principal Attitudes Measure to record Teacher opinions and feed-back from the TSP

Program training and curriculum were gathered. A t- test was used to determine the significance of pre and post responses. The intent was to prove that students could learn negotiation and mediation procedures, apply them, and retain them for a long period of time. The researchers examined whether adults viewed this model as constructive or helpful.

The findings revealed that although there was no statistical test for Measure A or B, the percentages obtained from the recall post-test showed that 94% of the students correctly answered all of the questions. The remaining 6% missed only the question relating to the negotiation steps, thus eliminating the need for a statistical test. The pre and post tests for the untrained control group remained stable; however, the post test for the trained group was statistically significant based on their measure. The data from Measure C supported a significant improvement in conflict management skills after training. Furthermore, if the control groups were separated from the tested groups, there was no difference before testing took place, indicating that pre and post test differences were a direct result of the intervention and training. Once again, for Measure D, there was a (98.8%) significant difference between the trained and untrained participants on the post-test where testing showed an improvement in conflict management skills. The basic finding was that students were able to remember the peer mediation format presented in the TSP program. This finding was also confirmed through anecdotal evidence regarding the effectiveness of peer mediation presented through TSP that validated the initial

assumptions for using this whole student body approach. Input from teacher questionnaires regarding this approach confirmed successful results.

A more recent study by Johnson and Johnson (2004) on teaching students to be peacemakers took place in eight rural and suburban schools in the United States and Canada with randomly assigned student participants ranging from kindergarten through ninth grade. The study focused on making schools safe, socializing students with the competencies, resolving conflict in constructive ways, and creating a safe environment. A meta-analysis was conducted on 16 studies on the effectiveness of the TSP in eight schools and two countries between 1988-2000. These field-experimental studies addressed the following questions: How often did conflicts among students occur, and what were the most commonly occurring conflicts? What strategies did students use to manage their problems before training? Was the TSP training successful in teaching students the negotiation and mediation procedures? Could students apply the negotiation and mediation procedures to conflicts? Did students transfer the negotiation and mediation procedures to non-classroom and non-school situations? What strategies did the students use to resolve their conflicts? When given the option, did students engage in win-lose or problem-solving negotiations? How were the conflicts resolved? Did the TSP training increase students' academic achievement? Did TSP training result in more positive attitudes toward conflict? Did TSP training result in fewer discipline problems that have to be managed by the teacher and the administration?

The findings revealed the TSP program taught students the following civic values:

- Students have the right to express openly what they want and how they feel, and they should listen carefully to what others want and feel.
- Wants and feelings should be supported by reasoning along with an understanding of the interests of others in the situation.
- Situations should be viewed from multiple perspectives.
- The well being of others and themselves and seeking agreements that benefit relationships over a long period of time are valued.
- Joint efforts to achieve satisfying agreements are appreciated.
- Conflicts result in positive outcomes when they are managed constructively.

The following TSP four step frame-work for teaching students to be peacemakers was implemented: understanding the nature of conflict, choosing an appropriate conflict strategy, negotiating to solve the problem and integrating problem-solving negotiation. The problem-solving procedure steps consisted of describing what you want, how you feel, describing the reasons for your wants and feelings, taking another's perspective and summarizing it, identifying three optional plans and choosing the wisest course of action.

The mediation of others' conflicts entailed using a Conflict Report Form and a Mediation Report Form. The findings showed the questions in this study aligned with the dependent variables post- training responses within the 16 studies examined. Thirteen effects on immediate recall supported the acquisition of the procedure. Mean improvement on the test score pre and post-training was demonstrated by an effect size of 2.25. The effect size definition was not clearly stated, but the larger the mean, the stronger the evidence for significant improvement.. With regard to the question about

how conflicts could be resolved, no difference was found in how conflicts were managed inside or outside of school. Another dependent variable relating to the same question was the quality of solutions, and this showed a positive effect size; however, this only occurred in one instance of an effect. The small effect prevented extrapolation of conclusions. Effect size was anecdotal; however, it did follow the trend of the other dependent variables which pointed to successful outcomes from the training.

In 2000, Sandy and Boardman conducted a study in eighteen Head Start Early Childhood Center classrooms in New York and surrounding areas during the Fall 1997 to Fall 1999. The participants were three hundred and thirty preschool children aged two to six years, 54% of whom were females. The ethnicity consisted of 155 Latinos, 120 African Americans, 15 European Americans, 11 Black West Indians, 4 Asians, and 25 in other ethnic groups. Due to high mobility, only 36 children participated for the duration of the two year study. There were 33 day-care staff (87% women and 13% men). Class enrollment ranged from 16-24 students with one group having 39 children. Over 170 parents participated with a 67% response rate to the pre and post questionnaires.

The study purpose addressed the following questions: What are parents, caretakers, and members of the community doing to stop increased violence, often tragic, among adolescents? How can we help children adjust to an increasingly complex world where television suggests that people are entitled to instant gratification and violence is often portrayed as the answer if gratification is frustrated? The Peaceful Kids Early Childhood Social Emotional Learning (ECSEL) Program procedure identified 11

developmental tasks: self-identity, self-control, self-efficacy, self-esteem, emotional competence, pro-social behavior, communication, cooperation, assertiveness, problem solving, and conflict resolution, incorporated into the curriculum. Parents were considered a vital component of this program, and collaboration with teachers was encouraged. The post-curriculum quasi-experimental design incorporated three groups to test the hypothesis of increased performance in the first two groups. The first group consisted of parents, children, and day-care staff receiving training. The second group trained day-care staff and children, and the third group or control group received no training. Researchers used the Playful Solutions Task that they developed. It contained age-appropriate tests using familiar animal-picture situations to gain conflict resolution responses which were then categorized. The scores revealed that only the group trained with parents, day-care providers, and children showed statistically significant improvement. All three areas assessed demonstrated improvement.

This research demonstrated the importance of providing conflict resolution training within a systems approach that affected the different areas in which children functioned, including the home, school, and community. This study further highlighted the importance of parental role models on children's attitudes and behavior. One major obstacle was getting parents to attend sessions. The importance of working together with center administrators, directors, and child-care providers was also highlighted. The most important voices in the program were those of the children telling what their major conflicts were and what they did and did not understand about emotional responses,

relationships, and problem solving. Through personal observations, there was a noticeable increase in the children's vocabulary.

These studies attempted to demonstrate the contribution of knowledge from established research; however, the significance of the information for supporting youth or young children in this social emotional domain was not clearly described. Furthermore, the lack of clear statements and criteria used to identify and select the relevant scholarship limited the depth and scope of the treatments. The interconnectedness of research relating to class meetings, problem solving, peer mediation, social-emotional development, classroom management tolerance, resiliency, conflict resolution, young children, classroom community, negotiated speaking, and communication was not clearly defined.. Although not specifically stated, there was an underlying implication that the predominant criteria used in building and presenting the grounding research was whether that grounding research was an author-generated prior study, specifically in the case of the investigations of Johnson and Johnson (2004). A limited and often inadequate rationale for the conceptual, methodological, and theoretical orientation was given in most of these studies making them difficult to reproduce.

The literature is comprised of two groups of related studies qualitative and quantitative. The first group consisted of qualitative, descriptive, studies with live, naturalistic interaction of students and teachers working together. Rowes' (1998) work highlighted the importance of teacher-talk. Donahue (2001), Styles (2001) and Angell

(2004) were significant because these studies utilized a definitional Class Meeting format to promote a student communication and to build a sense of community. In particular the Donahue (2001) study was grounded in action research with second grade students. Although the formats for the Donahue's and Style's Class Meetings were different, incorporating the use of the terminology like *positive*, *reminders*, and *the encouragement circle*, they shared goals similar to my orientation that included focusing on positive classroom communication, addressing problems, and peacemaking.

The second group is quantitative in its methodological orientation. It includes investigations by Johnson, Johnson, Dudley, and Maguson (1995) and Sandy and Boardman (2000) as well as further exploration by Johnson and Johnson (2004). These quantitative studies focused on a larger age range of student population. The format for these studies was heavily weighted toward conflict resolution training through the teaching students to be peacebuilders program (TSP). The meta-analysis (Johnson & Johnson (2004) was a more recent study focused on the effectiveness of implementing civic values. These quantitative studies were designed to test a prescribed curriculum that would meet similar ends and the actual pedagogical act was much more scripted and designed in terms of ease of outcome evaluation than in the qualitative studies..

Conclusion

This classroom-based study grounded in action research has five chapters organized accordingly. In Chapter 1, I lay the groundwork for the rationale for this study

on Class Meetings with young children, outlining my personal, practical and intellectual goals, stating the research questions, my personal history, theoretical framework, related studies, and a summary of the connections between the related studies. In chapter 2, I present a detailed description of the research design and methodology including data collection and data analysis. Chapter 3 examines teacher- talk within the Class Meetings through findings, analysis and discussion. Chapter 4 addresses students' problem identification and problem solving strategies through findings, analysis and discussion. Chapter 5, the conclusion, presents a summary of the findings, along with applications and implications for early childhood education.

IF...

by Pamela Houk

If I can

ask my own questions,
try out my ideas,
experience what is around me,
share what I find;

If I have

plenty of time for
my special pace,
a nourishing space,
things to transform;

If you'll be

my patient friend,
trusted guide,
fellow investigator,
partner in learning;

Then I will

explore the world,
discover my voice,
and tell you what I know
in a hundred languages.

Source: (Edwards, C., Gandini, L., Forman, G., The Hundred Languages of Children 1998 p. 294).

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

This research represents a collaborative, classroom-based study grounded in action research because this approach best supports answering the proposed research questions. A benefit of using this action-research framework is to generate and gather large amounts of data in a relatively short time period. The participants for this study included preschool children from a variety of ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds in a school district located in southwestern Arizona.

In the spring and summer prior to the study beginning, I worked as a Class Meeting consultant for the Vail School District in the early childhood enrichment program at Acacia School. During this time and before the study began I spent a great amount of time in the classrooms to become familiar with the teachers, children, their parents, and daily routines. Having the video cameras and audio recorders available from the first days of school helped the children to develop a sense of comfort with the presence of this type of technology. Actual filming of the Class Meetings began two weeks after the inception of the school 2008 year in the middle of July.

Research Setting

During the last ten years a large growth expansion from the nearby Tucson metropolis escalated the population in this area. As a result of this growth spurt the school district demographics and student population increased from 1,000 in 1990 to 9,000 in 2007. Homes in this area range from the mid \$200,000 upward. The school

district has added new schools each year in order to keep up with the increased residential and student growth.

According to data compiled through *Great Schools, the Parent's Guide to K-12 Success* and reported in 2008, test results show this school district performing at a nine level with ten being the highest achievable rating. At the time of this study the area demographic population was composed of predominantly 71 % Anglo, 21 % Hispanic, 5% Black, 3% Asian and 1% Native American. Students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch program were 17% with 51% as the state average. English Language Learners comprised 2% of the school population with 13% as the state average. In 2007 the following results, where % represents meeting or exceeding state standards, were compiled based on third grade AIMS Testing 91% reading, 92% writing, 91% math. All of these scores exceeded state averages. There was a 95% attendance rate and a student-teacher ratio of 14 to one.

The research occurred in the Vail Public School District, Acacia Early Childhood Enrichment Program in which administrators and teachers have a high interest and district-wide focus to implement and integrate Class Meetings into the curriculum. The teachers, administrators, parents, and children consented to collaborate without having anonymity to this study. Data was collected from student photographs, video, and audio taped discussions, along with written transcriptions of the regularly planned Class Meetings conducted three times a week, Monday through Wednesday around 8:00 a. m.

The timeline for data collection began the middle of July and ended in October 2008. Thursdays and Fridays were used to transcribe information and/or as an additional day for filming and taping if a schedule change was required.

Population

The study classroom demographics were composed 15-22 early childhood students ranging in age from 3-6. Children whose parents did not want their child to participate were invited to the adjacent classroom during the class meetings. They were not filmed nor had their comments recorded. It was a common practice in this school that the children are mixed at various times throughout the day with the children and teacher in the adjacent classroom and they were familiar with this procedure. This did not create a problem in terms of learning. The parents of the children were invited to become a part of this study. The number of parents depended on the amount of students enrolled in the study ranging between 15-20.

The students' ages were 3-6 with both girls and boys. The parents consisted of mixed gender, age with demographics for the most part similar to the students. There were 20 children in the Class Meeting study, 10 girls and 10 boys. Two children were Asian, two were Hispanic and the remaining were Caucasian. There were no more than 13 children in the classroom on a given day. The number of daily students in the classroom on a given day corresponds to the guidelines outlined by the National Association of Education of Young Children (NAEYC) stating that no more than 13

students in the classroom at a given time with one teacher. A total of 25 parents participated in the study, 18 were women and 7 were men. Five children had both parents participate in the study.

The staff supporting this Acacia early childhood enrichment classroom was comprised of a female, Caucasian early childhood site director, age 34 with an Associates degree in Early Childhood Education, an Anglo classroom teacher age 47, a 36 year old and a Hispanic teaching assistant both with a Child Development Associates credential. Another assistant of Italian ethnicity aged 47 with a high school education arrived at 10:00 am and stayed with the children until 6:00.

The early childhood curriculum followed the National Association for Early Childhood Education guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice. The program consisted of the following flexible, daily, classroom routine. The teachers and staff were inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach and explored ways of implementing the philosophy along with project work into the daily curriculum. The classroom was organized with a variety of areas for children to self-select activities such as dress-up, painting, block design, puzzles and toys, a library corner, science investigations, and writing. Materials including paper, pencils and markers for drawing and writing were placed at child level for easy access. Near the library corner, a large gathering space for group meetings, singing, and storytelling was designated with a natural woven

rectangular rug, a comfortable leather couch, low wooden table and soft incandescent lights giving a living room effect.

Daily Classroom Routine

7:30 am	School opens, Welcoming of children and parents
8:00 am	Outdoor play
9:00 am	Hand washing, Snack
9:30-10:45am	Indoor learning centers including painting, block building, library area, and science investigations and Class Meetings
10: 45am	Lunch
11:00 am	Morning pick up for children leaving
11:30-1:00 pm	Rest time for children that take naps, quiet activities for others
3:00-4:00	Outdoor play: gardening, tricycles, tire swing, slide
4:00-6:00 pm	Snack, indoor activities, story time, including painting, cooking Parents pick children up at various times
6:00 pm	School closes

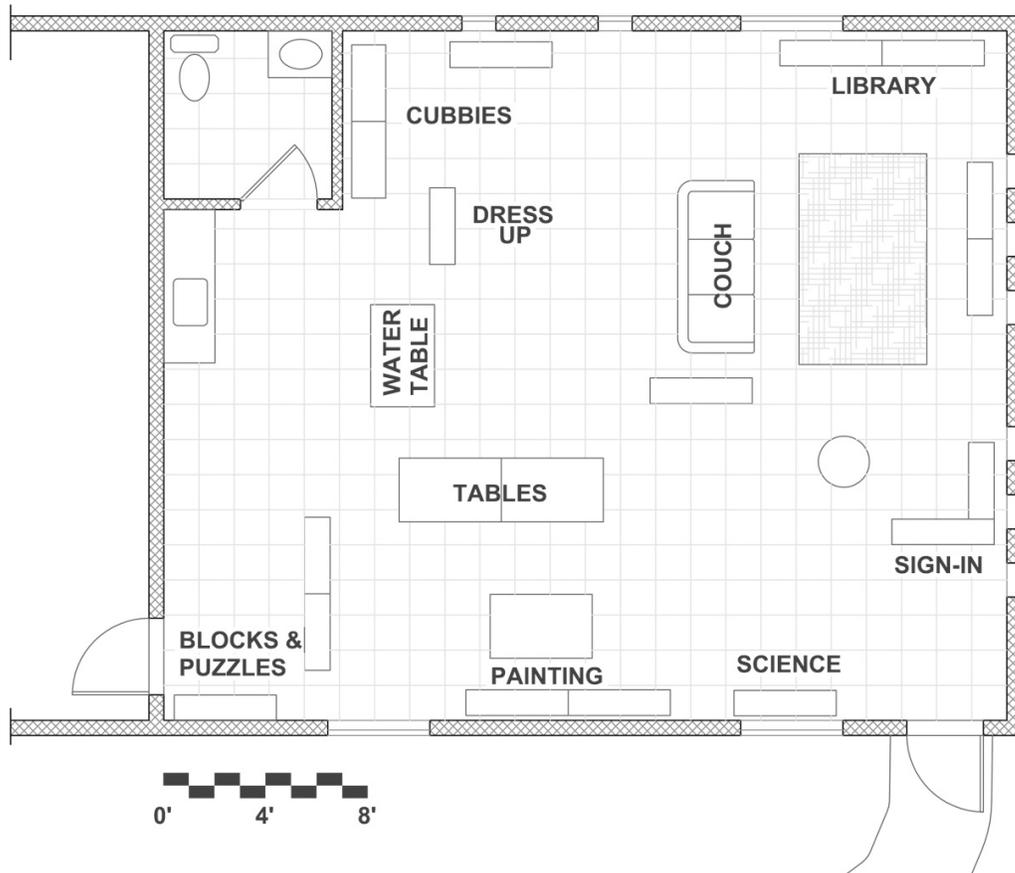


Figure 1: Classroom Floor Plan

Procedures

Participation in this study was open to any child attending the Acacia Early Childhood Enrichment Program morning session class, their designated teacher and staff, the director and parents of the children participating in the study. The class was recommended by the site director. The participation was on a voluntary basis. For instance, the students, parents and/or guardians had the right to decide whether they participated. All the potential participants who agreed to participate were included and

none were excluded. The first week of school beginning July 14, 2008, I scheduled time to describe the study, answered questions, and provided the written consent forms.

Parents and teachers were given time to read through the forms and return them. I was available during morning school hours the first week and one evening to answer questions and provide further information if parents wished to speak with me. I explained that the main objectives and research questions for this study focused on investigating the Class Meetings with young children to gain insight into the teacher roles, the impact of teacher-talk and the children's problem solving strategies, and communication.

Informed consent

Teacher's and staff consent were obtained by the principal investigator who visited, explained, and gave consent forms to each teacher or staff member s to read. They had the opportunity to ask questions. If they were willing to participate in this research and were interested in participating in the study, they were asked to sign the consent forms. If they requested more time to read or to discuss with their family members or friends, they were able to keep the forms and return them to the principal investigator at a later time.

As the principal investigator, I contacted the parents first to obtain permission for their child to participate in this research. I met the parents at the school meeting or in the classroom and gave them the consent forms when they brought their child to school.

After the signed parent consent forms were obtained, I read the Minor Verbal Consent Dialogue (Appendix B.3) to the child and asked for the child's verbal permission.

Parental consent was obtained during the first week of school. I met the individual parents in the classroom or during a parent meeting at the school (Appendix B.4). The research project was then explained to the parents. The parents were given the Parent/Legal Guardian Permission Form (Appendix B.1) and the Parent Informed Consent Form (Appendix B.2) to sign. Signing the former form meant that the parents gave permission for their child to participate in this research, and signing the latter form meant that the parents agreed to participate in this study themselves. If parents had questions, they could ask either during the meetings or contact the principal investigator by phone at any time. If they wanted more time to review the forms with family and friends, they could take the forms with them and return to the principal investigator at a later time. If a parent did not want his/her child to participate in the study the request was honored and the child was able to go in the adjoining classroom during the meetings.

The site director, teachers and parents were informed of their rights both orally in the initial meeting and in writing on the consent form. The children were asked verbally using the Minor Verbal Consent Dialogue (see Appendix B.5) if they were willing to be in the study. The principle of voluntary participation and the participant rights to withdraw at any time were explained both in the written consent forms and during the conversations.

Additional safeguards

As a volunteer at the school I did not have a supervisory or evaluation role with either of the children, parents, teachers, staff or the site director. I presented the project to the parents, teachers, staff and site director at the school or during the parent meeting. After the parents, teachers and site director were presented an overview of the study and given the opportunity to ask questions, I collected the signed consent forms. Once a parent gave consent their child was read the Minor Verbal Consent Dialogue (Appendix B.5) asking their permission to participate.

Confidentiality of personal identifying information

Consent to use identifying information was granted for the dissertation and published articles and the children were referred to by their first name in the videos. The videotapes may be used for this research and the related academic presentations. The videotapes will be kept in a secure place in the Language, Reading and Culture Department, with the other raw data, such as the audiotape- recordings of the interviews and the class meeting pictures.

Only the video clips may be used in the future research related academic presentations. In the videos only students' first names will be used. The parents' permission was obtained in the consent forms to have their children appear in the videos. It was explained to them that some video clips may be used for future research related academic presentations. Other than that, all the personally identifying information has

been kept confidential and the links between the study data and the identifying information will be destroyed upon the completion of the research.

Class Meeting Components

A plethora of professional literature and terminology relates to and is interconnected with Class Meetings: class discourse, conflict resolution, gathering time, community circles, and creative problem solving. However, for clarity within this study a particular class meeting format and definition are used. It is important to note that several authors, including Glasser (1969), Vance and Weaver (1995), and Styles (2001) describe the class meeting procedure and their experiences. Glasser's (1969) book *Schools Without Failure* was one of the first to record information about this type of group forum. The following Class Meeting procedure draws from this information with the primary focus on the work presented in *Class Meetings: Young Children Solving Problems Together* (Vance & Weaver, 2002). Class Meetings of the type discussed here provide children the opportunity to come together as a group, sitting in a circle, thinking together to foster mutual respect and create "a sense of community" (Vance & Weaver, 2002, p. 4). Four components are outlined for these Class Meetings.

The first step is opening the Class Meeting. The teacher or student facilitator brings the group together by singing a song, sharing a short story, or stating positive group behaviors. An example is "I have noticed that many of you are bringing your library books back. Thank you for remembering to do this." These types of shared

opening experiences support the formation of a classroom community. Short and Burke (1991) pointed out a community of learners is formed when predictable routines are established along with an environment filled with an abundance of options. (See Figure 1: Classroom Floor Plan)

The second meeting component involves sharing acknowledgments. Students reflect and share with their classmate's behaviors that are helpful and supportive. An example is "I want to acknowledge James for sharing the tricycle with me when we were outside today." This constructive dialogue sets the stage for positive discourse to facilitate trust and understanding.

The third Class Meeting element is problem-solving. The group focuses on creating solutions for interpersonal problems, group problems, or facilitating classroom procedures. A child may present a situation where another child did something perceived as hurtful and shares in the following way. Leticia said, "Adrian called me a cow." Adrian is then asked by the teacher, "Do you remember this happening?" Interestingly, most often children will self-identify if they did something. However, in the case where a child does not feel that they acted in the manner presented, the group can be called upon to see if anyone else witnessed this behavior or has supportive information. A sense of community and group trust are created by returning the focus back to the students involved in the situation being discussed and asking them if they are able to formulate solutions to their problem. At this time, students are requested to reach reasonable,

responsible, related and respectful solutions. The children involved in the problem agree on their solution and what they are willing to do. There are some exceptions when a child strongly denies being involved, at which time the facilitator may return to the child presenting the problem and brainstorm useful strategies with the child.

Sometimes, the students involved in a problem are invited to have a mini-meeting where they can discuss their problem together in small groups of two to three students. These mini-meetings allow the student to concentrate in greater detail with the understanding that they share their solution at the next meeting. This, however, is not a time to ostracize or ridicule an individual child but rather an opportunity to establish a forum for classroom communication and creative problem solving through guided negotiation. There is usually time to complete solutions for two to three problems.

The final step is closing the meeting. This reflection time allows students to share ways they solved problems without assistance from others. The purpose of this gathering component is to focus on student self-initiated use of the problem solving strategies presented in the class meetings. It is important to note that the ultimate goal of class meetings is to provide children with the capability to implement the array of language and problem solving techniques presented in their communication and problem solving inventories. The teacher may choose to use this time to share group behaviors that support the classroom community as a whole such, as taking turns at the drinking fountain or utilizing reading strategies. It can also be an occasion to focus on planning for

future classroom activities such as a field trip or project work. These daily meetings last approximately 15 minutes with young children and 20 to 35 minutes for older students.

Field Entry (Study Timeline)

In November 2007, I was invited to consult in the Vail School District focusing on incorporating Class Meetings into the daily curriculum within three early childhood enrichment centers. In the spring of 2008, I extended my work into all of the Vail early childhood enrichment centers along with presenting at several staff development seminars. During my five site visits to Acacia Early Childhood Enrichment Centers in the spring of 2008, I became familiar with the director and staff and made arrangements with the Vail administration to return the first week of school, July 2008, to begin my research data collection.

Data Collection

The study involved gathering data from an already existing school curriculum. Class Meetings were implemented into the classroom curriculum during the spring 2008. I gathered data from this context, not changing it or adding intervention or treatment. My primary focus was to document young children's problem solving strategies and to explore the impact of teacher-talk within a Class Meeting forum. Extensive data collection was achieved through a variety of methods including videotaping children's interactions during daily Class Meetings, audio taping, field notes, transcriptions and digital photographs.

The Class Meeting videos were the primary source for data collection. The visual references of the students' facial expressions, non-verbal language, and group dynamics were evident in the video reviews. The audio-tapes served as secondary data for the video-taping. It was difficult to decipher from the audio-tapes which child was speaking and I would return to the videotape for verification when transcribing. I found it challenging to take digital photographs while video taping and conducting the meetings. The digital photographs became a limited secondary data resource. Parent waiver for videotaping and audio-taping in the classroom was required by the Vail School District for all children participating in this early childhood enrichment program. Specific to this study, parent and student consent according to the University of Arizona Human Subjects Board review were obtained for each child prior to videotaping and classroom documentation.

Other secondary data collection was through teacher and parent meetings. I was able to discuss some of the concerns and positives of working with Class Meetings with the teachers at two after school meetings. Throughout the study, I was available to meet and converse with parents. One parent meeting was held to share a Class Meeting video. I was able to gain insights from parents and share observations regarding their children as a result of participating in the Class Meetings.

Another method of data collection was the use of a digital camera to photograph the children to further document conversations between the meeting facilitator/researcher

and students, related to the class meetings. The photographs served as a secondary record of the responses.

Data was gathered at the school three days a week. I arrived at the site early to set up the video cameras, audio equipment and tape recorders. Once the equipment was in place I stepped into the cameras to facilitate each Class Meeting. The morning Class Meeting sessions Monday through Wednesday were videotaped and audio-taped. They were then selectively transcribed for data analysis, based on information regarding students' reasons for verbal and non-verbal participation, emerging patterns, problem solving strategies, and the impact of teacher-talk.

Data Analysis

This qualitative, collaborative, classroom-based study grounded in action research incorporated ethnographic field techniques and multiple data sources within an early childhood setting. Data collection occurred three days a week beginning the middle of July 2008 and ending in October 2008. As a participant with permission, the children were given the opportunity to interact in class discussions three days a week for approximately 15 minutes to share positive feedback with their classmates and to develop strategies to deal with classroom dilemmas. The data collection consisted of student/facilitator participation and interactions during the scheduled Class Meetings documented through field notes field notes along with the videotapes and audiotapes of

the discussions. I transcribed the video and audio taped class meeting scripts of these discussions.

The analysis included a close examination of selected Class Meeting transcripts from the beginning, middle, and the end of the 12-week research period. The following summary focuses on the method of the analysis for each of the research questions. In Chapter 3 in order to answer the question, what roles do teachers play in Class Meetings? I catalogued both actions within the meeting as recorded in the transcripts and all the other actions I did that set up and framed the Class Meeting. The two broad categories that emerged were actions that enabled and facilitated the meeting and teacher talk which is discussed under the second research question. The major facilitating actions were establishing a space and time by organizing a welcoming student physical classroom environment and the utilization of the Class Meeting circle as a democratic forum for communication. I categorized and discuss the use of the Class Meeting components and the subsequent roles of the Class Meeting teacher as facilitator, supporting growth in building oral language development, nurturing strong student interpersonal relationships, fostering leadership qualities, and building a caring “community of learners,” maintaining an open mind and a neutral non-judgmental attitude as a facilitator, managing the meeting, active listening.

Close analysis of data that explored the following research question revealed the following initial teacher talk categories of respectful interactions, oral language, critical

reasoning, and problem-solving. Establishing these categories assisted in making the data more understandable. These categories were analyzed in Chapter 3 in relation to the second research question, what types of teacher talk are used to influence student thinking and talk within Class Meetings?

In chapter 4, I argue, what problems are identified in a Class Meetings with young children? The two types of problems intrapersonal and interpersonal surfaced as a result of this synthesis. In Chapter 4, I also discuss the types of problem solving strategies that were co- constructed to resolve what problem-solving strategies young children develop within Class Meetings?

Conclusion

This qualitative action based research study focused on the following questions: What roles do teachers play in Class Meetings? What types of teacher talk are used to influence student thinking and talk in Class Meetings? What problems identified in a Class Meetings with young children? What problem-solving strategies do young children develop within Class Meetings?

This study was comprised of 20 student, 25 parent, and 4 staff participants. The setting was in the Vail School District located in southern Arizona. The study duration was from July to October 2008. Data was collected through field notes and transcriptions of video and audio taped Class Meetings.

After I completed my research data collection, I was asked by the Community Services Program to extend Class Meeting consultations to the Vail afterschool and Kindercottage Programs. I also reported preliminary research findings to the Vail School District Early Childhood Enrichment Program at a beginning of the school year orientation in July, 2009.

CHAPTER: 3 TEACHER-TALK - FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In examining what happened in Class Meetings for this study, I found that I was evaluating my own interactions and talk. I have utilized Class Meetings for over 20 years within a variety of classroom settings; however, the reflection on my own actions reminds me of how much my teaching has always been moving from following a prescriptive curriculum and practice to a more flexible style.

When I first started teaching, I was essentially lost in the classroom and realized what I was doing had very little effect. As I gave students choices and opportunities to self-select, I began to understand that the motivation for learning must come from the children and my role was to support and facilitate.

This chapter is organized according to the overarching Class Meeting teacher roles that emerged from my analysis of the data related to facilitating, managing the meeting, and using teacher talk to encourage and support student thinking and talk. A literature review establishes the theoretical constructs for the teacher's role as facilitator in Class Meetings along with approaches for managing the larger organizational frame and concerns of the meeting. These include inviting the children to the meeting, organizing the space and choice, listen actively as well as establishing the Class Meeting procedures and the four meeting components. The categories for teacher talk that encourages and supports student thinking and talk are identified in Class Meeting scripts and the data analyzed and discussed in terms of teacher talk.

The findings are a result of a close examination of selected Class Meeting transcripts analyzed from the beginning, middle, and the end of the 12-week research period. In this chapter, I address the following two research questions:

- What roles do teachers play in Class Meetings?
- What types of teacher talk are used to influence student thinking and talk within Class Meetings?

The data indicated that in the context of Class Meetings, I played the role of facilitator in two ways. First, I managed the structural features of the meeting: setting the time of the meeting, initiating the meeting, organizing the children in a circle, as well as once the meeting started, moving through the four Class Meeting components in an orderly and predictable fashion. Once the Class Meeting was underway, I incorporated the reciprocal activities of active listening and teacher talk. My goal was to encourage the development of an array of social, emotional, and cognitive skills in the students.

Teacher Role of Facilitator

Generally the term facilitator is defined as “one that helps to bring about an outcome (as learning, productivity, or communication) by providing indirect or unobtrusive assistance, guidance, or supervision” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2009. p. 447).

In educational practice, the term facilitator has a wide variety of meanings that range from the teacher encouraging “student interaction and talk and monitoring social interactions” to providing additional information (Short, 1999, p. 378)

Stewart (1993) argued that a dichotomy comparing teaching and facilitation elevated the term facilitation to a higher precedence and displaced teaching. Stewart claimed that effective teaching builds on “intellectual” (p. 5) and “strategic acts” (p. 4). Intellectual acts included explaining, defining, justifying, and demonstrating as foundational forms of teaching. Stewart delineated strategic acts as external encompassing motivating, planning, encouraging, guiding, disciplining and evaluating. Stewart (1993) considered “strategic acts to be secondary in that their use alone would not exclusively constitute teaching” (p. 5).

In their critique of Stewart, Case, Harper, Tilley, and Weins (1994) stated that educators incorporate a different interpretation and meaning to “facilitating learning.” They proposed that facilitation was not a subset of teaching or alternative to teaching rather that facilitation represents an “alternative view of teaching” (p. 291).

This alternative teaching perception is embedded within the historical legacy of John Dewey’s (1916) educational philosophy. Dewey’s description of a democracy suggested implications regarding the role of facilitator, and the creation of classroom environments that foster communication and problem solving. According to Dewey (1916), “a democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (p. 87). Dewey (1916) described a conjoint communicated classroom experience as

the extension into space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others, and to consider

the action of others to give point and direction to his own, is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race and national territory which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity. (p. 87)

Furthermore, Dewey (1916) presented the notion that truth is not a thing to be acquired but rather an aim of an endless process of collaborative social inquiry. In discussing *School and the Life of a Child*, Dewey (1915) posited the school as providing “a proper medium, so to control their expression as not only to facilitate and enrich the growth of the individual child” (p. 59). In *My Pedagogic Creed* (1897), Dewey expressed his epistemology for school as a forum of collaborative social inquiry and community life where:

the teacher is not in school to impose certain ideas or to form certain habits in the child, but is there as a member of the community to select the influences which shall affect the child and to assist him in properly responding to these influences. (p. 9)

Dewey’s (1897) pedagogic elaboration creates a foundation for the role of facilitation

I believe that the image is the great instrument of instruction. What a child gets out of any subject presented to him is simply the images which he himself forms with regard to it. (p. 14)

Dewey also denoted the importance of the collaborative social inquiry and cognitive thinking by introducing the term facilitation in relation to instruction.

I believe that if nine tenths of the energy at present directed towards making the child learn certain things, were spent in seeing to it that the child was forming proper images, the work of instruction would be indefinitely facilitated. (p. 14)

Dewey suggests that a facilitator provides support for the development of the child’s own images through collaborative social inquiry and that the teacher utilizes the

characteristics of guiding, motivating, reflecting and encouraging during student conversations.

The Class Meeting facilitator promotes Dewey's (1916) democratic ideas about both a resistance to authoritarian rule and students' sense of worth as thinkers and speakers. It might seem that encouraging this kind of independence could lead to anarchy both in the classroom and society at large, but I found teaching these kinds of attitudes within a collaborative group context fostered individuality, group solidarity and the construction of a community of learners (Short, 1991). Short, Kaufman, Kaser, Kahn, and Crawford (1999) state in their article, *Teacher-Watching: Examining Talk in Literature Circles*, that the teacher as facilitator carries out a number of roles within the larger frame of "encouraging student interaction, monitoring talk and social interaction" (p. 378) and encourages students to expand their ideas. For myself as well as Short et. al, (1999) questioning is a core activity for the facilitator, always in the context of questions that have "proceeded from genuine curiosity" (p. 379) rather than a prescriptive program. They found that students are not resistive to questions asked in this way and do not view these questions as challenges.

Much of the research highlighting the teacher as facilitator appears in the context of literature discussions with elementary children where the book under consideration provides the core focus of the discussion. In my research with Class Meetings, I worked with young preschool children in a group situation where the text in the discussion was

the *living text* of their own experiences and encounters with their peers in the classroom. As a facilitator, one of the roles of the teacher is to draw out the *living text* from the students in order to clarify mis-understandings, “restate comments” (Short et. al, 1999, p. 379) both as a function of “conversational maintenance” (p. 379) and to build vocabulary beyond the limited repertoire of children this age.

Within Class Meetings the teacher as facilitator does not know the content of what the children will bring to the discussions prior to the meeting. Similarly, in literature circles, the teacher is aware of the book that will be discussed, but not the issues that children will raise from the book.

In the context of Class Meetings with young children I define the facilitator as someone who provides an opportunity for the children to come together within a democratically conceived and structured classroom. The purpose is to collaboratively develop communication skills and positive talk to support the identification of problems, or misunderstandings and brainstorm creative ways to problem solve. The Class Meeting facilitator utilizes the four Class Meeting components as a framework for building a conjoint communicated experience of collaborative social inquiry and community life.

I was interested in how I could support growth in building oral language development, strong student interpersonal relationships, leadership qualities, and a caring “community of learners” (Short & Burke, 1991, p. 16) as a facilitator in the Class Meetings. Short (1998) extended Dewey’s work describing an approach to social

interaction, as the building of “a collaborative community of learners who share responsibility for learning” (Short, 1998, p. 34). The construction of a “community of learners” outlined by Short (1998) further delineates the role of the Class Meeting facilitator.

Another of my roles as the Class Meeting facilitator was to provide the meeting “structure and the process for interactions” (Bens, 2000, p. 5), to define and share the Class Meeting format with students, to transition the children through the four Class Meeting components, and to make available alternate activities for those who prefer to not attend. My focus was on encouraging the building of a classroom community as a forum for receiving and sharing ideas. Furthermore, “as learners become secure and value their own meaning making, they are more capable of supporting the meaning making of others” (Short & Burke, 1991, p. 26). The Class Meeting forum provided the framework for this process to occur within the classroom.

Along with providing the physical space for student-teacher interaction, the Class Meeting facilitator creates a cognitive learning environment adhering to the principles illustrated in Harrison’s (1998) S.P.A.C.E teacher facilitator role model. The following adaptation of Harrison’s model serves as a way of illustrating the student cognitive learning environment created by the facilitator for use within a Class Meeting.

Self-affirmation: Young children view themselves as effective learners from the positive feedback shared the by Class Meeting facilitator.

Personal meaning:	The “living text” presented during a Class Meeting is relevant to young children because they share their individual experiences.
Active learning:	The students actively participate in the learning process created through the use of Class Meetings.
Collaborative:	During the Class Meeting, collaboration and co-construction of the curriculum takes place between the students and teacher.
Empowering:	The learners inform the learning process and have control of the outcomes (Harrison, 1998a).

According to Harrison (1998), the Class Meeting facilitator actively guides the meeting in order to achieve a variety of objectives:

- Providing a collaborative setting to develop communication skills and positive talk for identifying challenges and brainstorming.
- Supporting the growth of oral language, student interpersonal relationships, leadership qualities, and a caring classroom community.
- Establishing a meeting structure and process for interactions, defining and sharing format and components, and making alternative activities available.
- Maintaining a position of neutral authority.

Creating a welcoming student physical classroom environment provides the opportunity for the cognitive space in the Class Meeting discussions.

I have found from prior experience and this study that I need to maintain an open mind and a neutral non-judgmental attitude as a facilitator. A fundamental premise of my Class Meetings facilitation utilized a notion delineated by Stephen Covey (1989), in *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. This book was highly recommended to teachers by school district administrators for its importance in developing life skill qualities of

students of the 21st century. Covey (1989) believes that “two people can see the same thing, disagree, and yet both be right” (p. 27). Covey further illustrates this perspective visually by requesting his readers to look at a drawing that had the images of an old woman and young woman embedded within. Usually, the viewer could identify one of the images readily, and through assistance from others, the other image was revealed. This often occurs within Class Meetings when a teacher co-facilitates and co-constructs students’ understanding of other perspectives, supporting children to expand on the information shared in order to create a larger picture and engage in effective problem-solving strategies. At the same time the group’s clarity and perceptions are heightened and begins the process of integrating a group “metalanguage” (Sipe, 2008, p.112).

Managing the Class Meetings

As a facilitator, how does the teacher manage the Class Meetings? Management is an issue that all teachers confront daily and is a basic requirement for almost any teaching situation. Depending on the setting, age of the children, and the dynamics of the community already established within the group, the Class Meeting teacher manages the action. Three major categories of activities emerged from the data on roles that the teacher as facilitator undertakes in Class Meetings: organizing the Class Meeting’s physical and temporal classroom space, active listening that guides and supports teacher talk, and establishing the procedures.

Organizing Space

One major role of the Class Meeting facilitator in managing the meeting is the organization of time and space. In the beginning weeks of Class Meetings, managing the meeting encompassed a variety of organizational functions. This organization of the meeting involves meeting notification, making sure meetings occur regularly and consistently, creating the circle, preparing the space, following the four format components, managing time and focusing and redirecting student attention.

My role in organizing the meeting included notifying the children when the Class Meeting would occur, preparing the physical space, leading the meeting as a facilitator focusing and redirecting student attention, and following the Class Meeting format components.

One important aspect of managing the Class Meeting was to assure that the meetings took place on a regular and consistent basis. I found that meeting consistently aided in reinforcing facilitator and managerial objectives for the Class Meeting. This was accomplished in this study with young children by announcing prior to the meeting that a meeting would take place and after the closing of the meeting to make it known when the next meeting would occur by saying “See you tomorrow” or “We will have another meeting tomorrow after snack.”

The consistency and regularity of maintaining a scheduled meeting time is highly valued in early childhood pedagogy. According to Ostrosky, Jung, Hemmeter and

Thomas and the Center on Social and Emotional Foundation for Early Learning (2002), predictable and consistent schedules in preschool classrooms help children feel secure and comfortable. Nielson (2006) states “young children need the security of knowing what comes next and the comfort of following a predictable routine day after day” (p. 176). Nielson also shares that “sticking to the exact time on the clock is not a major concern, but following a pattern of activity is important for the children’s sense of well being. A good schedule is flexible but consistent”(p.176).

After consulting with the classroom teacher, I established a daily time for the Class Meetings to occur at approximately 9:30 am when students chose among several options (See Figure 2).

Prior to the Class Meetings, the children chose outdoor activities, being with friends, and enjoying a morning snack. The hot, Tucson summer weather made it important for the children to have their outdoor time early in the morning.

When managing the Class Meeting, the data indicated that I presented the expectation that children choose, without prompting, to attend. Therefore, in this study, the children were not expected or required to attend the meetings. The physical classroom space was organized to complement exploration in such a way that there were a variety of activities for children to select during the Class Meeting time. These student-initiated choices included dress-up, puzzles, reading, blocks, painting, etc. Thus, the children who

Figure 2: Options to Class Meetings



Top-left picture, science/nature, top-right picture, painting, middle picture, library/silent reading, bottom-left picture, blocks/construction, and bottom-right picture, dress-up/dramatic play.

engaged in the Class Meeting were given a number of other options, exercising their independence and ability to make decisions.

I did, however, do certain invitational routines before the opening of the Class Meeting to make that activity attractive to the children. For example, I sang an invitation for the children to come and join me on the rug. I was able to talk to the children while they were eating snacks, letting them know that a Class Meeting would take place soon and that they were invited to attend. The children's natural curiosity for the use of the video equipment drew them to this area and the children assisted in helping set up and take down the equipment.

Another role I played in managing the Class Meeting was to teach children how to sit in a circle, a visual representation and symbol of equality. At times, this was a young child's first experience sitting in a circle. Translating an abstract shape such as a circle into a physical form on the floor with young children was a difficult task. I encouraged the children's development of connections to the spatial relationships necessary for sitting in a circle. I used a variety of ways to achieve the goal of creating a talking circle, a common tradition among Native American tribes (Zolbrod, 2006), or the encouragement circle as defined by Styles (2001). This was done prior to the beginning of the meeting by explaining, and, at times, actually showing children where to sit. Another method utilized was to have the children stand in a circle holding hands and then sit down. An additional approach was to place a jump rope in the shape of a circle on the

floor and have the children sit down behind it. One more practice was to mark places for children to sit with pieces of tape (Xs) in a circle formation on the floor. There was a drawback to this method in that some children enjoyed picking at the tape and pulling it off the floor. However, the pulling of tape was turned into one of the first topics for discussion during the Class Meetings, and after a few sessions the distracting behavior diminished. In any case, it took several initial attempts and variations to be effective.

Finally, managing the Class Meeting required transitioning the group through the four components of the Class Meeting activity. Initially, I assumed a primary leadership role that involved inviting children to attend the Class Meeting through a variety of techniques. Over time, as the children became familiar with the songs and activities, this role subsided in importance. If this study had continued for a longer duration this leadership role could eventually be extended as a leadership role for the children and another opportunity for them to express their choice. I experienced that in each of the Class Meeting components, the facilitator-transition role played out somewhat differently, and that flexibility was a must. For example during the opening of the August 20th meeting, Garret walked into the circle and shared that his special water bottle had been thrown in the trash can and he did not want to reach inside the garbage to retrieve it. I stopped the opening activity to brainstorm ways that he could solve this dilemma. Then after Garret agreed to a solution, I continued to the acknowledgment component of the meeting.

Active Listening

One of my most important functions as a Class Meeting teacher was the practice of active listening. There are two distinguishing attributes of active listening: the actual listening process between the teacher and children that occurs each time a child speaks and the follow-up implementation of the basic active listening techniques of encouraging, restating, reflecting, and summarizing (Decker, 1988). Teacher encouragement promotes continued student conversation. Restating reflects the ability to understand what a child says through the use of feedback and mirroring information. Reflecting focuses on going over the main points of student- articulated feelings. Summarizing encompasses the key ideas voiced as a reciprocal way of extending the discourse.

I found during this study that the utilization of active listening within an early childhood classroom environment presents a unique opportunity for the teacher to model authentic interest. The student age and classroom atmosphere offer the potential for many teacher distractions that frequently occur in an early childhood setting so that a teacher has to make an assertive effort to focus, concentrate, and listen to an individual child or small group of children and concurrently maintain a professional responsibility of awareness of the other children throughout the classroom environment.

The teacher role as Class Meeting facilitator and active listener is further compounded by the responsibility to ensure safety for all students at all times. This often happens in classrooms with older age children, but not to the same degree as in an early childhood classroom because young children are beginning to learn acceptable group

behaviors and have not been exposed to longer periods of school acculturation and the expectations of appropriate social behavior. At the same time, young children are developing their cognitive abilities to understand abstract social norms.

Therefore, the teacher's active listening role during the Class Meeting is a two-fold process involving listening to the expression of students' ideas and responding from a neutral, engaged perspective to foster language and social/emotional development while conveying respect and acceptance. Active listening within the Class Meeting format was accomplished primarily through teacher-led questions provoking the exploration of alternative ways for children to view themselves and their situations.

1015	Teacher:	Okay, remember the other day we were giving acknowledgements?
1016	Teacher:	Does someone remember what is an acknowledgment?
1017	Group:	Five little hot dogs. Five little hot dogs frying in the pan, the grease got hot and one when bam!
1018	Teacher:	Wow you have a great song!
1019	Teacher:	Remember the other day when we were talking about acknowledgments?
1020	Kasey:	(Nods yes)

The above example in the July 23rd script is one of the early encounters with active listening. I followed the children's lead as they began singing an impromptu song. My willingness to listen and be flexible supported a sense of classroom community.

- 3116 Teacher: Okay, Patrick did you have a problem today?
- 3117 Patrick: Yes
- 3118 Teacher: Patrick had a problem.
- 3119 Teacher: Kasey, Patrick had a problem are you willing to listen.
- 3120 Kasey: Yes.
- 3121 Teacher: Okay, look at Patrick.
- 3122 Teacher: Taylor, look at Patrick
- 3123 Teacher: What was your problem?
- 3124 Patrick: I want to acknowledge
- 3125 Teacher: Who do you want to acknowledge?
- 3126 Patrick: Andrew
- 3127 Teacher: What did Andrew do that made you feel good?
- 3128 Patrick: I want Andrew to give the bucket back.
- 3129 Teacher: You didn't get your bucket back?
- 3130 Patrick: No
- 3131 Teacher: You want Andrew to give the bucket back next time?
- 3132 Patrick: Yeah.
- 3133 Teacher: So Andrew are you willing to give the bucket back next time he asks for it?
- 3134 Andrew: No, because I wasn't done with it.
- 3135 Teacher: Okay, so what could you say?

- 3136 Teacher: Could you say, Patrick in just a minute I will be through and I can give it to you?
- 3137 Teacher: Or could you say something like... I want to play with it now and when I get done I will let you know?
- 3138 Andrew: (Nods yes)
- 3139 Teacher: Can you try that next time?
- 3140 Andrew: Next time I will let you know you can have my bucket after I am done with using it.
- 3141 Patrick Okay
- 3142 Teacher: Oh wow! You guys want to shake hands?
- 3143 Teacher: Is your problem solved?
- 3144 Patrick: Yeah
- 3145 Teacher: Say my problem is solved.
- 3146 Patrick My problem is solved.
- 3147 Teacher: So we had a problem instead of an acknowledgment. That's great.

The above July 23rd script illustrates my role as an active listener trying to remain flexible and maintain the balance between control and freedom that occurs within the dialogue. I could have corrected Patrick's misuse of the word acknowledgment at the beginning of this scenario; however, I felt this would be intimidating and cause him to withdraw from the communication process. I also felt that through the formulation of his thoughts he would have a clearer understanding of the difference between a problem and an acknowledgment. At the end of this dialogue segment, I reflected, restated, and

summarized the key characteristics of active listening to scaffold Patrick's learning. The balance and equilibrium between teacher control and student direction that happens within the Class Meeting conversations required a quick decision. Patrick's agreement of the review and reflection at the end served as an informal assessment for me to make sure Patrick felt at ease with the situation.

Throughout the twelve week research period there were times when my decisions relevant to active listening were not always the best. For example, when reviewing the video tapes, I noticed that when a child was selecting another student to continue our discussion, there were instances when this child would take a long time to respond. I started using the technique of counting to three to prompt a quicker selection. My intention was to maintain order and direction, and at the same time, allow for the limited attention span of these 3-5 year olds. Several times I waited for a child to offer a name, counted to three, and then called another child's name to share. I noticed from this video examination that as I stated a child's name, the child who was supposed to select simultaneously suggested someone else. I proceeded with the child who was selected to speak by the student, not recognizing the disappointment of the child who was overlooked.

Establishing the Procedures for the Class Meeting Components

Within the first week, I established a group dynamic and introduced the Class Meeting format of the following four components: opening the meeting, acknowledgments, challenges and problem solving, and closing the meeting. These

components were examined in terms of teacher roles and established my working model for the Class Meeting. As the Class Meeting teacher, I familiarized the group with the terminology related to the four components. The Class Meeting and four components served as a vehicle to create new thinking patterns and develop communication skills and problem solving strategies.

Opening the Meeting.

I found that opening the meeting created the conversationally interactive tone for the entire class meeting. Coming together with a positive attitude set the stage for the confidence and risk taking needed during the meeting discourse. This was an appropriate time to give a group acknowledgment for positive group behavior that was observed during the day such as, “I noticed that everyone helped clean up our room nicely before we went outside this morning” or “Everyone is taking care of our library books and treating them with respect.” It was not time to single out one child’s efforts because that can create a competition for being acknowledged by the teacher. With older children, it may be appropriate to open the first meetings with discussions related to appropriate Class Meeting behavior. However, with young children these types of discussions should happen after several months of Class Meetings to allow children time to develop an understanding of the Class Meeting’s group expectations.

Regularly, I used songs, breathing exercises, and hand games as a signal for managing the transition for choosing to attend the morning Class Meetings, becoming

part of our circle, and opening the meeting. Some transition songs that were successful for opening the meeting are “*Come and Join Me on the Rug, On the Rug, Clap, Clap*” (Vance & Weaver 2002), “*The More We Get Together the Happier We’ll Be*” “*You Are My Sunshine,*” and “*Skidamarinky Dinky Dink, Skidamariky Doo, I-Love-You.*” Hand games such as *Who Stole the Cookie from the Cookie Jar, Down by the Banks of the Hanky Tank Where the Bull Frogs Leap From Bank to Bank, Five Little Monkeys* and clapping patterns were also effective in focusing young children’s attention to the start of the meeting.

Another approach for opening the Class Meeting was to begin with breathing exercises. One successful method was having the children pretend that there is a heart-shaped balloon inside their chest that they are to blow up by breathing in the love of the world. The inhaled air represents the love from our classroom community, which mixes with their individual love and then is exhaled and sent out into the world. This breathing calmed the children, and most responded positively.

On August 20 as the children gathered for the Class Meeting, I noticed they were having trouble calming down. For that reason, I began the meeting with movement and breathing activities instead of singing a familiar song.

The excerpt below exemplifies a meeting opening when children are demonstrating difficulty settling down:

- Line 304 Teacher: How many of you can snap your fingers? Alright, can you touch your nose? (I put my hand on my head.) Is this touching your nose?
- Line 305 Group: No.
- Line 306 Teacher: Can you touch your ears? Can you touch your shoulders? Okay here we go. First of all, everybody reach up and take a deep breath in, hold it, and breathe out slowly. Now this time remember that there is a little balloon that is heart shaped right here (pointing to lung and heart area of my body.) We are going to fill that up with lots of air from our friends and we are gonna mix our love with it and then we are going to put it out into the world. So here we go. Gentle. Breathe in. You have to breathe. There is no sound when we breathe
- Line 307 Teacher: Ready? Are you showing respect? (The teacher looks at a child having difficulty joining the activity.)
- Line 308 Teacher: One, two, three (Breathing out)
- Line 309 Teacher: Our circle is filling with the love of our friends and our caring community.

Even after these soothing opening meeting activities, I found it necessary to gather the group's attention before proceeding further. As indicated above, on August 20th while completing movement and breathing exercises, I noticed a child, who was giggling and making a noise by blowing loudly into her hands, having difficulty focusing. As we continued to breathe out, I looked at this student and asked trying to camouflage my irritation, Line 307, "Are you showing respect?" in order to redirect the child's attention to the breathing activity and assist with calming her. As a result, she stopped her

interruptive behavior. I proceeded and finished leading the breathing activity while other children joined the group. Next, a group acknowledgment was given to reinforce a positive environment and the expansion of the Class Meeting circle before moving to the next component.

Line 309 Teacher: Our circle is filling with the love of our friends
and our caring community.

Another type of meeting opening occurred on September 10 when two children who had previously been disruptive came to the Class Meeting rug area before any others. I wanted to reinforce their willingness to participate in the Class Meeting and create a welcoming feeling. I began the hand game “Who Stole the Cookie from the Cookie Jar” with them. One child made a joke saying, (Line 702) “I stole it.” I continued the game and the joke smiling and responding, (Line 703) “You did. Nah, I don’t think so.” Then after several other children arrived, I chose this child to be the first one named for the game. This proved to be an effective strategy because the two children were able to sit and listen during the meeting.

Additionally, the importance for setting the conversational tone and the reciprocity of communicating ideas was highlighted early in the research timeline during the August 20 Class Meeting opening component. After the breathing activities and in the group acknowledgment, I referred in Line 309 to “the circle filling with our friends.” One child quickly commented, (Line 310) “This is not a circle,” and, indeed, he was correct. I had asked the children to sit in a semi-circle or u-shape form so that the video cameras

were able to capture a better view of the children's faces and their responses. My reply was, "Well, it is kind of a circle of friends." Upon reflection, I realized that I missed an opportunity to highlight and recognize this child's heightened interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities along with observational skills and spatial intelligence (Gardner, 1999) as opposed to focusing on my own ambiguity. It is apparent when studying situations like these how even an experienced teacher may perceive a child's questioning as a criticism and easily become defensive. The importance of clarifying teacher-talk (Rowe, 1998) is illustrated along with making an effort to be explicit when speaking with young children. Additionally, this teacher-student interaction demonstrated the high-level listening skills young children exhibit within Class Meetings, even early in the process that may not be currently utilized in classrooms, to create changes in student cognitive abilities and reinforce new thinking patterns. As a final point, this dialogue served to remind me to sustain a flexible and non-judgmental attitude, viewing student questions, even during the opening activities, as opportunities to observe, then to reciprocally share the student abilities as exhibited back to the child.

Initially there were as few as 3 to 4 children self-selecting to be present at the opening of the Class Meetings. In this research study, the numbers of children fluctuated daily from a small number of 3 to 4 to larger group sizes of 8 to 10. This range depended on the social, educational, and logistical student challenges that arose on a given day and the children's interest. Over the 12-week period, the number of children attending the

daily meetings increased from 3 to 4 to a greater range of 8 to 10, the larger number representing almost two-thirds of the class members present on a given day.

The scripts during the opening of the meeting component throughout the research period reflected similar dynamics with the major difference being the reduction of my role when forming the circle and explaining the songs, hand games, and breathing exercises. Furthermore, the children's familiarity with the meeting opening activities reduced the amount of time needed for this component.

Acknowledgments.

Making the transition from opening the meeting to acknowledgments was not always clearly delineated. Sometimes acknowledgments occurred and became part of the transition into the next Class Meeting component.

Acknowledgments created an opportunity and purpose for young children to be aware and reveal ways others demonstrate behavior that is reinforcing to the student who is sharing. It is more than a compliment about something that is pleasing as with a pretty color or article of clothing a person wears. An acknowledgment communicates an action by someone who was helpful, considerate, and respectful or that produced a positive emotion for the child. For example, in the July 23 script Taylor acknowledged Savannah for helping her put on her shoes.

I found in the beginning weeks of this study with the 3-5 age group that children shared acknowledgments directed toward a family member, even when asked to

acknowledge someone sitting within our Class Meeting circle. This seemed to be a safe choice because young children are more familiar and comfortable with their families. There was a built-in advantage for the child because there was no way to verify whether the experience they shared actually happened.

One three-year old consistently acknowledged his grandfather for taking him to the drag races. His statements regarding his grandfather were accepted with a reminder for the child to acknowledge his grandfather directly when he saw him again. The child was then encouraged to look around the Class Meeting circle thinking about whether someone present made him feel good. This dialogue from the script was repeated for several weeks. The child continued to show a preference for acknowledging his grandfather; however, gradually, during the next few weeks, he began to acknowledge his classmates. The following dialogue took place on August 18, 2008.

2002	Teacher:	Okay. Who would like to give an acknowledgment?
2003	Andrew:	I do
2004	Teacher:	Okay. Andrew who do you want to acknowledge?
2005	Andrew:	I want to acknowledge my grandpa Max for taking me to the drag races.
2006	Teacher:	What's your brother's name? (I did not hear what he said.)
2007	Andrew:	No. Grandpa Max

2008	Teacher:	Oh you want to acknowledge your grandpa just like you did the other day.
2009	Teacher:	And it's always fun. Huh?
2010	Andrew:	Yeah because I can bring my
2011	Teacher:	Now (Teacher looking at Andrew) Andrew let me ask you a question.
2012	Teacher:	Is there somebody here in the classroom that is sitting right here that did something that made you feel good?
2013	Andrew:	(Nods his head yes.)
2014	Teacher:	Who?
2015	Andrew:	Um.
2016	Teacher:	Right here in our little circle.
2017	Teacher:	Somebody that did something that you want to tell them.
2018	Andrew:	Garret (Andrew points to Garret.)
2019	Andrew:	Garret got me an ice cream.
2020	Andrew:	And he made me feel good. And Miss Laura was talking about the drag race and that's true because and me and Ayden was talking about the drag race.

The next August 1, 2008 script excerpt from the beginning research period (see Appendix A) represents young children's ability to express acknowledgments as supported by me within two weeks of their introduction.

- Line 101 Teacher: This is exciting. First of all, I would like to know if any of you would like to give an acknowledgment to someone that is sitting here on the floor.
- Line 102 Kayden: I do.
- Line 103 Teacher: Kayden:, who do you want to acknowledge? (wait time then the teacher offers) Can you say, “I want to acknowledge”?
- Line 104 Kayden: I want to acknowledge Patrick.
- Line 105 Teacher: Patrick, look at Kayden: What did he do?
- Line 106 Kayden: He let me play with the puzzles.
- Line 107 Teacher: (Looking at Patrick) Did you realize that when you let him play with the puzzles he was real happy about that?
- Line 108 Patrick: Nods head
- Line 109 Teacher: So what do you tell Kayden?
- Line 110 Patrick: Thank you.
- Line 111 Teacher: Oh wow! You leaned over and you looked right at him. Patrick, that was awesome!
- Line 112 Teacher: Okay, well now Kayden, I am sure you have been looking at your friends, pick someone to go next. Okay? Someone showing respect that wants to give an acknowledgment.

In line 101, I guided the children to focus on the positive actions of others by inviting them to give an acknowledgment. Requesting children to focus on classmates within the Class Meeting circle by directing their acknowledgment to someone present created the prospect for reciprocity and dialogue with another child. I shared a personal

feeling of “excitement” about the opportunity of coming together. When Kayden responded enthusiastically in line 102, with “I do,” I guided the conversation’s focal point to his personal experience by asking Kayden, “Who do you want to acknowledge?” Then, I waited to give Kayden a chance to formulate his thoughts. The tendency and temptation when this quiet occurred was to move the meeting along by asking another question or addressing another child who was ready to speak. I found using active listening and giving children “wait time” was difficult for me in the early stages of the Class Meeting research. The silence created an opportunity for young children to be easily distracted; however, “wait time” offered me the opportunity to integrate active listening and model showing respect to a child. In line 103, I assisted and scaffolded the necessary vocabulary needed for Kayden to complete an acknowledgment. With my support and scaffolding in line 104, Kayden stated his desire to acknowledge Patrick, another student. In line 105, I guided Patrick to look directly at Kayden as a way of showing respect and creating non-verbal feedback between them. Next, I asked for more information to expand on Kayden’s initial comment. In line 106, an invitation was extended to the child being acknowledged to speak and give additional information. Through this shared personal observation and in the teacher role of participant, I helped children make connections that promoted personal understanding (Short et al., 1999). Kayden’s words in line 106 demonstrated his ability to remember a past event, taking a risk by speaking to a group of children in this early session, and showing initiative and sensitivity toward others along with the willingness to attempt to explain the positive

situation of playing together with puzzles. Here, the acknowledging child used language to satisfy basic wants and needs and clearly described a real situation using complex, concise, descriptive language. In this sentence, “He let me play with the puzzles,” respondent Kayden used an action narrative. This complete sentence captured the two actions of being allowed to play and the actual play itself.

According to Carol Novotny –Young (2007), narratives “contain at least two events that are either active (depicting action) or stative (depicting a condition or state of being); the events are organized according to their relationships in time (but do not necessarily have to be in strict chronological order); the events have some kind of causal or contributing relationship among them that leads to change of some sort and the events must pertain to a single unified subject”(p.23).

Consistent with this notion of response through narrative, Sipe (2008) suggests that children connect their narratives to their own larger personal life using life experiences to develop understanding. Horn (2005) noted that young children’s storytelling provided an opportunity to “think through, discover, plan, and develop the story [with the assistance] of a ‘supportive teacher” (p. 35). Moreover, Horn states that “The story begins with the child,” and when teachers “value storytelling we acknowledge the importance of oral language in learning” (p. 35).

Embedded within Kayden’s Class Meeting narrative acknowledgment are the teacher and child roles of co-constructing the story and the curriculum. In line 107, I

suggested a deeper analysis from the younger child receiving the acknowledgment, Patrick, by asking, “Did you realize that when you let him play with the puzzles, he was real happy about that?” Establishing this understanding and motivating the thinking process of the younger child receiving the acknowledgment encouraged repetition of this type of behavior in the future and began the co-construction and development of identifiable appropriate actions within our classroom community as class norms. Kayden’s recognition of a younger-aged child also displayed an appreciation for class diversity.

In line 108, respondent Patrick gave a nonverbal gesture (nod of head in agreement) to the child offering the acknowledgement. This gesture indicated reception of the acknowledgment and a conversational turn. In line 109, I encouraged Patrick to use courtesy words by asking, “So, what do you tell Kayden?” Patrick responded using courtesy words in line 110 that signaled the acknowledgment was received.

The continued teacher role of active listener and observer was evidenced in line 111 when I responded with enthusiasm and spontaneity to the child’s action of looking another person in the eye while saying, “Thank you.” Line 112 provided a transition to the next acknowledgment by allowing the child who shared the first acknowledgment to select the next student. At this time, I presented the criteria for selecting someone showing respect. There was an expectation that, over time, the children would develop their own understanding of respect. It is important to note that in the beginning stages,

even with my coaching, children selected a friend waving his/her hand or saying, “Pick me!” However, as the children became familiar with the word *respect* and created their own meaning, they began to apply their own criteria to the acknowledgment selection process. Consistently putting forth the criteria of selecting a child showing respect and simultaneously withholding teacher intervention supported the children’s role in developing a sense of trust for one another and their ability to share in-group leadership.

Problem Solving and Challenges.

The problem solving and challenges component intentionally follows the opening of the meeting and acknowledgments. The prior components utilized positive talk and supported the establishment of trust and risk taking among students. The problem solving and challenges component was a critical section of the Class Meeting because the focus on children developed group behavioral expectations; problem-solving strategies; and the ability to seek respectful, responsible, reasonable, and related solutions to interpersonal situations (Vance & Weaver, 2002). The purpose of this component was to support the children’s understanding of effective ways to get along, communicate ideas, and build the classroom “community of learners” (Short & Burke, 1991. p. 16). I found that I needed to utilize a non-judgmental attitude. Often when a child states a problem or challenge, the details surrounding their challenge reveal other interactions that influenced the situation. Through active listening and feedback, I had to guide children to develop personal strategies and create a menu of choices that they could select from when frustrating and challenging encounters occur again.

During this problem-solving component, children were called upon to share a past experience that may have caused a problem, misunderstanding, frustration, concern, or challenge. Working together in this open forum provided the children presenting the problem or challenge the opportunity to extend social skills and gave the other children attending the Class Meeting the chance to learn from others and share their ideas.

To begin the problem-solving and challenges component of the Class Meeting model and as a way of encouraging respect among the children throughout the meeting, I consistently had the child who spoke previously select the next child. Again, choice was an important factor. This took the pressure away from the teacher having to make these selections and allowed the teacher to have a moment to observe the group. After the child who completed his/her turn selected someone, I usually said, “Did anyone have a problem or challenge that bothered you that you would like to work on today?”

During this research project, I became aware of the importance of introducing other words for *problem* and *challenge* that served to extend vocabulary and lessen the intensity of the situation. These word substitutions included *misunderstanding*, *situation*, and *issues*.

The following dialogue addresses the second problem that appeared in the September 10th Class Meeting. This highlights the teacher supporting use of the closing statement in lines 855-858 “my mis-understanding is better.”

Line 836 Teacher: So Garrett what was your situation or misunderstanding this morning?

Line 837 Garret: When I was...Patrick kept going rrr rrr rrr to me.

Line 838 Teacher: Patrick, do you remember that happening?

Line 839 Patrick: Yeah.

Line 840 Teacher: Thank you Patrick for being honest. Patrick said he does remember.

Line 841 Teacher: So how did it make you feel when he was doing that Garret?

Line 842 Garret: Sad.

Line 843 Teacher: It made you feel sad. Can you look at Patrick and say I feel sad.

Line 844 Garret: I feel sad.

Line 845 Patrick: I play ninjas.

Line 846 Teacher: Yes, but when you were doing that to him...

Line 847 Teacher: Ethan, Patrick is trying to solve the problem.

Line 848 Teacher: So what would you like him to do next time Garret?

Line 849 Garret: Be nice to me.

Line 850 Teacher: Can you say next time please show me respect?

Line 851 Garret: Next time please show me respect.

Line 852 Patrick: Okay.

Line 853 Teacher: So Patrick is willing to do that. Does that take care of your situation?

Line 854 Garret: (Nods his head yes.)

Line 855 Teacher: Can you say my mis-understanding...

Line 856 Garret: My mis-understanding

Line 857 Teacher: is better.

Line 858 Garret: is better.

Line 859 Patrick: Let's play ninjas!

After the child stated the problem, I referred to the child identified as a part of this challenging situation. I asked, in line 838, "Patrick, do you remember this happening?" In this case, line 839, Patrick openly acknowledged being part of the problem. After Patrick admitted involvement, I immediately acknowledged him for being honest and began an effort to construct a solution in line 840. In line 841, I returned to the child presenting the

situation and asked “How did this make you feel?” Garrett responded in line 844, “sad.” After refocusing another child’s attention back to the meeting in line 847, I asked Garret what he would like Patrick to do the next time. He stated in line 849, “Be nice to me.” At this point, I supported Garret with the ability to speak directly to Patrick and I asked Garret to repeat, “Next time please show me respect.” Without coaching, Patrick said “Okay.” Then, in line 853 I shared, “So, Patrick is willing to do that. Does that take care of your situation?” This was a way for Garret to experience closure to this challenge. In line 855, I introduced the new vocabulary for closing the meeting by asking Garret if he could say “my mis-understanding is better.” He did and Patrick immediately invited Garret to play Ninjas. During most of this study the children recalled if they were involved in a problem, although, at times, a child did not remember the situation. When this occurred, I asked if anyone else saw this happen and for them to share what they witnessed. I then returned to the child who did not remember this problem or challenge happening and asked if this new information helped them to remember. Sometimes, children recalled the situation; other times they said, “It did not happen like that” and supplied further information. There were a few times when the children continued not remembering or recollecting being involved in a problem. Then, I addressed the group and observed that sometimes we are unable to solve problems with another person, and the children were encouraged to identify ways through brainstorming that they could make themselves happy when situations like this occurred. The remaining time for this

type of problem solving and challenges situation was used to create a cognitive menu by gathering classmates' ideas related to ways to make themselves happy.

According to Makiguchi (1989 in Bethal), a Japanese educator, “the purpose of education is to enable children to become responsible, healthy cells in the social organism, to contribute to the happiness of society, and, by so doing, to find meaning, purpose, and happiness in their own individual lives.” (p.22)

Makiguchi (1989) additionally delineates that the purpose for education is “learning to live as creators of value” (p. 54) He explains that “human life is a process of creating value, and education should guide us toward that end.” (p. 54). Thus, understanding happiness as the goal of both life and education begins with the creation of value.

As highlighted by Makiguchi, the ability to make yourself happy and to create value was embedded throughout the Class Meeting format. This occurred when children shared positive actions of their classmates during the acknowledgement component and when the children focused on discovering solutions to challenges and problems. In some meetings, I specifically asked children to take a moment to concentrate on “who they loved, who loved them” and what made them happy (Robbins, 2001, p.195).

Analysis of the problem-solving and challenges component and the interrelation of teacher talk with the development of student thinking and talk was applied to scripts from the beginning, middle, and end of the research period. The problem-solving

component highlighted when the thinking and talking skills were most clearly developed, and progress could be seen from the beginning to the end of the twelve-week research period. Early meetings involved definition, repetition, and the encouragement of emergent communication skills. Meetings from the middle and end of the research period extended the development of thinking and talking skills. Specific script analysis that charts the development of problem solving skills in relation to teacher talk is discussed in the data analysis sections titled *Using Teacher Talk to Support Thinking and Talk* and *Script Analysis of Teacher Talk Categories*.

Closing the Meeting

The meeting component of the closing indicated that the meeting was ending for the day. There are several ways I handled the closing of the meeting component to reinforce the children's ability to solve problems without the assistance of adults. To do this, I invited children to share how they solved a challenging situation on their own without adult assistance. These stories created a positive end to the meeting and reinforced strategies that children could use to solve problems. One of my favorite ways to end the meeting was to ask the children to join hands and repeat a saying as illustrated in the following August 1st meeting closing.

Line 210	Teacher:	Okay, well let's join hands. Can you hold my hand?
Line 211	Teacher	Let's say circle of love.
Line 212	Group:	Circle of love.

Line 213	Teacher:	Circle of friends.
Line 214	Group:	Circle of friends.
Line 215	Teacher:	We are a community!
Line 216	Group:	We are a community!

Together, the group raised hands in a circle high in the air while saying, “We are a community!” This created closure, built a sense of community, and served as a transition to the next classroom activities. The structure of the Class Meeting components not only serves as a guide for the teacher to follow but creates a recognizable design and eventually comfortable and expected pattern for the children.

Using Teacher-Talk to Support Student Thinking and Talking

The Class Meeting framework permitted the opportunity for me as a teacher to engage students’ heightened social and emotional intelligences and “motivate oneself and persist in the face of frustrations; to control impulse and delay gratification; to regulate one’s moods and keep distress from swamping the ability to think; to empathize and hope” (Goleman, 1995, p. 34).

During the implementation of Class Meetings when conversing with students, I focused on developing student thinking and talk by utilizing the meeting discourse from transcribed video and audio-taped Class Meetings. Focusing on my role as facilitator and supporting the children’s development of thinking and talk, I created the following four teacher talk categories (respectful interactions, oral-language, critical reasoning, and

problem-solving). The discussion video and audio tapes were analyzed comparatively to identify characteristics, properties and conditions that eventually evolved into these four “categories” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 193) for my teacher talk and the development of children’s thinking and talk. The scripts from the beginning, middle and end of the research period were reviewed, analyzed and applied to establish the categories. Often, the categories occurred at the same time or overlapped; however, it was important to characterize each in terms of teacher-talk to have a better understanding of the cognitive and communication experiences teachers can provide students during a Class Meeting.

Respectful Interactions

I encouraged respectful communicative interactions, directing students to make eye contact and use appropriate language and voice levels when responding verbally to one another, and while sharing personal connections. I modeled and directed courtesy speech vocabulary and patterns like *thank you* and *you’re welcome*. These communicative interactions were then used to highlight the positive interpersonal relationships revealed primarily through the Class Meeting acknowledgments, problem-solving and challenges components.

The Class Meeting acknowledgement component provided a major opportunity for developing respectful interactions as I encouraged the use of courtesy words and eye contact. In line 110 in the August 1 script at the close of this first acknowledgment, I suggested that Patrick correspond and equate the emotion of happiness to the stated comment. Patrick did this non-verbally through an affirmative nod of the head.

- Line 104: Teacher: Kayden who do you want to acknowledge?
(Wait time, then Kayden offers)
- Line 105: Kayden: I want to acknowledge Patrick.
- Line 106: Teacher: Patrick look at Kayden. What did he do?
- Line 107: Kayden: He let me play with the puzzles.
- Line 108 Teacher: (Looking at Patrick) did you realize that when
you let him play with the puzzles he was real
happy about that?
- Line 109 Patrick: (Nods head)
- Line 110 Teacher: So what do you tell Kayden?
- Line 111 Patrick: Thank you.
- Line 112 Teacher: Oh wow! You leaned over and you looked right
at him (Patrick) that was awesome.

The children's ability to use courtesy words and eye contact was reflected during
August 20 script.

- Line 331 Teacher: Okay, Patrick who do you want to acknowledge
today?
- Line 332 Patrick: I want to say. I want thank you Jaelyn.
- Line 333 Teacher: And what did Jaelyn do?
- Line 334 Patrick: She just not going to sharing these. (Looking at
the beads in Jaelyn's hand.)
- Line 335 Teacher: She was sharing the beads with you.
- Line 336 Patrick: Yeah.

- Line 337 Teacher: Jaelyn, do you remember sharing the beads with Patrick? Did you know that it meant a lot to him?
- Line 338 Jaelyn: Yeah.
- Line 339 Teacher: Okay, what do you say? Look at him with your pretty eyes and what do you say?
- Line 340 Jaelyn: Thank you Patrick.
- Line 341 Teacher: Yeah, thank you Patrick, and you know what, she used your name.

The positive language used in the acknowledgments component facilitated the development of respectful interactions. In line 335, I supported the student in making an acknowledgment when the words were paraphrased positively. After hearing my restatement in line 336, Patrick agreed. In line 341, Jaelyn, who received the acknowledgment, extended the use of the courtesy words dialogue pattern by saying “Thank you Patrick,” adding without prompting the name of the person acknowledging her. The impromptu language extension of using a classmate’s name made her response more personal. Subtle changes in student interactions comparable to this were indicative of children’s ability to follow or meet the Class Meeting group expectations and integrate respectful interactions during the discussions.

Oral Language

To develop oral language, I modeled and directed courtesy speech, alternative vocabulary, and narrative talk, encouraging students to use new vocabulary and full and complete sentences to relate experiences, extend discussions, and develop narrative talk

during the Class Meeting. I utilized probing questions as a way of requesting children to think and then supply more information in the dialogues. The addition of increased information required students to extend their own thinking while creating an awareness of the importance of their ability to use language as a means of expression.

This category presented multi-layered dimensions for language learning much like Bahktin (1981) suggested in his theory of heteroglossia as the multiplicity and interconnectedness of social languages. Bahktin stated,

the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of the dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own . (p. 294)

The multiplicity of social language occurs at varying levels within a Class Meeting and this is highly impacted by the chronological ages and developmental experiences of young children. The children's "dialogic" verbal expressions of thoughts and ideas gave me glimpses into their cognitive abilities; however, I could not determine with certainty what each child was thinking or how they interpreted this meaning making into their own lives (Bahktin, 1981). Paulo Freire and Ira Shor (1987) discuss how students gain intrinsic motivation from subject matter that they raise and that this dialogic inquiry is situated in the culture of the students. As a facilitator of the Class Meeting, I attempted to remain neutral, responding to information received rather than what I may have inferred from these dialogues.

Therefore, the children were asked to use language as an expression of their thoughts and ideas. The Class Meeting offered the prospect for what Shor (1999) described as the “challenge of discovering different paths for self and social development” (p. 1). Class Meetings created a forum where I guided and supported student participation, reflection, and discovery of different paths. Thus, a teacher role in developing oral language during Class Meetings models Ira Shor’s (1999) Critical Literacy Theory premise that “The way we speak and are spoken to help shape us into the people we become” (p. 1) and “We are what we say and do” (p. 1).

There were many opportunities for using teacher talk to develop children’s oral language skills throughout the Class Meeting process. An illustration of the way vocabulary development was embedded and reinforced during the Class Meeting was found in the August 1 script of the teacher-led acknowledgment.

- | | | |
|----------|----------|--|
| Line 145 | Teacher: | I would like to make an acknowledgment to Kasey up here. (Pointing upward to the child sitting on the couch behind.) |
| Line 146 | Teacher: | And, Kasey was sitting very nicely when we had a lot of things going on this morning and I asked her to wait patiently, she did. And she said, “I am waiting patiently,” and she showed a lot so that was wonderful. |

This dialogue exemplified the introduction of terminology within the Class Meeting process. The word *patience* was introduced to the Class Meeting participants as a reflection of a conversation I had with a child prior to the meeting. In this

acknowledgment, the use of the word *patience* supported the child's identification of a specific behavior while introducing the word and defining it to the larger audience. The word *patience* reappeared in the September 10 discussion near the end of the research period.

Line 758 Teacher: Look at the way that Fynn is sitting. Is she yelling out? She is just waiting patiently. And, patience is part of what we learn in our class to get along and work together.

In this case, I used the word *patience* again and incorporated it within the student criteria for selecting another student to speak. The application of this vocabulary also established that *patience* was acceptable and appropriate behavior for students to demonstrate during the Class Meeting.

I noticed that oral language skills were illustrated in a range of children's behavior and speech patterns. Another skill was narration, when the student told a story. For example, in the early stages of developing the Class Meeting forum, I asked Kayden to give an acknowledgment. I provided him time to organize his thoughts using wait time. As a result of this question and wait time sequence, Kayden gave a one sentence narrative acknowledgment relating his pleasure with Patrick's willingness to play with the dinosaur puzzle.

- Line 104: Teacher: Kayden who do you want to acknowledge?
(Wait time, then Kayden offers)
- Line 105: Kayden: I want to acknowledge Patrick.
- Line 106: Teacher: Patrick look at Kayden. What did he do?
- Line 107: Kayden: He let me play with the puzzles.

The development of oral language was noted in all four components of the Class Meeting. In this acknowledgment sequence, the word ‘acknowledgment’ was introduced as part of a question to Kayden. As a result of my follow-up probing questions, Kayden developed his oral language skills and revealed his cognitive clarity in his one sentence narrative.

Critical Reasoning

To enhance critical reasoning, I provided children with the opportunity to reflect on past experiences and asked and expected children to recall from memory prior experiences and interactions. The child was encouraged to identify and analyze components and sequences of action and associated responses, feelings, and thoughts. Through finding likenesses and differences, the children were led to compare and contrast their thoughts, feelings, and actions from the present to those of the past and to those of others. I scaffolded and modeled for the children, identifying positive versus negative feelings, actions, and outcomes to encourage thinking in terms of relative value. I communicated the expectation that each child has the ability to participate in the dialogue and achieve these abilities.

This category of teacher talk involved asking children to think and provide more information. An example of teacher talk during one Class Meeting that supported the development of critical reasoning skills is found in the August 1 script at the beginning of the research period.

- | | | |
|----------|----------|--|
| Line 104 | Teacher: | Kayden who do you want to acknowledge?
(Wait time, then Kayden offers.) |
| Line 105 | Kayden: | I want to acknowledge P. |
| Line 106 | Teacher: | Patrick look at Kayden. What did he do? |
| Line 107 | Kayden: | He let me play with the puzzles. |
| Line 108 | Teacher: | (Looking at Patrick) did you realize that when
you let him play with the puzzles he was real
happy about that? |

During this dialogue excerpt both Kayden and Patrick were asked to recall a positive experience from memory. In line 106, I asked Kayden to provide more information by telling what Patrick did. Even though the children were exposed to Class Meetings for less than two weeks, they demonstrated an awareness of the vocabulary and the expectation that further information would be requested. The teacher role of developing critical reasoning did not change dramatically during the research period; however, the pacing of the meeting increased due to the children's familiarity with the Class Meeting structure, vocabulary and expectations. Initially, even though it took more time during the meeting to check in with both the child giving the acknowledgment and

the child receiving the acknowledgment, it was important because this individual and follow-up questioning initiated the use of student critical thinking skills.

Several examples were revealed when asking follow-up questions, because the child receiving an acknowledgment did not recall the act of kindness stated by the child giving the acknowledgment. This is illustrated in the September 10 script below beginning with Line 818, when Nathan was selected to give an acknowledgment.

Line 818	Teacher:	Okay Nathan, you got picked. So who would you like to acknowledge?
Line 819	Nathan:	Garret
Line 820	Teacher:	And Garret. What did Garret do that made you feel good?
Line 821	Nathan:	Pushed me on the tire swing.
Line 822	Teacher:	Do you remember that Garret?
Line 823	Garret:	No.
Line 824	Teacher:	He doesn't remember. (Looking at Nathan) When did it happen? Was it a few days ago? Or was it...
Line 825	Nathan:	Today.
Line 826	Teacher:	Oh today. Was it this morning outside?
Line 827	Nathan:	(Nods his head yes)
Line 828	Teacher:	Oh, it was this morning outside.
Line 829	Garret:	Today?

Line 830 Teacher: He [Nathan] remembers. Isn't it interesting that sometimes we do things and other people remember it, and we don't even remember?

As a result of this conversational exchange, the children were developing cognitive reasoning skills. The relationship between memory and the ability to recall and assess whether an action was pleasing were highlighted and reinforced along with the awareness that others may not remember or value an action in the same way.

Additionally, this excerpt illustrates how it is important for the teacher to facilitate probing questions to gather more information to support student understanding and the formulation of their self selected "living text" while exercising their critical reasoning skills.

Problem-Solving

For the category of problem solving, I supported the identification, sharing, and gathering of information regarding student problems or challenges that generated negative feelings, thoughts, or concerns. Solutions were developed in the context of showing respect, developing responsibility, having mutual agreement among the students involved, and with the purpose of teaching expected appropriate behavior. I guided students in the co-construction, evaluation, and self-selection of possible solutions that established resolution and the development of problem-solving strategies through face-to-face dialogue, discussion, and conflict resolution. These group-developed strategies provided ways for students to approach possible future challenges. Once a solution for a

problem or challenge was produced and agreed upon, acknowledgment was given by the children involved to the group and related parties of the resolution achieved.

In the August 1 script, after completing four acknowledgments, I invited the children to share a problem or challenge. Noticing that none of the children raised their hands to speak or looked as though they wanted to contribute, I introduced a situation observed that morning.

- | | | |
|----------|----------|--|
| Line 147 | Teacher: | Now let's see did anybody have a problem that they want to talk about? A little problem. |
| Line 148 | Teacher: | Patrick, I remember you had a puzzle problem. |
| Line 149 | Teacher: | What happened at the puzzles? |
| Line 150 | Patrick: | I was playing with the puzzles dinosaurs. |
| Line 151 | Teacher: | And, what happened with the dinosaur puzzles? |
| Line 152 | Patrick: | Inaudible |
| Line 153 | Teacher: | Did someone take the puzzles and make you sad? |
| Line 154 | Patrick: | Yeah. |
| Line 155 | Teacher: | And what did you do? |
| Line 156 | Teacher: | What did you do when you were sad with the dinosaur puzzles? |
| Line 157 | Teacher: | How did you solve that problem? |
| Line 158 | Teacher: | Did you use your words? |
| Line 159 | Patrick: | Yeah. |

- Line 160 Teacher: Did you ask him if you could play with them again?
- Line 161 Patrick: Yeah.
- Line 162 Teacher: And did he let you? Do you remember that Kayden?
- Line 163 Kayden: Yes.
- Line 164 Teacher: What happened when he was sad with the dinosaur puzzle?
- Line 165 Kayden: He didn't let me help.
- Line 166 Teacher: What? (Strong voice)
- Line 167 Kayden: He didn't let me help.
- Line 168 Teacher: Oh so he didn't let you help. So you took the puzzle back?
- Line 169 Teacher: But then, did you get to play with it later? (Teacher looks at Patrick while directing the question to him.)
- Line 170 Patrick: Yeah.
- Line 171 Teacher: So sometimes we just have to take turns, huh?
- Line 172 Teacher: That is part of being friends.
- Line 173 Teacher: Well, thank you for sharing about your problem.

In the beginning stages of this Class Meeting, I moved the discussion along proceeding with a series of teacher-driven questions and one-word affirmative replies from the students. Initially, this may appear to be a result of the lack of active listening, or a teacher control issue; however, with this age group and with the highly abstract cognitive expectations, I found that it reduced and relieved the student's tension from

being a risk taker in front of his/her peers and allowed me to proceed more quickly. Too much “think time” in the beginning opened the door for student distraction and the breakdown of communication. In relation to literature circles, Sipe (2008) disagreed with common interpretations of interrupting the conversational flow by scaffolding. Sipe (2008) utilized Meyer’s (1993) scaffolding interpretation,

(as a gradual release of responsibility model seems to suppose) has the characteristics of a zero-sum game, where more power, control, or knowledge, by the teacher necessarily implies less power, control or knowledge by the children in the process of literary meaning-making. Rather, there is a synergy involved, where the teacher’s astute assistance may result in more active participation in literary interpretation on the part of the children; in other words the construction of literacy meaning becomes a truly *shared* responsibility (Meyer, 1993. p. 49).

I discovered that this group synergy was formed during the beginning stages of Class Meetings through my probing questions and receptive, reflective responses. Although this type of questioning appears similar to Mehan’s (1979) initiation, response, evaluation (IRE) question/answer structure, the major difference is that I maintained a neutral, non-judgmental participant role and looked for a variety of student initiated solutions rather than one correct solution or a solution I believed addressed the problem best. In the script above, the children could have offered negative responses as an acceptable response because it would have been an expression of the child’s beliefs and experiences. The questions I asked that followed would have incorporated the children’s point of view, highlighting the importance of my flexibility, active listening and the importance of co-constructing the solutions.

Script Analysis of Teacher Talk Categories

Six Class Meeting transcripts representing the beginning, middle and ending of the research period were selected and coded according to the four categories of teacher talk (respectful interactions, oral language, critical reasoning and problem solving) to generate a quantitative analysis representing the beginning, middle and end of the research period. When examining the six Class Meeting transcripts, several patterns emerged as shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1: Ratio of Teacher-Talk Categories in Sample Scripts (Beginning, Middle and End) (Unit %)

Scripts	Date	Respectful Interactions	Oral Language	Critical Reasoning	Problem Solving
1	Jul-23-08	66	56	32	1
2	Aug-01-08	52	35	35	32
3	Aug-18-08	68	63	53	5
4	Aug- 20-08	65	66	39	26
5	Sept-08-08	56	46	43	16
6	Sept-20-08	51	41	21	12
Average		60	51	37	15

On average, the ratio of critical reasoning teacher-talk over the total teacher responses was 37%, and the corresponding numbers for the other three categories are: 60% (respectful interactions), 51% (oral language), and 15% (problem solving skills).

The average total of my responses gathered from selected scripts for the category of respectful interactions consisted of 60% of the total responses. Further data analysis on the four class meeting components indicated that the respectful interactions occurred

more often during the acknowledgment and problem solving components. This suggested that I created a positive context that encouraged respect and the development of the student's problem solving skills. At the same time, my talk fostered positive interactions and established community awareness for a secure learning environment. I established a context that highlighted respectful interactions as well as developing oral language and problem solving skills. Reyes (2006) stated from a qualitative socio-psycholinguistic perspective that context was an important factor that contributed positively to the development of the children's emergent literacy. My responses for 'respectful interactions' supported the children's growth in learning and developing their own 'theories' and 'concepts' about language and literacy from an early age.

The category of oral language consisted of 51% total teacher responses, which demonstrated that I effectively introduced, further explained the concepts, and reiterated abstract terminology for young children, such as acknowledgments, problem, community, friendship, and team work.

Critical reasoning consisted of 37% of my total teacher responses, and occurred most often during the problem solving and acknowledgment components. I used questions and conversation to foster children's understanding of the concepts presented, recalled what happened and what the problem was, developed their own definitions and meaning for "problem" while encouraging students to think logically and create their own solutions.

My problem solving teacher-talk occurred most frequently during the Class Meeting problem solving component and consisted of 15% of the total teacher responses on the average in the three scripts. Compared to the other three categories, I responded less during the problem solving which indicated that my efforts to establish a positive and encouraging environment, and to guide the children to develop their own solutions effectively met the Class Meeting goals.

A further analysis of teacher-talk responses during the beginning, middle, and ending scripts indicated the category of critical reasoning skills dropped to 10% in the ending scripts compared to the beginning scripts and the category of problem solving dropped 20%. This indicated that children gradually developed critical thinking and problem solving skills during the 12 weeks. The categories of 'respectful interactions' and 'oral language' maintained a high occurrence during all the scripts, especially in the middle script when a student introduced the term 'team work'. My encouragement of a respectful and safe environment, and conversation as a facilitator provided a safe nurturing context that enforced the positive problem solutions.

Conclusion

My responses to encourage respectful interactions and oral language development among students focused on creating a secure learning environment, fostering a sense of community, and encouraging the development of problem solving skills. Fewer teacher responses addressed critical reasoning and problem solving from the later sessions

compared to the earlier scripts, which indicated that the Class Meeting format for the study period moved toward enforcing critical thinking and problem solving skills.

As a result of facilitating and managing the meeting, I guided children to develop what Gardner (1999) conceptualized as “an intelligence as a bio-psychological potential to process information that can be activated in a cultural setting to solve problems or create products that are of value in a culture” (pp.33-34). These interpersonal skills included a variety of important aspects in areas of cognitive and emotional development. First, was understanding people, i.e. sensitivity to and understanding of other people’s moods, feelings, and points of view. Another was in getting along with others, i.e. the ability to maintain good relationships with other people, especially friends and siblings. Leadership, was another, i.e. to take a leadership role in problem solving (Gardner, 1983). Personal intelligences of the type that Gardner and Goleman propose were also enhanced through the use of Class Meetings. Gardner pointed out that the ways in which intelligences combine and blend are as varied as the faces and the approaches utilized by educators. Like Reggio Emilia (Edwards, 1998) and Goleman’s (1995) extended theoretical constructs for developing the Emotional Quotient (EQ) and Social Intelligence (Goleman, 2006). The Class Meeting format nurtured emotional intelligence and supported the creation of a “metalanguage” (Sipe, 2008. p.112), trust and inter-thinking (Mercer, 2000, p. 1), and establishing a “community of learners” (Short & Burke, 1991. p. 16) within the group meeting dynamic.

My role as facilitator and the strategic teacher-talk was crucial to the success of Class Meetings. Through effective planning and management, a solid grounding in group process and early childhood oral language and problem solving skills, active listening, and flexibility, I worked to build a safe, supportive community that fostered the students' growth as critical thinkers. Transitioning the group through the four components of the Class Meeting format, I looked for opportunities to establish respectful interactions and develop student oral language and critical reasoning and problem solving skills. The process was organic and recursive so that student progress evolved and accumulated as the group became more familiar and comfortable with the Class Meeting framework, terminology, and types of interactions embedded within it.

CHAPTER 4: PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION AND PROBLEM-SOLVING STRATEGIES - FINDINGS, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the co-construction of problem-solving strategies during Class Meetings. Initially, the teachers and sometimes the students identified a problem after which problem-solving strategies were co-constructed by the students and teacher. Thus, the problem-solving strategies surfaced as a result of the students and teacher engaging in the co-construction of problem identification and solutions. Wells and Wells (1992), stated “Learning that is essential to cognitive development is most likely to occur from engaging in activities in which it is necessary to recognize and solve problems” (p. 55).

In this chapter I address the following two research questions:

- What problems are identified in a Class Meeting with young children?
- What problem-solving strategies do young children develop within Class Meetings?

What constitutes a problem within the Class Meeting forum? Charles and Lester (1982) defined a problem as “a task for which the person confronting it wants or needs to find a solution; the person has no readily available procedure for finding the solution; and the person must make an attempt to find a solution” (p. 5). Reys, Suydam, and Lindquist (1989) suggested that “A problem involves a situation in which a person wants something and does not know immediately what to do to get it” (p. 27). Reys et al. also affirmed that

“to gain skills in problem solving, one must have many experiences in problem solving” (p.27). The Class Meeting was specifically designed to give students these experiences.

Schiever (1991) identified five types of problems. Scheiver’s fifth problem type, most relevant to my work, was described as “The problem is unknown or undefined and the method and solution are unknown to both the presenter and solver” (p. 14).

Additionally, Schiever argued that these are “real-life” problems, which is the case in the kinds of problems that surfaced in the Class Meetings.

To address these real-life problems that challenge young children, during the problem-solving component my teacher talk and questioning began with asking for a student from the Class Meeting group to identify a problem. At times I prefaced this with a short explanation and review of what constitutes a problem. Then, I asked the student reporting the problem to reveal further details of the situation, his or her actions, statements regarding the situation, and the possible identity of involved student(s). Next, if another student was named and that person remembered the situation happening, I questioned their version of the misunderstanding (situation) and what they remembered. If there was agreement between the students, we began to work together to discover and co-construct a strategy or strategies that would resolve their problem. I asked the students for ways they could resolve the problem. If there was no agreement regarding involvement in the problem situation, the students within the Class Meeting group were asked to contribute ideas, possible solutions, or strategies to the child presenting the

problem. To gather further information, I posed teacher questions such as what happened or what was the situation and also asked the children to state the related emotions or effect. Shared agreement, tension, stress, anxiety, emotions, and problem-solving strategies were elicited from the students. If agreement was expressed among the students involved, I moved the discussion forward, working together to gather more information, asking what happened, what was the situation, who and what was involved, and what feelings were associated with this situation-anger, frustration, confusion, or tension. The child's response was shared, and I asked students for responses to the problem.

I have found that many types of problems occur throughout the daily routine in early childhood classrooms, including name calling, theft, and physical conflicts. Meetings analyzed in this study involved the following problems as identified from student input and teacher guidance: unwillingness to share toys, building friendships, taking turns, and physical altercations. These types of problems are analyzed in detail within the problem-identification section. The findings are a result of a close examination of selected Class Meeting transcripts analyzed from the beginning, middle, and the end of the 12-week research period.

Problem Identification

From the five reviewed scripts outlined in a table at the end of this chapter, the following problems were identified by the students and/or the teacher. My introduction of the problem-solving component and the language and concepts within this component

took place after the first week of the study to give the children time to become familiar with the Class Meeting format, establishing a circle, acknowledgments, and the use of positive talk.

I began the problem solving and challenges component during the August 1 meeting. I reminded Patrick about a problem with the dinosaur puzzles that occurred earlier in the day. Patrick remembered the situation and identified the problem. The next identified problem, introduced by a student during this meeting, was what to do if someone does not want to play with you. The final problem was also introduced by a child regarded turn-taking.

On August 18, I presented an open-ended discussion question of what the children would like to learn about at school. This was the only group problem discussed during the entire study.

On August 20, I asked the students if anyone had a problem that they would like to share. Two problems were identified and shared within the meeting. A child pushed another child down. The subsequent problem was when a child threw mud on another child's shirt.

On September 8, the problem-solving began with the introduction of a punching problem (See Appendix A). The next problem concerned what to do when someone takes something away and does not want to give it back.

On September 10, three problems were addressed. The first problem was identified during the acknowledgment component when a child entered the Class Meeting circle upset that his water bottle had been accidentally thrown away. The next identified problem was when a child made noises that were disturbing to another child. The last problem was when a child said she would not be another child's friend.

The following **Table 2** highlights the types of problems, strategies, and solutions within the five scripts analyzed in detail and described above.

Table 2: Identified Class Meeting Problems, Problem Solving Strategies and Solutions Utilized

	Problems/Challenges	Problem-Solving Strategies	Solutions
August 1, 2008	Problem 1 Puzzle Problem Sharing, taking away a toy from someone	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use your words 2. Asking again to play 3. Taking turns 	Taking turns and asking at a later time to play with the puzzle.
	Problem 2 Someone won't play with me	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ignore the person 2. Go somewhere else 3. Using words like <i>not right now</i> or <i>okay</i> 4. Moving away and come back later 	Went somewhere else to play
	Problem 3 Turn-taking I wanted a turn	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Let someone else have a turn 2. Let it go 	Discussed reasons we cannot always have a turn. We talked about not letting this bother us.

Table2: Identified Class Meeting Problems, Problem Solving Strategies and Solutions Utilized (Continued)			
	Problems/Challenges	Problem-Solving Strategies	Solutions
August 18, 2008	1. Problem (Group Discussion) What would you like to learn about?	1. Talked about things that they liked. 2. Identify types of transportation	Agreed on the topic of trains
August 20, 2008	Problem 1 Patrick pushed Taylor down	1. Say sorry.	Said sorry.
September 8, 2008	Problem 1 Punching others	1. Walk away 2. Ask them to show respect	Walked away
	Problem 2 Taking things (bucket) and not giving them back	1. Use your words to explain 2. Shaking hands	Andrew stated next time I will let you know when you can use the bucket. Students also shook hands combining strategies
September 10, 2008	Problem 1 Water Bottle was accidentally thrown away	1. Retrieve it after the meeting 2. You could get it out now 3. Get someone to help you now	Get someone to help you now
	Problem 2 When Patrick kept going “rrr”	1. Show respect	The child said he would show respect next time
	Problem 3 Taylor said she would not be Madison’s friend	1. Show respect	Show respect next time

Within the five Class Meeting scripts, a total of 11 problems were identified. Ten of the problems focused on interpersonal relationships, and one problem was a group discussion regarding what the children would like to study.

In the scripts analyzed for this study, common problems emerged and are detailed in this section. One problem addressed in the Class Meeting was sharing toys. The sharing toys problem was brought up at the August 1 Class Meeting. The following excerpts from that Class Meeting show how the problem was identified.

- | | | |
|----------|----------|---|
| Line 147 | Teacher: | Now let's see, did anybody have a problem that they want to talk about? A little problem.
(Silence, no response) |
| Line 148 | Teacher: | Patrick, I remember you had a little puzzle problem, huh? |
| Line 149 | Teacher: | What happened at the puzzles? |
| Line 150 | Patrick: | I was playing with the puzzles dinosaurs. |
| Line 151 | Teacher: | And what happened with the dinosaur puzzles? |
| Line 152 | Patrick: | inaudible |
| Line 153 | Teacher: | Did someone take the puzzles and make you sad? |
| Line 154 | Patrick: | Yeah |

This occurred at the beginning of the study when the students were asked to share a problem and no response was made. As a result of the lack of student response, I could have assumed that the children were unable to identify problems. Instead of stopping when no one responded, I introduced a situation that I observed earlier that morning

while two children were playing. I did this to support student understanding of the abstract terminology of *problem*. I reminded the children of an earlier situation. In this way, the students were guided to further identify, clarify, and develop an understanding of the word *problem*. I bridged student cognition during this first problem by providing additional information to support independent student problem identification.

Later in the same Class Meeting, another student revealed a friendship problem without my coaching, as shown in the following excerpt.

- Line 174 Teacher: Did anyone else have a problem?
- Line 175 Kasey: I did. I did.
- Line 176 Teacher: Okay — what is your problem Kasey?
- Line 177 Kasey: That Cierra said no one can play with her.

Upon further analysis of problem-solving identification in the scripts, a specific type of question pattern emerged for probing what happened. I asked for more information and details regarding the situation and the participants, as well as the emotions that occurred when this happened. A pattern of problem identification, solicitation of details, and emotional awareness was evident throughout the analyzed scripts during the research period. I found using this questioning pattern effective in supporting the children's identification of problems and the creation of empathy within the classroom community.

Two types of problems, intrapersonal and interpersonal, emerged during the problem identification. Thus, the Class Meetings problem solving component provided an opportunity for young children to demonstrate evidence of Gardner's (1983) personal intelligences. Gardner (1999) defined his two types of personal intelligences as intrapersonal, "the capacity to understand oneself" (p. 43) "including one's own desires, fears and capacities – and to use such information effectively in regulating one's own life" (p. 43). Gardner further delineates that interpersonal intelligence is an individual's ability "to understand the intentions, motivations, and desires of other people and consequently work effectively with others"(p. 43).

In the Class Meeting intrapersonal problems were fewer in nature, but in one case, three-year old Taylor introduced this type of intrapersonal problem (*I am afraid of the dark*) during one of the first meetings when problems were discussed (July 23). This young child was able to relate her personal fear and desire to better understand her specific situation early in the Class Meeting study. Furthermore, group discussions incorporating questions such as; Who loves you? and What makes you happy? required intrapersonal responses that were subsequently related to others.

The other category of interpersonal problems, those shared by others or involving more than one child, were identified more frequently during the Class Meetings. The running problem, the biting problem and the sunglasses problem illustrate this type of interpersonal involvement. The data revealed that the majority of Class Meeting problems

focused on interpersonal relationships, specifically physical conflict and or verbal tensions between students.

Problems were identified as misunderstandings in three ways by individual students, among small groups of two to four children or problems that I introduced as result of classroom observation.

Tables 3 and 4 illustrate the range of problem types and problem solving strategies throughout the study. Table 3 highlights the range of problem types throughout study period and Table 4 the range of problem solving strategies throughout the study.

Table 3: Range of Problem Types Throughout Study Period

Date	Problem categories	Problem/Challenges
Jul. 23	Interpersonal	1. Microphone Problem
	Intrapersonal	2. Taylor scared at night when I go to sleep
Jul. 29	Interpersonal	1. Reviewed Taylor's Scared at night problem
Aug. 1*	Interpersonal	1. Puzzle Problem Sharing, taking away a toy from someone
	Interpersonal	2. Some one won't play with me
	Interpersonal	3. Turn-taking
Aug. 5	Interpersonal	1. Running problem (Group Problem)
Aug. 6	Interpersonal	1. Sharing Problem (Group Problem)
Aug. 12	Interpersonal	1. Who loves you? Who do you love? 2. What makes you happy? (Group discussion)

Date	Problem categories	Problem/Challenges
Aug. 13	Interpersonal	1. Reviewed Taylor's scared of the dark
Aug. 18*	Interpersonal	1. What would like to learn about
Aug. 19	Interpersonal	1. The sunglasses Problem
	Interpersonal	1. Patrick pushed Taylor down
	Interpersonal	2. Patrick threw mud on Ethan's shirt.
Aug. 20*	Interpersonal	1. Patrick pushed Taylor down
	Interpersonal	2. 2. Patrick threw mud on Ethan's shirt.
Aug. 25	Intrapersonal	1. I want to go play.
Aug. 26	Interpersonal	1. Torn paper
	Interpersonal	2. What makes you happy? (Group Discussion)
Aug. 27	Both	1. I want to be picked
Sept. 2	Interpersonal	1. The trap problem (getting stuck inside a kitchen sink toy)
	Interpersonal	2. What to do next time? (Group discussion)
Sept. 3	Interpersonal	1. Fighting over purple paint
Sept. 8*	Interpersonal	1. Punching others
	Interpersonal	2. Taking things (bucket) and not giving them back
Sept. 9	Interpersonal	1. Won't be my friend
Sept. 10*	Interpersonal	1. Water Bottle was accidentally thrown away
	Interpersonal	2. When Patrick kept going "rrr"
	Interpersonal	3. Taylor said she would not be Madison's friend

Date	Problem categories	Problem/Challenges
Sept. 16	Interpersonal	1. The hitting problem
	Interpersonal	2. What can we do for ourselves when someone hits us and does not want to talk it out? (Ms Sue)
	Interpersonal	3. Wanting to play with something another child has.
Oct. 23	Interpersonal	1. Biting Problem (Group discussion)
	Interpersonal	2. Sometimes my sister bites me
	Interpersonal	3. My brother kicked me, turned me upside down, and 'bitted'

* five detailed scripts

Table 3 illustrates the forty identified problems throughout the study. The five scripts analyzed in detail (highlighted in italics) were characteristic of typical Class Meetings because they focused on problems that came from the children's genuine experience, small group conflicts and general group discussions.

A problem identification technique that was used often was to listen to the child's individual intrapersonal or interpersonal problem then extend this to the group asking if others had also encountered this type of situation and shared strategies they themselves had used. The social interaction within the Class Meeting dialogue provided a vehicle for these children emergent in language acquisition, who according to Otto (2006), utilize receptive language as a catalyst to comprehend problems and then as an opportunity to

engage expressively in their language use. Coincidentally, this language expression concurrently comprised and illustrated the synchronistic use of Gardner's (1999) linguistic intelligence "sensitivity to spoken language" (p. 41) and the "capacity to use language to accomplish certain goals" (p. 41).

Problem-Solving Strategies

I discovered in this study that three, four, and five year old students were capable and willing to identify problems. Moreover, I found these students were able to construct strategies to solve the identified problems. The solutions were perceptive and showed sensitivity on the part of the students. When it came to problem-solving strategies in Class Meetings, the children demonstrated their creativity and ability to be empathetic to one another. General discussion of problem-solving strategies for young children helped them to develop skills to cope with real-life situations.

According to Reys, et al. (1989), "Problem solving strategies can be taught"(p.29). This is what I found when working with these young children; however, it took time for the students to become familiar with the Class Meeting components and to develop an understanding of the abstract terminology. Reys, et al. (1989) also suggested that "No one strategy is optimal for solving all problems" (p. 29). It took several weeks for evidence of the children making connections between identifying problems and utilizing strategies for resolution to surface. The regularity and consistency of the Class Meeting format added to this development. Reys, et al. (1989) noted that "Teaching a variety of strategies (in

addition to an overall plan for how to go about problem solving) provides children with a repertoire from which they can draw as they meet a wide variety of problems” (p. 29). According to Reys, et al. (1989) students “should be encouraged to solve some problems with the same strategy and to discuss why some strategies are appropriate for certain problems” (p. 29). Children “need to be faced with problems in which the way to solve them is not apparent” (p. 29). Indeed, both of these scenarios occurred during the Class Meetings.

In the early stages of this Class Meeting study, I guided the children with possible ideas for strategies that they could choose for solutions. Then, students were given an opportunity to use and act on these strategies to solve their problem. For example, in the following excerpt from the August 1 script, three problem-solving strategies emerged: using your words, asking again to play, and taking turns. Through the use of these co-constructed strategies, the concepts of building friendships and sharing with others were fostered. This incident occurred between Patrick and Kayden over the use of the dinosaur puzzle. Kayden would not let Patrick have the puzzle. The resolution was that Patrick waited and asked at a later time when Patrick was successful in getting Kayden to share.

- | | | |
|----------|----------|--|
| Line 155 | Teacher: | And what did you do? |
| Line 156 | Teacher: | What did you do when you were sad with the dinosaur puzzles? |
| Line 157 | Teacher: | How did you solve that problem? |

- Line 158 Teacher: Did you use your words? (Suggested problem-solving strategy #1)
- Line 159 Patrick: Yeah.
- Line 160 Teacher: Did you ask him if you could play with them again? (PSS #2)
- Line 161 Patrick: Yeah.
- Line 162 Teacher: And did he let you? Do you remember that Kayden?
- Line 163 Kayden: Yes.
- Line 164 Teacher: What happened when he was sad with the dinosaur puzzle? What happened?
- Line 165 Kayden: He didn't let me help.
- Line 166 Teacher: What? (in a strong voice)
- Line 167 Kayden: He didn't let me help.
- Line 168 Teacher: Oh, he didn't let you help. So he took the puzzle back.
- Line 169 Teacher: But then did you get to play with it later? (question directed to Patrick)
- Line 170 Patrick: Yeah.
- Line 171 Teacher: So sometimes we just have to take turns huh? (PSS#3)
- Line 172 Teacher: That is part of being friends.

Through the use of probing questions, such as “What did you do?” and “How did you solve that problem?” I requested the children to provide more information and used questions to respectfully navigate the young children involved to devise strategies,

formulate consensus and agreement, and create resolution to their problem. Throughout the analyzed scripts, probing questions were part of my teacher-talk pattern after a problem was identified.

One important finding was that these young children were able, with my support, to process and discover strategies and solutions for the challenges that they themselves encountered and addressed within the first two weeks of the beginning of the study.

During the August 1 Class Meeting, the common problem of a child not wanting to play with another child was addressed. The two strategies developed were ignoring the person and going somewhere else to play. The following excerpt illustrates the process of co-constructing these strategies.

Line 178	Teacher:	Oh. Cierra do you remember that?
Line 179	Teacher:	Not right now. When you said no you couldn't play with her.
Line 180	Teacher:	So what did you do Kasey?
Line 181	Kasey:	I just ignored her.
Line 182	Teacher:	You just ignored her.
Line 183	Teacher:	And then did you go somewhere else to play?
Line 184	Kasey:	(nods, non-verbal agreement)
Line 185	Teacher:	Did that solve the problem?
Line 186	Teacher:	So Kasey you gave an example of a problem that you solved by yourself. Wow! (Looking at Cierra)

- Line 187 Teacher: Do you remember that happening?
- Line 188 Teacher: Next time she asks to play with you, what might you do? (Asking Cierra for a response)
- Line 189 Teacher: Do you think you could say not right now or okay?
- Line 190 Teacher: Those are some choices that you could have.
- Line 191 Cierra: Not right now.
- Line 192 Teacher: If she said not right now, what would you do Kasey?
- Line 193 Kasey: Go away.
- Line 194 Teacher: Go away and then maybe come back later.
- Line 195 Teacher: Okay so we are using lots of great things for solving problems.

In line 183, another problem-solving strategy of moving away is co-constructed. In the end, I proposed an extended solution for going away: revisiting the child who had refused to play and try again.

On August 18, I introduced a group problem-solving discussion on what the children wanted to learn about in school. Rather than addressing a specific interpersonal problem, this discussion was an opportunity to explore the children's interests and come to consensus about what the class as a whole should study.

- Line 2113 Teacher: What is it that you want to study about in school?
- Line 2114 Teacher: What is it that you want to learn about?

- Line 2115 Teacher: Taylor, what do you want to learn about?
- Line 2116 Taylor: I want to acknowledge my dad.
- Line 2117 Teacher: Well, tonight when you go home, you can acknowledge your dad.
- Line 2118 Teacher: Right? You can tell him, dad thank you for...
- Line 2119 Teacher: What does he do that you really like?
- Line 2120 Taylor: He lets me play on the computer.
- Line 2121 Teacher: He lets you play on the computer.
- Line 2122 Teacher: Is there something that you want to learn about here at school like maybe the trains, or maybe you want to learn about cars, or maybe you want to learn about plants outside.
- Line 2123 Teacher: What would you like to learn more about?
- Line 2124 Madison: The computer.
- Line 2125 Teacher: But, I don't think we have a computer in here.
- Line 2126 Teacher: Something we could do here at school.
- Line 2127 Madison: My brother plays on the computer for games on that
- Line 2128 Teacher: Right. Your brother plays on ...
- Line 2129 Teacher: Jaelyn thank you for letting go. (Jaelyn was playing the microphone)
- Line 2130 Teacher: Okay. But what can we do here?
- Line 2131 Teacher: Garret, what would you like to learn about here at school?
- Line 2132 Teacher: Jaelyn, what would you like to learn about here at school?

Line 2133 Garret: I want to learn about trains.

Line 2134 Teacher: You want to learn about trains.

Line 2135 Teacher: Taylor, would you like to learn about trains too?

Line 2136 Taylor: Yeah.

Line 2137 Teacher: Would you Madison?

Line 2138 Madison: Yeah.

Line 2139 Teacher: So maybe we can get some books about trains.

Line 2140 Jaelyn: I want to learn cars.

Line 2141 Teacher: You like cars and trains and things that move?

Line 2142 Teacher: Okay. So maybe we can talk about that.

Line 2143 Teacher: Madison, does that sound like something you'd like to do?

Line 2144 Madison: (Nods head yes.)

This type of general group discussion about issues important to the children was another way to promote intrapersonal and interpersonal cognitive growth, gain information, build trust, create group consensus and a build a sense of community, all important to the group problem solving process.

On August 20, a child suggested the problem-solving strategy of saying, "I'm sorry." This was not a strategy or solution that I preferred for young children because I have found that at times young children say these words and then repeat the same inappropriate action. It was difficult for me to refrain from expressing my opinion but, in this case, as a Class Meeting facilitator, I chose to remain nonjudgmental because the

children suggested this particular problem-solving strategy. In hindsight, I realized that by maintaining a nonjudgmental attitude, I fostered an atmosphere of trust and self confidence by encouraging the child to proceed with his suggested strategy choice. As a Class Meeting facilitator, I chose to let the children explore the results of their suggested solutions knowing that if it did not work, they would be able to review the problem again at a future meeting.

- Line 432 Teacher: Okay now, this morning we had a little problem. Does anybody remember what the problem was?
- Line 433 Kasey: Patrick pushed Taylor down.
- Line 434 Teacher: Oh okay, Patrick do you remember that happening? When you pushed Taylor?
- Line 435 Kasey: He made her feel terrible.
- Line 436 Teacher: Okay, Taylor, how did you feel when that happened?
- Line 437 Taylor: Sad
- Line 438 Teacher: You felt sad. What did you tell Patrick?
- Line 439 Teacher: Did you solve the problem?
- Line 440 Taylor: Yeah
- Line 441 Teacher: How did you solve it?
- Line 442 Taylor: I was playing with the dress-up clothes and he pushed me down.
- Line 443 Teacher: And, after he pushed you down.

- Line 444 Teacher: What did you say to her, Patrick, to solve the problem?
- Line 445 Patrick Say sorry
- Line 446 Teacher: So, when he said, "sorry" it made you feel better?
- Line 447 Taylor: Yes.
- Line 448 Teacher: So you two were able to solve this problem?
- Line 449 Teacher: Are you problem solvers?
- Line 450 Teacher: Can you say "We're problem solvers?"
- Line 451 Patrick We're problem solvers.
- Line 452 Teacher: Together, everybody let's say it together.
- Line 453 Children We're problem solvers.
- Line 454 Teacher: And, that is what our Class Meeting is about. Sometimes our problems are not big, they're just little misunderstandings and so we try to work them out.
- Line 455 Teacher: So we can be safe.
- Line 456 Kasey: It's teamwork!
- Line 457 Teacher: That's right Kasey! It's teamwork!

Reflecting on this moment, I realize if I had intervened to voice my opinion, there was an increased possibility of shutting down student communication and having the children withdraw from the process. Ultimately, the problem solving-strategy of saying "I'm sorry" became the agreed upon and selected solution for this problem. This appeared to bring closure to this misunderstanding.

On September 8, what started out to be an acknowledgment developed into the taking things and not giving them back problem. Patrick had a bucket and Andrew took it away from him. Patrick, who initially had the bucket, utilized a strategy I suggested, stating that the next time something like this happened he could let the other child (Andrew) know when he could use the bucket. Andrew was willing to echo my speech making an imitative statement regarding what could be expected in the future. I also introduced another strategy to extend the children's critical thinking and awareness for other possible solutions to their dilemma. I proposed as a possible strategy of shaking hands. The two children involved immediately extended their arms to complete the handshake. In this example the children combined more than one of the suggested problem-solving strategies to co-create their solution.

Line 3116	Teacher:	Okay, Patrick did you have a problem today?
Line 3117	Patrick	Yes
Line 3118	Teacher:	Patrick had a problem.
Line 3119	Teacher:	Kasey, Patrick had a problem; are you willing to listen?
Line 3120	Kasey:	Yes.
Line 3121	Teacher:	Okay, look at Patrick.
Line 3122	Teacher:	Taylor, look at Patrick
Line 3123	Teacher:	What was your problem?
Line 3124	Patrick:	I want to acknowledge

Line 3125 Teacher: Who do you want to acknowledge?

Line 3126 Patrick: Andrew

Line 3127 Teacher: What did Andrew do that made you feel good?

Line 3128 Patrick: I want Andrew to give the bucket back.

Line 3129 Teacher: You didn't get your bucket back?

Line 3130 Patrick: No

Line 3131 Teacher: You want Andrew to give the bucket back next time?

Line 3132 Patrick: Yeah.

Line 3133 Teacher: So, Andrew, are you willing to give the bucket back next time he asks for it?

Line 3134 Andrew: No, because I wasn't done with it.

Line 3135 Teacher: Okay, so what could you say?

Line 3136 Teacher: Could you say, Patrick, in just a minute I will be through and I can give it to you?

Line 3137 Teacher: Or could you say something like I want to play with it now and when I get done I will let you know?

Line 3138 Andrew Nods yes.

Line 3139 Teacher: Can you try that next time?

Line 3140 Andrew: Next time I will let you know you can have my bucket after I am done with using it.

Line 3141 Patrick: Okay.

Line 3142 Teacher: Oh wow! You guys want to shake hands?

Line 3143 Teacher: Is your problem solved?

- Line 3144 Patrick: Yeah
- Line 3145 Teacher: Say my problem is solved.
- Line 3146 Patrick: My problem is solved.
- Line 3147 Teacher: So we had a problem instead of an acknowledgment. That's great.

On September 10, we were beginning to make acknowledgments when Garret entered the Class Meeting circle stating that his water bottle was accidentally thrown away. Sensing his urgency, I transitioned from the acknowledgment component to the problem-solving component. Here I was flexible and adjusted to meet his concerns. Immediately the group focused on co-constructing strategies from which he was able to select the solution of having his classroom teacher help retrieve the bottle. The suggested strategies included retrieving the bottle after the meeting, getting it now, or getting someone to help you.

- Line 716 Garrett: Miss Sue, (the class lead teacher) I threw my water away.
- Line 717 Teacher: You put your what away?
- Line 718 Garrett: I threw my water away in the trash can.
- Line 719 Teacher: Oh. Well, is it a special water bottle?
- Line 720 Garrett: Yes.
- Line 721 Teacher: Well, maybe we can get it. Come sit down over here Garret. We will look for it after the meeting.
- Line 722 Garrett: No.

Line 723 Teacher: Do you want to go get it now?

Line 724 Garrett: No, then my jacket will get dirty

Line 725 Teacher: Why don't you take your jacket off? Then you can just reach in and then wash your hands.

Line 726 Garrett: It's all dirty.

Line 727 Teacher: You know what, after the meeting I'll be glad to put some gloves on and go get it for you.

Line 728 Garrett: But it's all dirty. My water is all dirty.

Line 729 Teacher: Your water is all dirty?

Line 730 Ms. Sue: Your water is all dirty?

Line 731 Teacher: We can wash it off.

Line 732 Ms. Sue: We can wash it. You want some help? (Lead teacher)

Line 733 Garrett: Yes.

Line 734 Ms. Sue: Who do you want to help?

Line 735 Garrett: You (Ms. Sue).

Line 736 Ms. Sue: Okay.

Within the five Class Meeting scripts analyzed in detail, a total of 11 problems were identified. Ten problems focused on interpersonal relationships, and one represented a group discussion regarding what the children would like to study. Within these same five Class Meeting scripts twenty-two problem-solving strategies were collaboratively developed from which students selected their solutions.

Table 4: Range of Problem-Solving Strategies Throughout the Study

	Problem Solving Strategies category**	Problem Solving Strategies
Jul. 23	A B	1. Stay back from it. 2. Leave it alone
	A A A A B	1. Turn the light on. 2. Use a nightlight. 3. Use three nightlights. 4. Turn the light out when you are not scared. 5. Don't run away
Aug. 1*	A A A	1. Use your words 2. Asking again to play 3. Taking turns
	A,B A,B A A	1. Ignore the person 2. Go somewhere else 3. Using words like: "Not right now." or "okay" 4. Moving away and come back later
	A B	1. Let someone else have a turn 2. Let it go
Aug. 5	A A A	1. We don't run in class. 2. Use walking feet 3. Use running feet outside.
Aug. 6	A A A	1. Walk away 2. Say, "Can I play?" 3. Wait for a while then come back

Table 4. Range of Problem-Solving Strategies Throughout the Study (contd.)		
	Problem Solving Strategies category	Problem Solving Strategies
Aug. 12	B B	1. Think about who you love 2. Think about what makes you happy
Aug. 13	A	1. Turn on a light
Aug. 18*	B	1. Share what you wanted to study
Aug. 19	A A A A	1. Say it's mine 2. Share it 3. Show we care. 4. Use teamwork.
Aug. 20*	A	1. Say sorry.
	A A	1. Ethan said please do not throw mud on me. 2. When you pick up mud throw it on the ground.
Aug. 25	A,B	1. You can go play
Aug. 26	A A A B	1. Child that tore the paper gave another one 2. Be friends 3. Start over make another one 4. Think about what makes you happy
	A	1. My mom gives me candy when I don't suck my thumb.
Aug. 27	B A, B A	1. We can't always be picked. 2. Let others have a turn 3. Get an acknowledgment

Table 4. Range of Problem-Solving Strategies Throughout the Study (contd.)		
	Problem Solving Strategies category	Problem Solving Strategies
Sept. 2	A	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Be quiet and listen to me 2. Please show me respect. 3. Tell the teacher 4. Help them take the stick away 5. No locking someone in 6. Next time we will be safe
	A	
	A	
	A	
	A	
	A	
	A	1. We will be safe
Sept. 3	A	1. Walk away
	A	2. Play somewhere else
Sept. 8*	A	1. Walk away
	A	2. Ask them to show respect
	A	1. Use your words to explain
	A	2. Shaking hands
Sept. 9	A	1. Say next time please use kind words
	A	2. Talk about it
Sept. 10*	A	1. Retrieve it after the meeting
	A	2. You could get it out now
	A	3. Get someone to help you now
	A	1. Show respect
	A	1. Show respect
Sept. 16	B	1. Breathe in
	A	2. Tell him/her "I feel sad."
	A	3. Ask them to stop doing that.
	A	4. Say sorry.
Table 4. Range of Problem-Solving Strategies Throughout the Study (contd.)		

	Problem Solving Strategies category	Problem Solving Strategies
Sept. 16	A A	1. Get a hug 2. 2. Move and sit somewhere else
	A A A,B A A B	1. Tell the teacher 2. Say don't bother me, after me I will give it to you 3. Be patient 4. Walk away 5. Find another one (that is similar) 6. Let it go. (Keep this from being a problem.)
Oct. 23	A A A A	1. Hold hand up (like a stop sign), say 'stop' 2. Please show respect 3. Move away 4. Tell the teacher
	A A	1. Say 'stop' 2. Please show respect
	A A	1. Say 'stop' 2. Please show respect

* five detailed scripts

** category A indicates positive verbal response, or physical action; category B indicates self-regulated, self-reflecting response.

Two types of problem solving strategies emerged from the data. One involved a positive spoken or verbal response and/or a physical action such as saying something like *next time please show me respect*, turning on a light, shaking hands, talking it out, or using walking feet.

The other type involved a self-controlled, self-reflecting, self-regulated response that demonstrated resilience. These responses included withholding from the action or withdrawing from the conflict, creating self imposed intrapersonal “time out” or restraining themselves from further conflict. Examples of these suggested problem-solving strategies included don’t run away, breathe in, let it go, be quiet, or move away.

The following chart illustrates the range of problems identified, strategies applied and solutions selected over the course of the entire twelve week period.

Table 5: Problem Identification, Problem-Solving Strategies, and Solutions Throughout the Study Period

	Problem Challenges	Problem Solving Strategies	Solutions
Jul. 23	1. Microphone Problem	1. Stay back from it. 2. Leave it alone	1. Stay back
	2. Taylor is scared at night when she goes to sleep	1. Turn the light on. 2. Use a nightlight. 3. Use three nightlights. 4. Turn the light out when you are not scared. 5. Don’t run away	1. Turn on a light.
Jul. 29	1. Reviewed Taylor’s Scared at night problem		1. Turn on a light.

Table 5: Problem Identification, Problem-Solving Strategies, and Solutions Throughout the Study Period (Contd.)			
	Problem Challenges	Problem Solving Strategies	Solutions
Aug. 5	1. Running problem (Group Problem)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. We don't run in class. 2. Use walking feet. 3. Use running feet outside. 	1. Use walking feet to make it safe.
Aug. 6	1. Sharing Problem (Group Problem)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Walk away 2. Say, "Can I play?" 3. Wait for a while then come back 	
Aug. 12	1. (Group discussion) Who loves you? Who do you love? What makes you happy?	Suggested ways to focus thinking when you have a problem	
Aug. 13	1. Taylor's scared of the dark problem	1. Turn on a light	1. Turned on a light
Aug. 19	1. The sunglasses Problem	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Say it's mine 2. Share it 3. Show we care. 4. Use teamwork. 	

Table 5: Problem Identification, Problem-Solving Strategies, and Solutions Throughout the Study Period (Contd.)			
	Problem Challenges	Problem Solving Strategies	Solutions
Aug. 25	1. I want to go play.	1. You can go play	1. Child got up and went to play along with all of the other children in this Class Meeting
Aug. 26	1. 1. Torn paper	1. Child that tore the paper gave another one 2. Be friends 3. Start over make another one 4. Think about what makes you happy	1. Used a combination of strategies 1, 2, and 3
	1. (Group Discussion) What makes you happy?	1. My mom gives me candy when I don't suck my thumb.	
Aug. 27	1. I want to be picked	1. We can't always be picked. 2. Let others have a turn 3. Get an acknowledgment	1. Let others have a turn

Table 5: Problem Identification, Problem-Solving Strategies, and Solutions Throughout the Study Period (Contd.)			
	Problem Challenges	Problem Solving Strategies	Solutions
Sept. 2	1. The trap problem (getting stuck inside a kitchen sink toy)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Be quiet and listen to me 2. Please show me respect. 3. Tell the teacher 4. Help them take the stick away 5. No locking someone in 6. Next time we will be safe 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Show each other respect. 2. Be safe
	7. What to do next time? (Group discussion)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. We will be safe 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. We will be safe
Sept. 3	1. Fighting over purple paint	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Walk away 2. Play somewhere else 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Walk away
Sept. 9	1. Won't be my friend	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Say next time please use kind words 2. Talk about it 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use kind words
Sept. 16	1. The hitting problem	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Breathe in 2. Tell him/her "I feel sad." 3. Ask them to stop doing that. 4. Say sorry. 	All strategies were used as part of the solution.

Table 5: Problem Identification, Problem-Solving Strategies, and Solutions Throughout the Study Period (Contd.)			
	Problem Challenges	Problem Solving Strategies	Solutions
	2. What can we do for ourselves when someone hits us and does not want to talk it out? (Ms. Sue)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Get a hug 2. Move and sit somewhere else 	Both strategies incorporated. (combined solution)
	3. Wanting to play with something another child has.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tell the teacher 2. Say don't bother me, after me I will give it to you 3. Be patient 4. Walk away 5. Find another one (that is similar) 6. Let it go. (Keep this from being a problem.) 	Group discussion to explore strategies for possible solutions
Oct. 23	1. Biting Problem (Group discussion)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hold hand up (like a stop sign), say 'stop' 2. Please show respect 3. Move away 4. Tell the teacher 	
	2. Sometimes my sister bites me	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Say 'stop' 2. please show respect 	
	3. My brother kicked me, turned me upside down, and 'bitted'	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. say 'stop' 2. please show respect 	

Conclusion

In this chapter, I selected and analyzed problem identification and problem solving strategies in five Class Meeting scripts representing the beginning, middle, and end of the research period focusing on how the children and I worked together. These problems and problem-solving strategies were co-constructed within the group forum and then used to create solutions to problems and challenges or as strategies for resolving future misunderstandings. Because of the complexity of the problem-solving process, the uniqueness of each individual problem ascertained in the analyzed scripts determined the strategies that surfaced as possible solutions like taking turns to build friendships, sharing with others, ignoring the person, going somewhere else to play or moving away. Near the end of the 12 week research period, I found fewer explanations of the Class Meeting terminology were required.

The gradual increase of children attending the meetings demonstrated their continued interest in utilizing their creative invention, innovation, and cognitive skills to identify problems collaboratively, then co-constructing and extending their initial problems into problem-solving strategies leading to the application of acceptable, reasonable, solutions. This confirmed and validated the importance for young children to be provided numerous experiences in problem solving and suggested that as children became familiar with the Class Meeting process, the language used, problem identification and problem-solving strategies, they were more likely to identify problems

and apply problem-solving strategies on their own. This co-construction of problem-solving strategies exemplified the theoretical perspectives posited through the work of Vygotsky (1978), who believed that social cultural interactions promote a communicative context and “What a child can do today with help, tomorrow he will be able to do alone” (p. 342). Additionally, Piaget’s (1972) expressed his view of the interrelatedness between a young child’s representation of the world with words and thoughts.

By extending developmentally appropriate communication and by capitalizing on the students’ “living text” and “real-life” experiences, the Class Meeting problem identification, strategy building and solution selection provided a naturalistic, organic occasion for these young children to define problems and develop and enhance creative and critical thinking; evaluative skills; and decision making. Children were given the opportunities to develop their cognitive capabilities with the facilitator’s guidance.

Within the first two weeks, this study revealed the major finding that these young children were able, with my support, to process and discover strategies and solutions for the challenges that they themselves encountered. Moreover, as a result of the group’s dynamics, the children’s level of thinking processes were higher than initially anticipated with these young preschool children. Toward the end of this study, I experienced the children internalizing and utilizing the Class Meeting process with more confidence, sophistication, and purpose. However, there were times when confusion regarding an

acknowledgment and problem warranted further clarification. In these situations I reviewed the terminology to help the children understand.

A further finding was that teacher flexibility throughout the meeting was imperative. For example during the August 20 Class Meeting a child offered the commonly used solution “I’m sorry.” I was able to assist using probing questions and a connection with their feelings to critically analyze their actions and self-reflect. This was achieved through my active listening and non-judgmental attitude. As a result of accepting the children’s strategies and solutions, they were guided to experience closure to their problems and challenges. This is an important finding to share with other educators to support the possible extensions for children’s cognitive growth and language that can be provided in these types of Class Meeting situations.

Another case for flexibility occurred when students initiated problems during the acknowledgment component. Listening and responding to the children’s thoughts and concerns took precedence over adhering to the customary Class Meeting component sequence. Openness and accommodation within the meeting also took place when no one responded to presenting a problem. Instead of stopping, I provided an observed challenging situation to support student comprehension for the abstract terminology *problem*. I reminded the children of an earlier situation. In this way, the students were assisted and guided to further identify, clarify, and develop an understanding of the word *problem*.

Additionally, flexibility was demonstrated with the types of discussions. The majority of the meetings focused on interpersonal problems and strategies for solutions; however, several meetings incorporated more general discussions utilizing the group dynamic.

It is important to note that within the Class Meeting circle, problems and problem-solving strategies were not considered as unique to a particular individual child but as a way to scaffold and model solutions created as a result of the group's collective funds of knowledge, inter-thinking, and collaborative talk (Moll, 1990; Mercer, 2000; Wells & Wells, 1992). My review of the scripts and their findings suggests that as a result of the group inter-thinking and collective thought these young children were able to clearly demonstrate their emerging abilities to internalize problem identification, be empathetic to one another, co-create problem solving strategies, and select solutions.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

As a young child I remember my family's evening meals but more importantly the wonderful discussions that took place around the dining table. The evening meal was a special time for our family to come together and share daily events, including things that bothered us and our accomplishments. It was a comfortable and safe place that gave each of us the opportunity to share ideas, ask questions, and offer suggestions. My participation in this daily forum fostered my valuing of group communication and problem solving.

From 1971-2000, as I developed as a teacher and later in my career as a teacher educator, I became aware of the importance of communication with my students. When my visionary principal, Rosanna Gallagher, offered our faculty the opportunity to explore and implement Class Meetings into our curriculum, my interest was sparked, and I immediately volunteered to participate. I was inquisitive about how Class Meetings would work with my kindergarten class and I hoped that utilizing this vehicle for communication would make a difference in the classroom environment. I have worked on developing this pedagogy during the last ten years of my teaching career. I had, however, not looked at these forums from an analytical perspective with an underlying theoretical grounding. In the past my focus was pragmatic and naturalistic.

The purpose of this qualitative action research study with three, four and five year old children in the Vail School District Early Childhood Enrichment Program is to

analyze and define the teacher roles within Class Meetings, the types of teacher talk, and the co-construction of problem-solving strategies.

Four research questions guided the study:

- What roles do teachers play in Class Meetings?
- What types of teacher talk are used to influence student thinking and talk within Class Meetings?
- What problems are identified in a Class Meeting with young children?
- What problem-solving strategies do young children develop within Class Meetings?

Daily Class Meetings lasting approximately 15 minutes supported young children in acquiring positive communication skills and strategies for solving interpersonal problems. At the same time, students became aware and developed an appreciation for diverse thinking. Class Meetings with preschoolers provided a forum for creative group problem solving that helped to establish a community of learners to promote the development of oral language skills.

Theory and research related to Class Meetings, classroom discourse, group discussions, peer negotiation, and problem solving provided a basis for my study. Major theories included Dewey's (1916) democratic principles, Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, Piaget's (1972) work on cognitive development, Gardner's (1999) multiple intelligences and Goleman's emotional intelligence (1995) and social intelligence (2006). I also draw on the

inspiration of the Reggio Emilia approach and their views focusing on creativity and social emotional development. This approach supports the development of young children's inner speech, language practice, and intentionality through the use of Class Meetings, peer meetings and dialogues (Edwards, et. al, 1998.) The finding from this study that children will elect over time to attend a Class Meeting rather than engage in play activities that can have an egocentric orientation suggests that Class Meetings bring children from their egocentric stage and provide a "collective Zone of Proximal Development" (Moll, & Greenberg,1990) that they find important. According to L.C. Moll (personal communication, November 25, 2009)

The way I try to make sense in a simplified way of the difference between Piaget's (1972) and Vygotsky's (1978) thinking about the same phenomenon, egocentric speech is as follows. Egocentric speech was coined by Piaget (1972) to mean that speech by the child that doesn't take into account the social context. Thus, the term egocentric is centered on self. As the child becomes more and more socialized that egocentrism leaves the child, disappears. In a sense, it is anchored in the child and leaves as the child becomes more of a social participant. Vygotsky viewed these phenomena the other way around. He viewed egocentric speech as having a regulatory role from the beginning. And, as the child develops that egocentric speech becomes internalized as part of the private speech used for self-regulation. This helps to regulate the child's thinking and actions and becomes part of their self-regulation. Vygotsky viewed egocentrism as a social phenomenon internalized while Piaget viewed this as an individual phenomenon that disappears when the child becomes more of a social participant.

As Vygotsky indicated, for young children this is a major point of passage, a breakthrough in language and social cultural development. In this study, the identification of problem solving strategies confirmed Vygotsky's belief that egocentrism supports young children's ability to self-regulate. This was demonstrated when the children were

able to co-construct and utilize problem solving strategies such as moving away or letting it go.

The review of the research indicated that Class Meetings can be a vehicle for problem solving, peer negotiation, conflict resolution, and the development of communication strategies. Some of the descriptor words used to locate these studies included *class meetings, problem solving, peer mediation, social-emotional development, conflict resolution, young children, classroom community, and communication.*

The studies comprised of two groups. The first group of studies consists of qualitative and descriptive information by Rowe (1988), Styles (2001), Donahue (2001), and Angell (2004), focusing on the teacher's perspective of Class Meetings, teacher-student interaction, and the definitional format for the meetings. The second group of studies, quantitative in their methodological orientation, includes investigations by Johnson, Johnson, Dudley, and Maguson (1995) and Sandy and Boardman (2000) as well as further exploration by Johnson and Johnson (2004). These theorists and the studies created the background structure and foundation for my research.

The challenge for me in this study was not in the actual doing of the Class Meetings because once underway the facilitator/researcher is totally engaged in working with the children. My purpose was to learn about the roles teachers play in Class Meetings, types of teacher talk used to influence student thinking and talk, problems identified by young children and problem solving-solving strategies young children

develop within Class Meetings. I collected data through the following sources: video and audio taping Class Meetings, field notes, and digital photographs. I documented commonalities, patterns, and differences as I collected the data from the beginning of my study and I used my research questions to guide my investigations. Through a detailed review of the data spanning the research timeline including transcriptions from the video and audio tapes, and examination and reflection on the data, I created “categories” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 193) to address the concerns of my research questions. This occurred throughout the data collection and the investigation process.

My primary participants included the Acacia Early Childhood Enrichment Program director, a classroom teacher, a teaching assistant and 20 young children, 10 boys and 10 girls. The study also incorporated 25 parent participants, another teacher and a teaching assistant.

In this chapter I review the findings related to my four research questions. I briefly describe the data analysis, summarize the findings, and discuss what I learned about each of my research questions. I provide insights and implications from this research for other early childhood educators as a way to view their practice through the inclusion of Class Meetings into emergent curriculums for early childhood programs. I offer researchers categories for analyzing teacher-talk and problem solving strategies utilizing group forums with young children and I present data in the area of social emotional development. I also demonstrate how Class Meeting facilitators and

preschoolers create mediation tools that support the children's ability to operate in the social world moving beyond a child's egocentric space.

Summary of Findings

For this summary, I provide a brief description of the data analysis, the major findings, and my new understandings for each question. My first research question was inclusive in scope: What roles do teachers play in Class Meetings? Overall the findings indicate that the role of the teacher as a Class Meeting facilitator is broad in depth and scope. Initially, I formulated a definition for the teacher as facilitator in the context of Class Meetings with young children, meaning that the teacher provides an opportunity for children to come together within a democratically conceived and structured classroom for the purpose to collaboratively develop communication skills and positive talk to support the identification of problems and brainstorm creative ways to problem solve. Next, I identified the major roles of the teacher as facilitator within the Class Meeting as providing a collaborative setting to develop communication skills and positive talk for identifying challenges and brainstorming, supporting the growth of oral language, student interpersonal relationships, leadership qualities, a caring classroom community, establishing a meeting structure and process for interactions, defining and sharing format and components, making alternative activities available, and maintaining a position of neutral authority.

Three major categories of activities emerged from the data on roles that the teacher as facilitator undertakes in Class Meetings: organizing the Class Meeting's physical and temporal classroom space, active listening that guides and supports teacher talk, and establishing the procedures.

My second question sought to uncover more directly the impact of teacher talk: What types of teacher talk are used to influence student thinking and talk within Class Meetings? Focusing on my role as facilitator in supporting the children's development of thinking and talk through examining the meeting discourse from transcribed video and audio-taped Class Meetings, I created the following four teacher talk categories: respectful interactions, oral-language, critical reasoning, and problem-solving. The discussion video and audio tapes were compared and analyzed to identify characteristics, properties and conditions that eventually evolved into these four categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) for my teacher talk and the development of children's thinking and talk. The video taped meetings became the major information source because the child who was speaking was more easily identified and often these young preschool aged children used gestures such as nodding their head or pointing to answer questions. This information was difficult to obtain from audio tapes and field notes due to the challenge of recognizing individual children's voices. As a participant in the research as the Class Meeting facilitator, the writing of field notes was delayed until after the meeting. The scripts from the beginning, middle and end of the research period were reviewed, analyzed and applied to establish the teacher talk categories. Often, actions, events, and

talk from different categories occurred at the same time or overlapped; however, it was important to characterize each interaction in terms of teacher talk to have a better understanding of the cognitive and communication experiences teachers can provide students during a Class Meeting.

In viewing the video tapes my struggle became to see my own behavior and talk in an analytical way, to generate analytical categories and further define my interactions with the children. In my role as investigator, I became aware during the data review of the missed opportunities for supporting student growth and the potential for enhancing the roles of a Class Meeting facilitator, teasing out information as the Class Meetings developed, especially when viewing the videotapes and analyzing the results. Sometimes my concern with moving through the meeting components prematurely closed down the potential for teacher-child exchanges and engagements. I was surprised at the extensive amount of teacher talk that took place within the entire meeting. The proportionately greater amount of teacher talk was a specific finding necessary that I believe was necessary in order to accommodate children of this age group from being easily distracted, maintaining continuity and keeping focused on the meetings. As I identified the four categories of teacher talk, respectful interactions, oral-language, critical reasoning, and problem-solving, I saw that with this age group in particular it was necessary to have a large degree of understanding of my own thought processes and children's reasoning in order to scaffold and model a meta-linguistic language and knowledge level.

As a result of participating in this particular study on Class Meetings I became aware that three-year old children could comprehend and implement the abstract cognitive concepts and associated terminology within the Class Meeting. I discovered the importance of thinking about my thinking and analyzing my reasons for specific teacher talk interactions. I learned that with effective teacher talk students could identify problems and develop strategies to solve them.

The third research question was this: What problems are identified in a Class Meetings with young children? Reys, Suydam, and Lindquist (1989), suggested that “A problem involves a situation in which a person wants something and does not know immediately what to do to get it” (p. 27). Schiever (1991), described one problem type as, “The problem is unknown or undefined and the method and solution are unknown to both the presenter and solver” (p. 14). Schiever’s work suggests that these are “real-life” problems, which is the case in the kinds of problems that surfaced in the Class Meetings. I examined five Class Meetings during the research timeline and found that within the five scripts two types of problems, intrapersonal and interpersonal, emerged during the problem identification and these two types of problems directly correlated to Gardner’s (1983) personal intelligences. Then I returned to the data and looked at a larger number of Class Meeting scripts to apply the identified problem categories. This larger data source was in agreement with the initial finding from the five scripts that the majority of the problems introduced during the Class Meeting were interpersonal in nature. It was also evident that the language expression utilized during the Class Meeting incorporated

Gardner's (1999) linguistic intelligence of "sensitivity to spoken language" (p. 41) and the "capacity to use language to accomplish certain goals" (p. 41).

The final question addressed during this study was: What problem-solving strategies do young children develop within Class Meetings? To answer this question, I returned to the data and found two types of problem solving strategies emerged. One involved a positive spoken or verbal response and/or a physical action such as saying something like *next time please show me respect*, turning on a light, shaking hands, talking it out, or using walking feet.

The other type involved a self-controlled, self-reflecting, self-regulated response that demonstrated resilience. These responses included withholding from the action or withdrawing from the conflict, creating self imposed intrapersonal "time out" or restraining themselves from further conflict.

The research indicated that there were many identifiable changes throughout the research period. The children became familiar with the Class Meeting terminology and utilized the vocabulary with less teacher guidance, modeling and coaching. I also found that waiting to introduce the problem solving component until students were comfortable with making and practicing acknowledgments worked effectively. There were more students attending the meetings at the end of the research period than at the beginning. The attendance growth pattern for the meetings moved up and down gradually like a wave, increasing with a larger number of students volunteering to participants at the end.

Many students, most notably the youngest, extended their oral language expression, were easier to understand, utilized the Class Meeting terminology and extended their sentence length. Students also began to implement the language and problem solving techniques outside of the Class Meeting forum. Taylor, a three-year old, was able to introduce her problem in the Class Meeting, consider solution strategies suggested by the other students, share this information with her parents, take action, return to school and share her results. Other children, as documented in the scripts, shared their ability to solve problems outside of the Class Meeting without assistance from their peers or teachers.

Implications and Recommendations

The implications for this study are relevant and related to five major audiences: parents and families, early childhood educators, teacher educators, policy makers, and researchers. In this section, I first address the implications of Class Meetings for parents and families. Next, I concentrate on early childhood educators discussing the importance for early childhood educators to understand their purpose for teacher talk and the inclusion of Class Meetings into the curriculum. Then I look at the relevance of Class Meetings for teacher education. After that, I consider implications for policy makers regarding testing, state standards and No Child Left Behind. Finally, I explain some of the issues for future research.

Implications for Parents and Families.

The impact of Class Meetings can extend to parents and families. Sharing Class Meeting terminology with parents and families such as acknowledgments, problems and challenges, strategies, and solutions can encourage parents and families to integrate this vocabulary into daily conversations with their children, thus extending and supporting the value of the school Class Meetings. Parent meetings and flyers describing the Class Meeting format and components can encourage the incorporation of family home meetings that assist in positive family communication and problem solving. During family meetings children can provide a leadership role through the sharing of the Class Meeting components, facilitating the family meetings, utilizing the terminology and suggesting creative strategies for problem solving to their family members.

Implications for Early Childhood Educators.

Class Meetings can play an important role within early childhood classrooms. By facilitating social interactions and critical thinking, the Class Meeting model bridges the disciplines for success within schools. Problem solving applies to all subject areas within the curriculum. Class Meetings provide a forum to support developmentally appropriate practice (Copple and Bredekamp 2009) and meaningful learning in early childhood education classrooms. This study confirms both Piaget's (1972) and Vygotsky's (1978) work regarding children's language and thought and their cognitive abilities. However, in this study these preschool children demonstrated sophisticated problem solving identification and the development of problem solving strategies at earlier ages than

outlined in Piaget's cognitive stages. The effects of Class Meetings on children's cognitive and language growth suggest that this methodology may have important theoretical implications.

Giving young children the opportunity to express creativity and empathetic abilities encourages them to make critical decisions regarding their own emotional states. When young children feel safe to move beyond their egocentric spaces Piaget (1972) Vygotsky (1978) and use their voices as tools to operate in the social world, the effects extend from the child, to the child and parents, to the child and school, to the child and community, and the child and society.

Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of Child Development (1979) illustrates these influences and the connections between the micro and macro system environments that create the comprehensive chronosystem vital for a child's development. Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2005) argues that experiences in these environments contribute to a child's growth and development. It is important for teachers to create these kinds of environments in their school settings. The influence of the Reggio Emilia approach (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998) can be seen more and more in early childhood educational practice throughout the world. Reggio educators value the importance of messages received from the environment and they are often quoted as saying, "The environment is the third teacher" (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998. p. 177) in conjunction with the two customary classroom teachers in Reggio schools. However, I

would extend this notion by including parents and families as a child's first and foremost influential teachers.

Throughout their planning and application, Reggio Emilia practitioners place great emphasis on the intent to communicate through the surroundings (Edwards et al., 1998). The teachers and staff at the early childhood center in this study effectively utilized the classroom space by presenting a variety of optional activities for the children within a welcoming and comfortable Class Meeting space incorporating a leather couch, rug area and soft lighting. Thus, the building subtly “nourishes and supports... sensory perceptions” encouraging students to refine and develop them (Ceppi and Zini 1998 p. 15). The “multisensoriality” of this environment encouraged the sense of community and shared purpose (Ceppi & Zini 1998 p. 16). The Reggio Emilia educators and architects support the view that “the shape of the spaces, the functional organization, and the whole body of sensory perceptions including light, color, acoustic, tactile effects and microclimatic conditions” serve to foster the development of the children's unique, individual languages and intelligences (Ceppi & Zini 1998 p. 16). This study could have implications in the way that early childhood educators arrange the classroom space.

Observing group dynamics documented from video taped Class Meetings could provide assessments for young children's social emotional growth and for professional development through the examination of teacher talk. Furthermore, the Class Meeting model could be a useful tool for class management by establishing, incorporating and

extending the democratic principles outlined by Dewey (1916) into the early childhood curriculum.

As identified through the research on literature circles, the effects of teacher talk and active listening are relevant to critical reasoning and problem solving. The categories of teacher talk identified in this study could become a means for other early childhood educators to better understand and incorporate the close examination of teacher talk within their classroom practice.

The data on Class Meetings from this study indicates that when children are given a choice between play centers and attending Class Meetings over a twelve week period greater numbers of children participate voluntarily in the meetings. This finding reflects the significance of giving young children choice and a voice in the classroom. These preschool students demonstrated a preference for engaging in the Class Meetings as an alternative to other classroom activities including block building, painting, dress-up, and science investigations as indicated that over a period of time young children self select group discussions. The gradual progression and self selection of Class Meetings over time indicates that early childhood educators should consider offering Class Meetings for longer periods within the curriculum and not be concerned when initially the children may make other choices.

Recommendations for teachers who want to begin using Class Meetings

Before beginning Class Meetings:

- Read literature related to Class Meetings.
- Find a school in your area where an experienced early childhood educator is conducting Class Meetings as part of the school curriculum or where a mentor program is offered to access professional development.
- Arrange a comfortable space preferably away from the other activity distracting choices.
- Identify the discussion area using a rug and other classroom furniture.
- Make the classroom space flexible to accommodate small to large groups of children.
- Select an appropriate time during the day to offer the choice of Class Meetings and provide alternative independent activities for the children. (I have found that after outdoor activities and exercise it is easier to get young children to settle down and focus on group discussions. Often misunderstandings occur during outdoor time. When children return inside they are interested in discussing their dilemmas.)
- Coordinate with teaching assistants or classroom volunteers as to their duties and responsibilities during the Class Meetings.
- Once the Class Meetings are underway:
 - Be prepared to have a steep learning curve. There may be uncomfortable moments when first starting the meetings. Resist the temptation to fill the silent meeting space entirely with teacher talk and to complete your own agenda. Give children opportunities to make choices with which you may not agree.
 - Be aware that when you begin Class Meetings, you have a structure to work with as with other instructional activities, but unlike most instructional activities the content for the Class Meeting comes from the children's own experiences, their own problems, and their own attempts to solve those problems.
 - Be flexible, utilize other school resources such as another teachers, the school nurse, the school counselor, parent volunteers, and outside school resource programs for information and techniques to foster children's social and emotional development.
 - Elicit parent support by informing them of the Class Meetings through flyers, parent meetings and/or providing documentation through photographs and text from selected Class Meeting scripts.

- Provide parents and school administrators with a glossary of terms and definitions utilized within the Class Meetings.
- Make sure the Class Meeting component is featured as a curriculum component in school brochures and flyers.

Implications for Teacher Educators.

We have to teach teachers to use children's play and retain children's rights of self selection and choice as channels for engaging children's minds. Increased student choice to attend Class Meetings over play activities guides teacher educators with the understanding that within the early childhood setting there is reason to provide these types of opportunities for children.

If a teacher has not experienced the excitement, joy, and connection to meaningful learning experiences in their own education process then it would be difficult for them to employ these kinds of learning experiences within their pedagogical practice. Short and Burke (1991) state that "the realization that we have choices, that there are alternatives open to us as learners, allows us to develop a sense of ownership and responsibility about our learning" (p. 13). This emphasizes the importance of developing teacher awareness as a learner, the accompanying responsibility, and ways they can make a difference in their classroom environments and the lives of the students.

My study demonstrates how an experienced early childhood educator executes the Class Meetings. The implication for research is considering the problems and difficulties in helping future and present early childhood educators develop the skills I identified in this study. Initially, my own learning curve with Class Meetings was over a two to three

year period and was brought back into focus and extended by doing this research project. I realize from my own student experience of having university professors who provide a collaborative community of learning that this allowed me to learn about the importance of providing choice, group discussions, team work, valuing student contributions and prior knowledge, and collaboration within the adult teacher education learning environment. Preparing teachers with these types of experiences within their teacher education programs could be provide the necessary support to encourage them to engage with these types of experiences with their own students.

After completing my data collection, I was asked to return to the Vail School District as a consultant during the 2008-2009 school year to provide professional development for classroom teachers in the early childhood centers, after school, and during extended day programs. It is important for teachers experienced with the Class Meeting process to collaborate, mentor and support the classroom teacher's and staff's implementation and facilitation of Class Meetings. As a consultant and mentor specifically focusing on Class Meetings, I conducted 4-5 district professional development seminars with early childhood teachers, teaching assistants, and the afterschool staff. During these presentations, I gave an overview of Class Meetings and their four components; introduced theoretical constructs to bridge theory into practice; conducted a mock Class Meeting where teachers were able to play the role of a child experiencing the Class Meeting procedure; showed a video with kindergarten children participating in a Class Meeting; and answered questions and concerns raised by the

participants regarding Class Meetings, their students needs, or specific situations. A major concern was with developing ways they could extend their students' talk through questioning to gain further information. Together we brainstormed and developed possible probing questions.

As part of this mentoring program, I also supported teachers, staff, and their students by arranging a time to meet in their classrooms. I found it important to alleviate the possible fear that I was there to evaluate their teaching performance.

During each initial classroom visit, I asked teachers if they wanted me to run the meeting so that they could observe or if they would like to run the meeting and together we would discuss it afterwards. The majority of the teachers chose to have me demonstrate the meeting. During follow-up visitations, I observed the classroom teachers or staff members facilitating a Class Meeting with their students. After these meetings we would discuss concerns and accomplishments. In the middle of the year this school district asked me to extend and continue the program in other school sites. During the 2009-2010 school year, Class Meetings were mandated by this school district to become part of the early childhood enrichment curriculum for all faculty and staff.

Another implication for teacher educators is the use of Class Meetings as a support for classroom management. Teachers could benefit from the reduction of stress and conflict generated from interpersonal problems prevalent with this age group by providing a group forum focusing on strategies for problem solving and the resolution of

interpersonal problems. Providing young students and teachers a format to co-construct strategies and allowing children to navigate their own paths of discovery creates the potential for children to apply their understandings independently throughout their lives.

Implications for Policy Makers.

Policy makers are strategic stakeholders in the educational process of young children. This Class Meeting research could provide a forum to demonstrate alternatives to scripted early childhood classroom curriculums, and standardized testing, and as a means of documenting the Early Childhood State Standards. For example, Class Meetings could offer teachers evidence for documenting the use of exhibited state standards such as showing respect for self, others and the environment, getting along with others, and problem solving. It could also serve as a catalyst for policymakers to institute policies and require funding to support practices similar to Class Meetings.

Implications for Researchers.

Recommendations for future research include incorporating a larger participant size with a wider range of socio-economic backgrounds and ethnicities. The sample size for this research was relatively small. An extension of the research to better document how these meetings and children's thinking develop over time. Gathering information from parent and teacher surveys could give other perspectives on the influence of Class Meetings. Another important specific recommendation for future research is to wait to introduce the concept of problem solving and challenges until several meetings have taken place. This gives the children of this young age the opportunity to become familiar

with sitting in a circle, the Class Meeting format, and making acknowledgments. Furthermore, utilizing a collaborative research partner to document the Class Meetings would allow for another perspective during the research period and data analysis.

Additionally, having children represent various aspects of the Class Meetings such as their feelings when they solved their problem, depicting the problem/story sequence or what they did to find resolution, through the artistic media. Drawing, painting, clay and written or dictated emergent journals could give other insights into children's thinking process. Follow up interviews with the children could be conducted on the strategies they used, the emotions resulting from use of the selected strategies, and if the children felt they would apply the strategy at another time.

There are implications for research in the area of group dynamics. Researchers could utilize Vygotsky's social cultural theory to re-examine and explore ways to document developmentally appropriate practice specifically with this age group.

Howard Gardner (2006) stated that he has considered adding a "moral intelligence" (p.27) to his list of intelligences. Further research on Class Meetings could provide information on when young children begin to demonstrate the ability to make moral decisions and offer new insights as to whether this could be an identifiable intelligence. Furthermore, Rheta DeVries and Betty Zan (1994) extend the work of Piaget (1954/1981) in favor of the "sociomoral atmosphere" (p. 1) in classrooms. They posit that

“all interactions between and among children and their caregivers/educators have an impact on children’s social and moral experience and development” (p. 1).

There could be a correlation between the conditions created within the group dynamics of Class Meetings and the moral capacities of young children. An example of making moral decisions occurred when three-year-old Patrick showed empathy during the last few weeks of the study. When we gathered together for the Class Meeting, I immediately noticed that, Nathan was visibly upset. I called on Nathan to talk and he said “I feel mean.” I responded with the probing question, How can I help you? I thought than Nathan said, “I want an acknowledgment.” (A later review of the video tapes with muffled sound revealed that it sounded more like Nathan actually said, “I want to give an acknowledgment”). Next, I turned to the Class Meeting group and asked if anyone in the Class Meeting circle would like to give Nathan an acknowledgment. There was a distinct pause from the students then finally one child, Patrick, raised his hand. Patrick said, “I want to acknowledge Nathan for playing with me.” Nathan retorted in a strong, angry voice. “He did not!” I returned to Patrick and said, ‘Nathan does not seem to remember playing with you. Are you sure you did this?’ Patrick shook his head side to side as if to say, ‘no.’ I then asked, “Did you want to give him (Nathan) an acknowledgment to make him feel better? Patrick said, “Yes.” What was profound to me was that after Nathan realized Patrick’s intention was to try and make him feel better, Nathan’s behavior changed and he calmed down. We were able to proceed with the remainder of this Class Meeting without interruption from Nathan. At subsequent Class Meetings, Nathan came

voluntarily ready to participate and there was no evidence of Nathan projecting anger within the Class Meeting circle. This example highlights a young child (Patrick), expressing empathy and utilizing abstract, cognitive, interpersonal skills to support making moral decisions and the peer impact.

Conclusion

Giving children the opportunity to express their creativity and empathetic abilities encourages them to make critical decisions regarding their own emotional states. When children and teachers feel safe to move beyond their life spaces and extend their voices as tools to operate in the social world, the implications are far reaching. Lilian Katz (2008) suggests that we are all responsible for doing what is best for children: “We are all equally human in that we all have dreams, hopes, wishes, fears, and fantasies, and we all want and deserve to be treated with respect. So, let us all do what is in our hands to do as whole-heartedly as well as we know how- and the rest will follow. And even if it doesn’t we will be doing what is right” (p.31). Bredekamp and Copple (2009) argue that teachers need sound “teacher training, continued professional development and regular opportunities to work collaboratively” (p.6) to maintain quality teaching and be expert decision makers. Continued research in the field of early childhood education extends “the early childhood knowledge base and enables the field to refine, redirect or confirm understandings of best practice” (p. 6). This research serves to bridge the gap between theory to practice, and practice to theory, by offering new perspectives utilizing group

dynamics within Class Meetings as a forum for positive communication, problem identification, and the development of problem solving strategies.

APPENDIX A: CLASS MEETING SCRIPTS

A.1: Class Meeting Script 1-August 1, 2008

Line	Speaker	Dialogue	Notes (participants duration: 6 minutes)
201	Teacher:	Ok we are ready to have our Class Meeting today.	Opening the meeting
202	Teacher:	This is exciting. First of all I would like to know if any of you would like to give an acknowledgment to someone that is sitting here on the floor?	
203	Kasey:	I do	1st Acknowledgement
204	Teacher:	K who do you want to acknowledge? (wait time then offers initial words) Can you say I want to acknowledge?	
205	Kasey:	I want to acknowledge P.	
206	Teacher:	P look at K. What did he do?	
207	Kasey:	He let me play with the puzzles.	
208	Teacher:	(Looking at P) Did you realize that when you let him play with the puzzles he was real happy about that?	
209	Patrick:	Nods head	
210	Teacher:	So what do you tell K?	
211	Patrick:	Thank you.	
212	Teacher:	Oh wow! You leaned over and you looked right at him P that was awesome.	

Line	Speaker	Dialogue	Notes
213	Teacher:	Okay well now K I am sure you have been looking at your friends pick someone to go next. Okay? Someone showing respect that wants to give an acknowledgement.	Acknowledgment #2
214	Patrick:	Ethan	
215	Teacher:	Ethan who do you want to acknowledge?	
216	Ethan:	<i>Ethan pauses and looks down.</i>	
217	Teacher:	Do you want some time? Okay we will come back to you.	
218	Kasey:	Can you pick someone else K? Pick another person.	
219	Kasey:	<i>Points to another child in the group.</i>	
220	Teacher:	Who is that?	
221	Kasey:	Kasey	
222	Teacher:	Yes Kasey. So you did get a turn Kasey.	
223	Teacher:	Thanks for being patient. (Earlier when Patrick was selected Kasey stated to the group How come I don't get a turn.)	
224	Teacher:	Alright Kasey who do you have to acknowledge?	Continuation of Acknowledgment #2
225	Kasey:	Jaylene	
226	Teacher:	And what did she do?	
227	Kasey:	We were...I was playing with the dress-up clothes and she was playing with the dress-up shoes.	
228	Teacher:	So you were sharing the dresses together?	
229	Teacher:	J do you remember that happening?	

Line	Speaker	Dialogue	Notes
230	Teacher:	Do you remember that happening? Were you having fun?	
231	Jaylene:	Nods head yes.	
232	Teacher:	Can you look at K and say thank you?	
233	Jaylene:	Yes. Thank you.	
234	K:	You're welcome.	
235	Teacher:	Very nice. Okay Kasey who is going to go next? (A child from the group shouts "me")	Begin Acknowledgement #3
236	Teacher:	Remember to pick somebody who hasn't had a turn, that is showing respect.	
237	Kasey:	Jaylene	
238	Teacher:	Jaylene who do you want to acknowledge?	
239	Jaylene:	Kasey because she helped me with the shoes and her helped me put them on.	
240	Teacher:	What did she let you do?	
241	Jaylene:	<i>Child repeats inaudible</i>	
242	Teacher:	So Kasey helped you with the shoes. Was it fun? (Child nods yes)	
243	Teacher:	Kasey what do you say to her?	
244	Kasey:	Thank you! (strong, firm voice)	
245	Teacher:	And I would like to make an acknowledgment to Cierra up here. (Pointing to the couch.)	Acknowledgment #4 Teacher

Line	Speaker	Dialogue	Notes
246	Teacher:	And Cierra was sitting very nicely when we had a lot of things going on this morning and I asked her to wait patiently, she did. And she said, “ I am waiting very patiently” and she showed a lot of respect so that was wonderful.	
247	Teacher:	Now let’s see did anybody have a problem that they want to talk about? A little problem.	Transition to another meeting component. #1 Problem/Challenge Sharing with others
248	Teacher:	Patrick, I remember you had a little puzzle problem, huh?	
249	Teacher:	What happened at the puzzles?	
250	Patrick:	I was playing with the puzzles dinosaurs.	
251	Teacher:	And what happened with the dinosaur puzzles?	
252	Patrick:	<i>inaudible</i>	
253	Teacher:	Did someone take the puzzles and make you sad?	
254	Patrick:	Yeah	
255	Teacher:	And what did you do?	
256	Teacher:	What did you do when you were sad with the dinosaur puzzles?	
257	Teacher:	How did you solve that problem?	
258	Teacher:	Did you use your words?	PS Strategy #1 Use your words
259	Patrick:	Yeah	
260	Teacher:	Did you ask him if you could play with them again?	
261	Patrick:	Yeah	
262	Teacher:	And did he let you? Do you remember that K?	

Line	Speaker	Dialogue	Notes
263	Kasey:	Yes	PS Strategy #2 Asking again to play.
264	Teacher:	What happened when he was sad with the dinosaur puzzle? What happened?	
265	Kasey:	He didn't let me help.	
266	Teacher:	What? (strong voice)	
267	Kasey:	He didn't let me help?	
268	Teacher:	Oh he didn't let you help. So he took the puzzle back.	
269	Teacher:	But then did you get to play with it later? (Looking at Patrick, question directed to Patrick)	
270	Patrick:	Yeah	
271	Teacher:	So sometimes we just have to take turns huh?	PS Strategy # 3 Taking turns for building friendships
272	Teacher:	That is part of being friends.	
273	Teacher:	Well thank you for sharing about your problem.	
274	Teacher:	Did anyone else have a problem?	transition to #2 Challenge/Problem When someone won't play with you
275	Kasey:	I did. I did.	
276	Teacher:	Okay - what is your problem K?	
277	Kasey:	That C said no one can play with her.	
278	Teacher:	Oh. C do you remember that?	
279	Teacher:	Not right now. When you said no you couldn't play with her...	
280	Teacher:	So what did you do K?	

Line	Speaker	Dialogue	Notes
281	Kasey:	I just ignored her.	<i>PS Strategy #1 Ignoring</i>
282	Teacher:	You just ignored her.	
283	Teacher:	And then did you go somewhere else to play?	<i>PS Strategy #2 Moving away.</i>
284	Kasey:	<i>nods (non-verbal agreement)</i>	
285	Teacher:	Did that solve the problem?	
286	Teacher:	So K you gave an example of a problem that you solved by yourself. Wow! (Looking at C)	*** First identified challenge/problem solved without adult support
287	Teacher:	Do you remember that happening?	
288	Teacher:	Next time she asks to play with you what might you do? (Asking C for a response)	
289	Teacher:	Do you think you could say not right now or okay?	<i>PS Strategy #3 Using words to express opinions (not now, okay)</i>
290	Teacher:	Those are some choices that you could have.	
291	Cierre:	Not right now.	
292	Teacher:	If she said not right now what would you do K?	
293	Kasey:	Go away.	
294	Teacher:	Go away and then maybe come back later.	<i>PS Strategy #4 Revisiting the situation or challenge</i>
295	Teacher:	Okay so we are using lots of great things for solving problems.	
296	C:	I have a problem.	#3 Challenge/Problem Turn-Taking
297	Teacher:	What happened?	

Line	Speaker	Dialogue	Notes
298	C:	Someone put their hand up and I wanted a turn.	
299	Teacher:	Who put their hand up? Did someone put their hand up and you wanted a turn?	
300	Teacher:	Did you hear what C's problem is?	
301	Teacher:	She wanted a turn and she didn't get a turn.	
302	Teacher:	So what happens when we don't get a turn boys and girls?	
303	Child:	Let someone else have a turn.	<i>PS Strategy #1 Let someone else have a turn</i>
304	Teacher:	So you know. We can let somebody else have a turn.	
305	Teacher:	Do we always get a turn when we want it?	
306	Children:	No	
307	Teacher:	Why not?	
308	Child:	Cause its mean.	
309	Teacher:	We just can't huh?	<i>Introduce PS Strategy #2 Let it go</i>
310	Teacher:	Okay well lets join hands. Can you hold my hand.	Closing the Meeting
311	Teacher:	Let's say circle of love.	
312	Group:	Circle of love	
313	Teacher:	Circle of friends	
314	Group:	Circle of friends	
315	Teacher:	We are community!	
316	Group:	We are a community!	

Line	Speaker	Dialogue	Notes
317	Teacher:	Everyone pat yourself on the back .	
318	Teacher:	We had a good class meeting.	
319	Teacher:	Thank you	

A.2 Class Meeting Scripts 2 - September 8, 2008

Line	Speaker	Dialogue	Notes (6 participants, duration 10 minutes)
3000	Teacher:	The more we get together, together, the happier we'll be. For your friends are my friends and my friends are your friends, the more we get together the happier we'll be.	Meeting Opening
3001	Teacher:	Andrew, can you come sit over here so that I can see your pretty face.	
3002	Teacher:	That's awesome! Okay Oops, I am sorry we have a little microphone problem. Okay.	
3003	Teacher:	Okay, crisscross applesauce	
3004	Andrew	Crisscross applesauce	
3005	Teacher:	So, how's it going?	
3006	Group	Good	
3007	Teacher:	Does anybody have an acknowledgment they would like to give?	
3008	Teacher:	Cierra, can you turn this way?	
3009	Kasey	Acknowledgments, acknowledgments	
3010	Teacher:	Look at Cierra. She is ready to give and acknowledgment and we are going to look at her with our pretty eyes. So Cierra who do you want to acknowledge?	Acknowledgment #1

Line	Speaker	Dialogue	Notes
3011	Cierra	Ahh ahh	
3012	Teacher:	Somebody here in our circle. Somebody that did something that made you feel good.	
3013	Teacher:	Andrew are you showing respect?	
3014	Andrew	Nods yes.	
3015	Teacher:	Okay. That's great listening.	
3016	Cierra	Grandma	
3017	Teacher:	She wants to acknowledge her Grandma. What did your Grandma do that made you feel good? Or something that you are going to do and that you are going to look forward to doing?	
3018	Kasey:	Madison no!	
3019	Teacher:	Are you listening to Cierra?	
3020	Cierra	She always lets me swim in the pool.	
3021	Teacher:	She lets you swim in the pool?	
3022	Cierra	Nods yes	
3023	Teacher:	So tonight... Taylor are you listening to Cierra?	
3024	Teacher:	Madison are you showing Cierra respect?	
3025	Teacher:	Okay, look at her with your pretty eyes because right now it is her turn to talk.	
3026	Teacher:	And she says that her Grandma always lets her in the pool.	
3027	Teacher:	So tonight will you tell your Grandma I want to acknowledge you.	
3028	Cierra	Nods yes	

Line	Speaker	Dialogue	Notes
3029	Teacher:	Okay, who wants to give another one?	
3030	Teacher:	Raise your hand. Cierra pick the next person.	
3031	Cierra	Taylor doesn't have her hand up.	
3032	Teacher:	Well pick someone who does have their hand up. Look you have Andrew and Patrick. You have quite a few people that want to give an acknowledgment. I will count to three and if not I'll do it. Okay? One, two, three.	
3033	Teacher:	Patrick	
3034	Cierra	Kasey	
3035	Teacher:	Okay, let's go Kasey who do you want to acknowledge?	
3036	Kasey	Ahmm, Ahmm	
3037	Teacher:	Taylor look at Kasey.	
3038	Teacher:	Somebody here in our circle.	
3039	Kasey	Madison	Acknowledgment #2
3040	Teacher:	And what did Madison do that you really enjoyed?	
3041	Kasey	I asked her if she wanted to go into the dark.	
3042	Teacher:	And what did she say?	
3043	Kasey	No thanks.	
3044	Teacher:	And, Madison do you remember that?	
3045	Madison	Nods yes	
3046	Teacher:	Okay, so you are acknowledging Madison for saying words nicely?	

Line	Speaker	Dialogue	Notes
3047	Teacher:	What is it that she did that made you feel good?	
3048	Kasey	She said yes. She would like to come in the dark.	
3049	Teacher:	Oh so where did you go?	
3050	Madison	I did like the dark.	
3051	Teacher:	Where did you go? Where is that in the dark?	
3052	Kasey	In the bathroom.	
3053	Teacher:	Okay and so	
3054	Kasey	It was just so quick.	
3055	Teacher:	And was it fun?	
3056	Madison	Yeah	
3057	Teacher:	Okay, so what do you say Madison to Kasey?	
3058	Madison	Thank you.	
3059	Kasey	You are welcome.	
3060	Teacher:	And that was very kind.	
3061	Teacher:	Kasey pick the next person. Someone waiting patiently to acknowledge someone in our little circle today. Kasey pick someone.	
3062	Kasey	Why do we have a little circle?	
3063	Teacher:	Well, why do we have a little circle?	
3064	Teacher:	You chose to come here right? And some people chose not to come here. So that is why we have a little circle.	
3065	Kasey	I want to pick, (pause) Andrew.	
3066	Teacher:	Yes, Andrew is waiting so nicely.	
3067	Teacher:	Andrew who do you want to acknowledge? Somebody here in our circle.	
3068	Andrew	I want to acknowledge	
3069	Teacher:	Look here	

Line	Speaker	Dialogue	Notes
3070	Andrew	Katelyn and Katie	
3071	Teacher:	Are they here in our circle?	
3072	Andrew:	(Shakes his head no)	
3073	Teacher:	Look in the circle, somebody here	
3074	Teacher:	Did somebody here in our circle do something that made you feel good? That you enjoyed.	
3075	Teacher:	Are you showing Andrew respect?	
3076	Teacher:	Let's look at Andrew. Who do you want to acknowledge?	
3077	Andrew	I want to acknowledge Kasey.	
3078	Teacher:	Kasey. And what did Kasey do?	
3079	Andrew	She opened the door. And then I punched her, then I kicked her and then I do this. Like this.	
3080	Teacher:	uh huh	Problem # 1
3081	Teacher:	Did you like that when he did that?	
3082	Kasey	Nat huh	
3083	Teacher:	Is that an acknowledgment Kasey?	
3084	Kasey	No	
3085	Teacher:	What was that?	
3086	Kasey	That's a problem.	
3087	Andrew	You have to close the door so lions and bats can't come in.	
3088	Teacher:	So what did you say Kasey when Andrew did that?	
3089	Teacher:	How did you respond when he was kind of pushing at you?	
3090	Kasey	I just walked away.	PSS #1 Moving away or walked away.

Line	Speaker	Dialogue	Notes
3091	Teacher:	You walked away.	
3092	Teacher:	Did you ask him to show you respect?	PSS#2
3093	Kasey	No	
3094	Teacher:	Maybe next time you can do that too.	
3095	Kasey	Please show me respect, Andrew.	
3096	Andrew		
3097	Teacher:	Are you willing to show her respect, Andrew?	
3098	Andrew	No, I am moving to another school and I won't be here.	
3099	Teacher:	Andrew, when you are with Kasey is it okay to push and shove? Is that safe?	
3100	Andrew	No	
3101	Teacher:	Is that safe to push and shove other people?	
3102	Taylor	No	
3103	Teacher:	No. What should we do?	
3104	Kasey	I saw..... He put Marissa down.	
3105	Teacher:	What do we have to do at school to be safe?	
3106	Cierra	Be good	
3107	Kasey	Be nice and be kind to our friends and be respectful and show them respect.	
3108	Teacher:	And what about our hands. Do we use our hands or our words.	
3109	Group	Our words	Review of PSS #2
3110	Teacher:	Yeah and our hands should be mean or gentle?	
3111	Kasey	Gentle	
3112	Group	Gentle	

Line	Speaker	Dialogue	Notes
3113	Kasey	Hands can be mean.	
3114	Teacher:	Yes our hands can be tough sometimes but we want at school to be safe.	
3115	Teacher:	We want them to be gentle.	
3116	Teacher:	Okay, Patrick did you have a problem today?	
3117	Patrick	Yes	
3118	Teacher:	Patrick had a problem.	
3119	Teacher:	Kasey, Patrick had a problem are you willing to listen.	
3120	Kasey	Yes.	
3121	Teacher:	Okay, look at Patrick.	
3122	Teacher:	Taylor, look at Patrick	
3123	Teacher:	What was your problem?	
3124	Patrick	I want to acknowledge	
3125	Teacher:	Who do you want to acknowledge?	
3126	Patrick	Andrew	
3127	Teacher:	What did Andrew do that made you feel good?	
3128	Patrick	I want Andrew to give the bucket back.	
3129	Teacher:	You didn't get your bucket back?	Problem #2
3130	Patrick	No	
3131	Teacher:	You want Andrew to give the bucket back next time?	
3132	Patrick	Yeah.	
3133	Teacher:	So Andrew are you willing to give the bucket back next time he asks for it?	
3134	Andrew	No, because I wasn't done with it.	
3135	Teacher:	Okay, so what could you say?	

Line	Speaker	Dialogue	Notes
3136	Teacher:	Could you say, Patrick in just a minute I will be through and I can give it to you?	PSS1
3137	Teacher:	Or could you say something like... I want to play with it now and when I get done I will let you know?	
3138	Andrew:	(Nods yes.)	
3139	Teacher:	Can you try that next time?	
3140	Andrew	Next time I will let you know you can have my bucket after I am done with using it.	
3141	Patrick	Okay.	
3142	Teacher:	Oh wow! You guys want to shake hands?	PSS #2 Introduced the strategy of shaking hands. Andrew extends his hand and Patrick shakes hands.
3143	Teacher:	Is your problem solved?	
3144	Patrick	Yeah	
3145	Teacher:	Say my problem is solved.	
3146	Patrick	My problem is solved.	
3147	Teacher:	So we had a problem instead of an acknowledgment. That's great.	
3148	Teacher:	Well let's do our community of friends.	Closing the Meeting.
3149	Taylor	I had a problem.	
3150	Teacher:	Okay, you can tell me after we do our little song.	
3151	Teacher:	Circle of love	
3152	Everyone	Circle of love, circle of friends, we are a community.	
3153	Teacher:	Okay let's do a group hug.	
3154	Everyone:	(We all hug one another.)	

Line	Speaker	Dialogue	Notes
3155	Teacher:	So Taylor and Madison want to share something with me real quick.	
3156	Teacher:	What is it Taylor? Come close.	
3157	Taylor	I want to acknowledge my mommy.	Acknowledgment #3
3158	Teacher:	So tonight in the car what do you say?	
3159	Taylor	Thank you for the candy	
3160	Teacher:	Say mommy, I want to acknowledge you or thank you for the candy.	
3161	Teacher:	Can you do that?	
3162	Taylor	Yeah.	
3163	Teacher:	Let me know tomorrow alright.	
3164	Teacher:	Okay, alright. Good job.	
3165	Teacher:	Madison what is your acknowledgment?	Acknowledgment # 4
3166	Madison	I want to acknowledge Sophie.	
3167	Teacher:	Sophie, what did Sophie do that made you feel good?	
3168	Madison	She loves me and she plays with me and Taylor.	
3169	Teacher:	She loves you. Is that what you said?	
3170	Madison	Yes	
3171	Teacher:	She loves you and she plays with you and Taylor.	
3172	Teacher:	So when you go outside and you see Sophie what are you going to say to her?	
3173	Madison	Thank you.	
3174	Teacher:	Say, I want to acknowledge you for playing with me. Okay?	
3175	Madison:	(Shakes head yes.)	
3176	Teacher:	Alright, have a good day. Bye bye friends	

APPENDIX B: HUMAN SUBJECT FORMS

B.1: PARENT/LEGAL GUARDIAN PERMISSION FORM

Project Title: Class Meetings with Young Children

You are being asked to read the following material to ensure that you are informed of the nature of this research study and of how your child will participate in it, if you permit him/her to do so. Signing this form will indicate that you have been so informed and that you give your permission. Federal regulations require written informed consent prior to participation in this research study so that you can know the nature and risks of your child's participation and can allow him/her to participate or not participate in a free and informed manner.

PURPOSE

Your child is being invited to participate voluntarily in the above-titled research project. The purpose of this project is to explore the use of class meetings with young children to gain insight into children's problem solving strategies, reasons for verbal and non-verbal language use, and the impact of teacher talk within the meetings. As teacher, administrator, or a parent of a student in the Vail Early Childhood Enrichment Program, you are being invited to participate voluntarily in the above-titled research project.

SELECTION CRITERIA

The Principal Investigator or a member of his/her study staff will discuss the requirements for participation in this study with you. To be eligible to participate, your child is between 3 and 6 years of age and must be a student in the Vail Early Childhood Enrichment Program at Acacia Elementary School . A total of 70 individuals (including 6 staff members, 1 site director, 17-22 children and 17-44 parents) will be enrolled in this study locally.

PROCEDURE(S)

The following information describes your child's participation in this study which will last up to one hour a day, three days a week beginning July 15 until the beginning of October 2008. The children will be invited to come to the rug area to sit and share acknowledgements, discuss classroom challenges and give their ideas on ways to create a classroom community. During this time, I will be facilitating the class meetings which are part of this early childhood program curriculum. Also at this time the video camera, and audio tape recorder will be recording the children's responses and teacher questions. At times children may be asked to draw pictures or write letters related to the class meeting discussions. These artifacts will be copied or photographed as part of the research. Some children may also be interviewed regarding their class meeting experiences.

RISKS

There is minimal risk for your child for his/her participation. The things that he/she will be doing have no more risk than from attending a regular school day. Although I have tried to avoid risks, you may feel that some questions asked may be stressful or upsetting. If this occurs you can stop participating immediately. I can give you information about individuals who may be able to help you with these problems.

BENEFITS

There is no direct benefit to your child from his/her participation.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information will not be confidential. However, only the use of your child's first name will be used in publications and the video. Representatives of regulatory agencies (including the University of Arizona Human Subjects Protection Program) may access your records to ensure quality of data and study conduct.

PARTICIPATION COSTS AND SUBJECT COMPENSATION

There is no cost to you or your child for participating except for the time. Neither you nor your child will be compensated for your child's participation.

CONTACTS

You can obtain further information about the research or voice concerns or complaints about the research by calling the Principal Investigator Emily Vance Ph.D.

Candidate, at (520) 621-1311. If you have questions concerning your rights as a research participant, have general questions, concerns or complaints or would like to give input about the research and can't reach the research team, or want to talk to someone other than the research team, you may call the University of Arizona Human Subjects Protection Program office at (520) 626-6721. (If out of state use the toll-free number 1-866-278-1455.) If you would like to contact the Human Subjects Protection Program via the web, please visit the following website: <http://www.irb.arizona.edu/contact/>.

LIABILITY

Side effects or harm are possible in any research program despite the use of high standards of care and could occur through no fault of your child or the investigator involved. Known side effects have been described in this consent form. However, unforeseeable harm also may occur and require care. You do not give up any of your or your child's legal rights by signing this form. In the event that your child requires or you are billed for medical care that you feel has been caused by the research, you should contact the principal investigator Emily Vance (name of Ph.D. Candidate, at (520)621-1311).

AUTHORIZATION

Before giving my consent by signing this form, the methods, inconveniences, risks, and benefits have been explained to me and my questions have been answered. I may ask questions at any time and I am free to withdraw my child from the

project at any time without causing bad feelings or affecting his/her medical care. My child's participation in this project may be ended by the investigator or by the sponsor for reasons that would be explained. New information developed during the course of this study which may affect either my willingness or that of my child to continue in this research project will be given to me as it becomes available. This consent form will be filed in an area designated by the Human Subjects Protection Program with access restricted by the principal investigator, Emily Vance, Ph.D. Candidate, or authorized representative of the Language, Reading and Culture Department. I do not give up any of my or my child's legal rights by signing this form. A copy of this signed consent form will be given to me.

Subject's Name (printed)

Parent/Legal Guardian's Signature

Date

Witness (if necessary)

Date

INVESTIGATOR'S AFFIDAVIT:

Either I have or my agent has carefully explained to the parent/legal guardian of the subject the nature of the above project. I hereby certify that to the best of my knowledge the person who signed this consent form was informed of the nature, demands, benefits, and risks involved in his/her child's participation.

Signature of Presenter

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

B.2: Parent/Legal Guardian Informed Consent Form

Class Meetings with Young Children

Introduction

You are being invited to take part in a research study. The information in this form is provided to help you decide whether or not to take part. Study personnel will be available to answer your questions and provide additional information. If you decide to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this consent form. A copy of this form will be given to you.

What is the purpose of this research study?

The purpose of this study is to explore the use of class meetings with young children to gain insight into children's problem solving strategies, reasons for verbal and non-verbal language use, and the impact of teacher talk within the meetings. As a parent of a student in the Vail Early Childhood Enrichment Program, you are being invited to participate voluntarily in the above-titled research project.

Why are you being asked to participate?

You are being invited to participate in this study because you are a parent/legal guardian of a child in the Acacia Early Childhood Enrichment Program. As part of the study, we would like to know parent's or legal guardians' ideas on class meetings. The principal investigator will discuss the requirements for participation in this study with you.

How many people will be asked to participate in this study?

Approximately 70 persons will be asked to participate in this study.

What will happen during this study?

The following information describes your participation in this study during the months of July- October 2008.

Your child will be participating in routine class meetings that may last up to one hour a day, three days a week beginning July 15 until the beginning of October 2008. The children will be invited to come to the rug area to sit and share acknowledgements, discuss classroom challenges, and give their ideas on ways to create a classroom community.

Parents will be asked to complete a survey the first week of school describing ways their child solves dilemmas and uses positive talk. Parents will be given the same survey at the end of the nine weeks. The survey will be given to parents or guardians when they come to pick their child up. Some parents will be invited to do an interview after the class meeting sessions are completed.

How long will I be in this study?

During the study period from July through October 2008, you will be asked to fill out a parent survey twice, once, at the beginning of the study and again at the end. This survey will reflect your opinions about how your child solves dilemmas and uses positive talk. It

may take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete the parent survey each time. There will also be an opportunity for some parents to participate in an interview at the end of the study that will take approximately 30 minutes. This interview will be related to your child's experience with class meetings. An open-ended interview protocol sheet will be handed to parents before the interview begins.

Are there any risks to me?

The things that you will be doing have some risk depending on the nature of what you discuss in the parent survey particularly if you reveal personal information or something that is a breach of confidentiality. Although I have tried to avoid risks, you may feel that information you have given is confidential and should not be revealed to others. If this occurs you can stop participating immediately and request this data be eliminated from the study.

Are there any benefits to me?

There is no direct benefit to you as a participant beyond the knowledge that educators gain about their students and the opportunity to engage in professional reflection on their teaching. This study will provide insights on instructional issues and engagements for educators in other schools who are interested in exploring class meetings with young children and teachers.

Will there be any costs to me?

Aside from your time, there are no costs for taking part in the study.

Will I be paid to participate in the study?

There is no monetary compensation for participating in the study.

Will video or audio recordings be made of me during the study?

Yes, along with field notes both video and audio recordings will be made during the study. Audio and Video recordings will be made during the study to make certain that the responses are recorded accurately only if you check the box below:

I give my permission for audio/video recordings to be made of me during our participation in this research study.

At the end of the study there is a possibility that video and or audio vignettes from the study will be used for teacher training.

I give permission for video vignettes to be used for professional teacher training.

Will the information that is obtained from me be kept confidential?

The information for the dissertation will be confidential. The use of a pseudonym will be used when writing about the study. However, the video vignettes will not be confidential as they may reveal your first name and picture.

It is also possible that representatives of federal regulatory agencies and the University of Arizona Human Subjects Protection Program may review your records for proper study conduct and quality.

What if I am harmed by the study procedures?

If you self-identify being distressed or depressed as a result of this study you will be provided referral information to seek professional help.

May I change my mind about participating?

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide to not begin or to stop the study at any time. Refusing to participate will have no effect on your relationship with the Vail School District. You can discontinue your participation with no effect on your relationship with the Vail School District. Also any new information discovered about the research will be provided to you. This information could affect your willingness to continue your participation.

Whom can I contact for additional information?

You can obtain further information about the research or voice concerns or complaints about the research by calling the Principal Investigator Emily Vance Ph.D. Candidate, at (520) 621-1311. If you have questions concerning your rights as a research participant, have general questions, concerns or complaints or would like to give input about the research and can't reach the research team, or want to talk to someone other than the research team, you may call the University of Arizona Human Subjects Protection

Program office at (520) 626-6721. (If out of state use the toll-free number 1-866-278-1455.) If you would like to contact the Human Subjects Protection Program via the web, please visit the following website: <http://www.irb.arizona.edu/contact/>.

Your Signature

By signing this form, I affirm that I have read the information contained in the form, that the study has been explained to me, that my questions have been answered and that I agree to take part in this study. I do not give up any of my legal rights by signing this form.

Name (Printed)

Participant's Signature

Date signed

Statement by person obtaining consent

I certify that I have explained the research study to the person who has agreed to participate, and that he or she has been informed of the purpose, the procedures, the possible risks and potential benefits associated with participation in this study. Any questions raised have been answered to the participant's satisfaction.

Name of study personnel

Study personnel Signature

Date signed

B.3: Minor Verbal Consent Dialogue

Your parents told me it was okay for you to participate in a study that I am doing about class meetings. Is it all right for me to take your picture, record your words and videotape the class meetings? I may also make copies of your drawings or some of your writings.

At the end of this session, some of you may be asked some questions of your ideas on the class meetings.

You do not have to be in this study and you can stop at any time.

Do you have any questions? Is this okay?

B.4: Parent Meeting Agenda

Opening the meeting

Introduction of the principal investigator

Explanation of the class meeting study

Review voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any time

Question and answer session

Pass out forms

Thank you for those present

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