The Progression and Development of Community in a First Grade Classroom

Master’s Thesis

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By
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Abstract

This teacher-researcher study aims to document and investigate some of the educational practices implemented by a teacher to facilitate students’ social-emotional growth and community development in the classroom. This study takes a comprehensive look at daily events in the teacher’s first grade classroom throughout the first 10 weeks of school. Specifically, this paper is a case study that details one student’s journey of social-emotional development in relation to the community building process in the classroom as a whole. The teacher-researcher acted as an active participant using multiple methods of data collection including student interviews and self-reflection of teaching practices and observations. This study reveals changes in one student’s social-emotional growth, as well as some aspects of the development of community in the classroom.
Dedication

To all educators who believe the social curriculum is just as important as the academic curriculum. To my past and future students, you have taught me more than you will ever know. May I continue to draw inspiration from each of you. To my friends, family and colleagues, thank you for your ongoing encouragement and support.
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Finally, to my mother and father, words cannot express my gratitude for your continued and constant support. You are my biggest fans and number one cheerleaders! No matter the endeavor, I know I can always count on your support. I love you both.
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Drama, Language Arts, Literature, and Reading Education
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Chapter 1: Introduction

The need to address the social-emotional challenges that face students in schools today is critical (Wood, 2007, p. 9; Zins et al., 2007, pp. 191-192). Many educators agree that many students entering school today lack basic social-emotional skills such as self awareness (e.g. identifying and recognizing emotions), social awareness (e.g. perspective taking, empathy), responsible decision making (e.g. problem solving), self management (e.g. impulse control, self motivation), and relationship management (e.g. communication, social engagement, building relationships) skills to aid them in current and future academic and social success (Zins et al., 2007, p. 195). When such skills are taught through appropriate modeling and practicing of behaviors, many students feel a stronger sense of belonging and significance towards school, which yields higher academic success and social-emotional health for those students (Rimm-Kaufman, 2006, p. 2).

Teachers and parents are generally familiar with school-based character education programs that teach students about concepts related to respect, cooperation, and caring. Such as monthly character education programs which focus on a specific word (i.e. respect, cooperation, kindness, etc.) related to social behaviors each month. However, teachers and parents may be unfamiliar with positive social emotional teaching approaches that help facilitate social emotional learning and growth and community building among elementary students, as well as the potential need for such programming and practices within classrooms and schools (Zins et al., 2007, p. 192). As Katz & Galbraith (2006) argue, “Early childhood educators must not only acknowledge the importance of promoting young children’s cognitive development but also recognize the importance of addressing the “whole child” (e.g. the child’s sensorimotor, communication, social, and emotional areas)” (p. 6).

This study was designed to document and analyze at the way community is formed in the elementary classroom, in which I teach, as well as the teaching practices used to facilitate such
community building with students. Specifically, I highlight one student and reflect on my perceptions of his social-emotional growth, as it relates to other students, and the ways in which I believe my own teaching practices facilitated building community among all students in the classroom.

Problem Statement and Significance

Studies have researched and shown that social-emotional curricula in school increase students’ academic performances (Rimm-Kaufman, 2006; Zins et al., 2007), yet, research that looks specifically at how such communities are built and use social-emotional teaching practices to build community in classrooms is lacking. With the increased awareness of the importance of social-emotional competence among students in schools, many teachers see an increased need for a social-emotional curriculum in classrooms (Katz & Galbraith, 2006; Wood, 2007).

Research Question

By focusing on one child in the teacher-researcher’s classroom, this case study aims to investigate the development of community within a first grade classroom throughout the first 10 weeks of school and the perceived effects of such practices have on elementary students’ social and emotional growth and development of community within the classroom. The central question that guided this study was as follows: What effect did my teaching practices seem to have on the development of classroom community especially in relation to social-emotional growth?
Chapter 2: Review of Literature and Research

The review of research for this study developed the theoretical framework related to sociocultural approaches to teaching and learning, young children’s social-emotional development and curricula used in schools, the Responsive Classroom method of teaching and learning, and dramatic inquiry as an educational tool to facilitate social-emotional growth and community building.

Theoretical Framework

Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural theory emphasizes the interdependence of the cultural, social and individual dimensions of the construction of knowledge. Such approaches to learning and development draw heavily upon the work of Lev Vygotsky and his research throughout the 1920s and early 1930s (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 191). The major theme of Vygotsky's theoretical framework is that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition. As cited in John-Steiner & Mahn (1996), Vygotsky believed that every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people and then inside the child (p. 192). Therefore, learners initially rely on their interactions with more experienced people, such as teachers, adults or more advanced peers before internalizing such learning experiences.

Vygotsky believed that a child’s development is interrelated with his or her culture and observed mental development in children through social interactions with significant people in a child’s life. Vygotsky described human cognitive development as a “collaborative process,” meaning the learning process of individuals takes place through social interactions (Lantolf, 2000, pp. 1-2). Vygotsky pioneered the idea that culture and community play important roles in the early development of children’s cognition and learning. Vygotsky’s view of culture and community and the role each play in a child’s development is important when thinking about building community in the classroom. A student’s culture
and community are so intertwined with the school culture and community and both affect one another. Further, students must see the connections between home and school and their parents and teachers to provide the optimal learning experience, while teachers must be able to make connections to students’ cultures and home community.

Vygotsky also saw play as of utmost important in the development of children’s cognitive abilities related to learning development. He viewed play as a time where social rules were put into practice and he believed that practices of play supported all developmental levels, in a condensed form. According to Fleer and Pramling (2008), “Vygotsky’s theory of the role of play in the mental development of children provides powerful new directions for re-thinking how we have conceptualized play.” In essence, Vygotsky believed play was the leading source of social, as well as cognitive development for children (Lantolf, 2000, p. 13). These examples of play as a way for students to further develop their own social-emotional skills are important when thinking about the way teachers plan both academic and social learning experiences for students. Play is sometimes thought to be less valuable in elementary schools focused on academic success.

An important concept developed by Vygotsky is known as The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which has been characterized as the gap or difference between a child’s existing abilities and what he or she can learn under the guidance or assistance of an adult or a more capable peer (Byrnes, 2008, p. 41; Lantolf, 2000, p. 17). The Zone of Proximal Development uses two levels to gauge a child’s ability and potential: A child’s “actual developmental level” (when a child can work unaided on a task or problem) and a child’s “potential developmental level” (the level of competence a child can reach when he or she is guided and supported by another person, such as an adult) (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 198). The proximal zone is the gap between what children are already able to do and what they are not quite ready to accomplish by themselves. This idea of an adult, such as a parent or teacher, guiding a child through the ZPD is known as “scaffolding” (Byrnes, 2008, p. 41). Jerome S. Bruner introduced the

While children’s development of such skills are still understood to be heavily influenced by events and people around them, the views concerning sociocultural theories of childhood are changing to include how children are actively contributing to cultural production and change through negotiation, sharing, and creating culture with adults and each other (Corsaro, 2005, pp. 20-21). Sociocultural theorist Barbara Rogoff, from a Vygotskian perspective, researched the role of adult experts in the process of learning, peer interaction and sociocultural activities of communities (Rogoff, Turkanis, & Bartlett, 2001, p. 3). Rogoff introduced the notion of “participatory appropriation,” showing how individual’s previous participation in events contributes to future events (Corsaro, 2005, p. 20). Corsaro (2005) researched children’s abilities to create and participate in their own peer cultures by appropriating information from the adult world to address their own peer concerns through interpretation and reproduction (p. 20). According to Corsaro (2005), the term interpretive looks at the innovative and creative aspects of children’s participation in society, while reproduction captures the idea that children are actively contributing to cultural production and change (pp. 20-21). His research supports the idea that children and their childhoods are affected by the societies and cultures of which they are members.

*Contextual Theory*

Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979), a renowned Russian-born American psychologist, developed an Ecological Systems Theory. He argued that it is not only necessary to understand how the family or school influences human development, but also the importance of the social environments in which children are raised (p. 3). Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems shows each ecological system. Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory consists of five systems including (Lerner, 2002, p. 238):

- **Microsystem**: Immediate environments (i.e. family, school, peer group, neighborhood, childcare)
- **Mesosystem**: A system comprised of connections between immediate environments (e.g. a child’s home and school)
- Exosystem: External environmental settings which indirectly affect development (e.g. parent’s workplace)
- Macrosystem: The larger cultural context (i.e. Eastern vs. Western culture, national economy, political culture, subculture)
- Chronosystem: The patterning of environmental events and transitions over the course of life.

Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems (“Ecological theory of development,” n.d.)

Bronfenbrenner’s theoretical model transformed the way many social and behavioral scientists approached the study of human beings and their environments. According to Lerner (2002), “The theory itself depicts the dynamic, developmental relations between an active individual and his or her complex, integrated, and changing ecology” (p. 240). Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory led to new directions in educational research and to applications in the design of educational programs and policies. In many classrooms educators put as much emphasis on the social development of children as their academic development while at the same time recognizing the importance of a child’s overall ecological environment affects their learning in the classroom. This is particularly true depending on the surrounding community in which one teaches and reiterates the importance of knowing the children we teachers teach, from individual, cultural, and developmental view points. As stated by Ramsey (1991), “When interpreting children’s behaviors, we constantly need to ask ourselves if we are applying norms and expectations that are congruent with children’s real life experiences” (p. 40).
Concepts resulting from sociocultural and contextual theories have influenced education in many ways. Instructional implications include recognizing students have Zones of Proximal Development, scaffolding lessons, making time for play in the classroom, and the recognition of the importance of a student’s ecological environment.

In examining students’ culture and home community, I am better able to understand their potential contributions to the community building process. What students learn at home in regards to social skills and participation in a community affects the way they contribute to the entire community. Furthermore, students who have little experience with social-emotional learning at home arguably have more social-emotional skills to learn at school which make the process of community building much more difficult.

Social-Emotional Development and Curriculum

With increased demands on educators to focus primarily on academics, social-emotional curricula are oftentimes left out of the classroom altogether or implemented in a fragmented manner through singled out character education programs (e.g. Drug prevention, Anti-bullying campaigns, Service learning programs) (Zins et al., 2007, p. 191). To better understand such social-emotional learning and its potential use and benefits in the classroom, one must understand the nature and implementation of such programming.

According to Zins et al. (2007), social emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children enhance their ability to integrate thinking, feeling, and behaving to achieve important life tasks (p. 192). The social aspect of social-emotional development relates specifically to interaction with people (external), while the emotional aspect directly relates to understanding and appropriately controlling one’s emotions (internal). Arguably, in order to be successful in social relationships (e.g. make and maintain friendships), children must learn to develop five key social-emotional skills: Self awareness (e.g. identifying and recognizing emotions), social awareness (e.g. perspective taking, empathy), responsible decision making (e.g. problem solving), self management (e.g. impulse control, self motivation), and
relationship management (e.g. communication, social engagement, building relationships) (Zins et al., 2007, p. 195).

There are many examples of social emotional education programs available for educators to use in the classroom (i.e. Resolving Conflict Creatively Program [RCCP], Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies [PATHS], Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports [PBIS]). One particular curriculum focused on social-emotional development with young students implemented in this study’s classroom is called Responsive Classroom. Educators who use Responsive Classroom approaches integrate social-emotional curricula into an environment which helps students develop age-appropriate social skills and facilitate emotional health. Such integration of social-emotional learning includes ongoing conversations related to social-emotional development and modeling and practice of appropriate behaviors and skills, which are interwoven into daily classroom pedagogy. Below are the key principles and classroom practices within the Responsive Classroom approach.

Responsive Classroom

Responsive Classroom is an approach to teaching that emphasizes social, emotional, and academic growth (Rimm-Kaufmann, 2006, p. 3). Responsive classroom is based on seven core principles related to the social, emotional and academic growth of elementary students.

First, the social curriculum is just as important as the academic curriculum. In many educational environments teachers focus so heavily on the academic progress of students that the social aspects of development are left behind (Katz & Galbraith, 2006; Zins et al., 2007). Responsive Classroom emphasizes the importance of teaching social skills with students in order to promote social-emotional health and growth.

Second, how children learn is just as important as what they learn: Process and content go hand in hand. When thinking about ways in which children learn it can sometimes be easiest to rely on the end product of a unit and forget about the learning that takes place throughout such a study, due to the less
obvious nature of noticing the learning happening when heavily focused on an end product. For example, although students may be working together on a project and the goal might be to complete said project, while doing so students might be practicing other skills such as those related to social-emotional learning (i.e. cooperation, collaboration, respect).

Third, the greatest cognitive growth occurs through social interaction. As supported by Sociocultural and Contextual theorists, students learn from and with those around them when curriculum is based on the social interactions of students with adults and peers (Lantolf, 2000, pp. 1-2). Oftentimes when students work together they are able to learn from one another and increase their knowledge in a more extensive way than if they worked alone. Vygotsky referred to the gap or difference between a child’s existing abilities and what he or she can learn under the guidance or assistance of an adult or a more capable peer learning taking place when students learn from one another as The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Byrnes, 2008, p. 41; Lantolf, 2000, p. 17).

Fourth, to be successful academically and socially students need to develop a set of social skills: Cooperation, Assertion, Responsibility, Empathy, and Self Control (C.A.R.E.S.). The five key social-emotional skills discussed previously (self awareness, social awareness, responsible decision making, self management, and relationship management, Zins et al., 2007, p. 195) needed for successful social-emotional development also fit into the five outlined social skills emphasized by Responsive Classroom.

Fifth, knowing the children we teach—individually, culturally, and developmentally—is as important as knowing the content we teach. Students enter the classroom environment with complicated histories. Each student has his/her own individual characteristics, cultural history and developmental progress to add to the make-up of the classroom environment. It is vital to think deeply about what each student may add to the classroom culture and need both socially and academically while at school. Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (as discussed previously, p. 5-6), helps frame the impact of a child’s culture and community on their development. Bronfenbrenner referred to the Microsystem as a
child’s immediate environment, including school and/or daycare as one of the most influential factors in a child’s social development (Lerner, 2002, p 240).

Sixth, knowing the families we teach and working with them as partners is essential to children’s education. As supported by Bronfenbrenner, a child’s Mesosystem is comprised of connections between immediate environments (e.g. a child’s home and school) that are vital to the social and emotional development of young students (Lerner, 2002, p. 238). When teachers take time to fully understand the families of students in the classroom, the information learned is invaluable when planning activities and lessons to support each student’s social emotional progress and growth.

Seventh, how the adults at school work together is as important as their individual competence: Lasting change begins with the adult community. Students model behaviors based off of what they notice others doing around them. When adults model appropriate behaviors with one another, students begin to notice such interactions and even practice those behaviors with their own peers.

In addition to the seven core principles, Responsive Classroom also encourages the practice of several key classroom routines to encourage the above mentioned core principles. The routines consist of morning meeting, academic choice, interactive modeling, guided discovery, rule creation, logical consequences, positive teacher language, collaborative problem solving, working with families, and classroom organization.

Morning meeting takes place at the start of each day and is a time when students greet one another, share news with their peers and prepare for the day ahead. Morning meeting is also a time for teachers to teach students how to appropriately greet others using eye contact, an audible speaking voice and a motion such as a handshake, hi-five or wave. In addition, teachers use morning meeting to help students practice listening skills and responding to others in a thoughtful way through questions and comments. During morning meeting students are able to share personal experiences or items that the class might be interested in learning more about. The purpose for having a daily time for students to
share is two-fold, this time is a chance for students to share their won person experiences with the class and a time for children to create their own oral text on a self-chosen topic (Cazden, 1985, p. 72).

Academic choice is a teaching practice used to provide students with choices in their learning by giving students a common goal and a handful of avenues to accomplish the goal. Academic choice gives students ownership of their learning while increasing student engagement. Interactive modeling teaches children to notice and internalize expected behaviors through a specific modeling system. First, the teacher shows students the expected behavior (i.e. lining up, waiting in line for a drink, meeting on the carpet) in a positive way while students observe and notice the behavior. Second, students share what they noticed about the behavior displayed by the teacher. Third, one student then models the same behavior for the rest of the group while students notice the displayed behaviors by that student. After students watch the teacher and a peer model the behavior the rest of the group practices the expected behavior. Once all students have had the chance to practice the group hosts a collective discussion related to the behavior.

Guided discovery is used as a way to introduce new materials into the classroom environment. Teachers take time to model appropriate use of the material, through interactive modeling, to allow students to use classroom materials responsibly and independently. Once students have used a material through the guided discovery process, they are better able to use the material successfully, independently and socially.

Rule creation takes place within the first few weeks of the school year and are based off students’ hopes and dreams for the school year. By relating classroom rules to the hopes and dreams of everyone in class, teacher included, it provides a set of guidelines to ensure an environment that allows everyone to meet their classroom goals, both social and academic. Typically, classroom rules fall into four categories: take care of yourself (e.g. use a calm body), take care of others (e.g. support each other), take care of your learning (e.g. actively listen), take care of your environment (e.g. treat materials gently).
Logical consequences refer to the ways in which adults at school respond to misbehavior while protecting students’ dignity and relating such misbehaviors to appropriate reparations. The four main types of logical consequences are apology of action, positive take a break, “you break it, you fix it,” and loss of privilege. The use of apology of action goes beyond the typical “I’m sorry,” rather, students are encouraged to add an action to the apology to show a genuine sense of remorse and a desire to make amends.

The use of positive take a break is most commonly related to the “time-out” procedures implemented in some households. However, positive take break is introduced to students as a classroom tool used to calm down and regain self control. Students are often sent by a teacher to take a break when the student is having difficulty contributing to the group (i.e. hitting others). Although teachers may send a student to take a break, in some classrooms students choose to take a break on their own. When students choose to take a break it is often due to the student feeling upset or sad and their need to be alone in order to work through his or her emotions.

The term “you break it, you fix it” refers to situations in class when something has been broken, both physical and emotional, or a mess has been made, either intentionally or accidentally. This consequence encourages students to take responsibility for the problem and take responsibility for fixing the problem the best they can.

Positive teacher language refers to the words and tone used by teachers and students to communicate with one another. Three types of language used by teachers consist of reinforcing language: seeing children and naming their strengths; reminding language: helping students remember expectations; redirecting language: giving clear commands when children have gone off track.

Collaborative problem solving uses conferencing, role playing, open and honest conversations along with other techniques to resolve problems with students. Such problems are related to peer-to-peer issues and issues related to a student’s own behavior struggles. Peer-to-peer collaborative problem
solving conferences are an effective way to guide students through the process of problem solving an issue with another person in a respectful way.

Another key practice, working with families, encourages teachers to have frequent and open communication to help create a partnership between families and teachers. The collaboration between families and teachers creates a space for teachers to better understand the backgrounds of the students in the classroom while helping families understand the teacher’s teaching practices in the classroom. Many teachers use blogs to document the work taking place in the classroom along with frequent email communication with families.

Classroom organization refers to setting up the classroom in a way which encourages students’ creativity, independence, productivity, and cooperation. The way in which the classroom is set up not only refers to the physical furniture in the classroom space, but it also refers to the items hung on the walls and student access to classroom materials. When students create the work displayed on the walls of the classroom, such work can also be a display of ownership of the classroom space.

Recent studies have assessed the successfulness of the Responsive Classroom approach (Rimm-Kaufman, 2006, 2011; Zubrzycki, 2011; Payton et al., 2008). From 2001-2004, Sara Rimm-Kaufman, associate professor at the University of Virginia, Curry School of Education, Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning, researched the Responsive Classroom approach at a school wide level with an urban school district in the Northeast. Her Social and Academic Learning Study (SALS), funded by a grant from the DuBarry Foundation, compared three schools implementing the Responsive Classroom approach at a school-wide level with three non-implementing schools. The researchers collected data through standardized test scores, teacher questionnaires, student questionnaires, classroom observations, and teacher and principal interviews. The study found that the Responsive Classroom approach was associated with better academic and social outcomes for elementary school children as compared to classrooms whose teachers do not use Responsive Classroom methods of teaching and learning. Children
at schools using the Responsive Classroom approach showed greater increases in reading score as measured by the Degrees of Reading Power Test and math test scores as measured by the Connecticut Mastery Test, in over two to three year periods than children at comparison schools. Other findings included: teachers felt more effective, more positive about teaching and collaborated with each other more often, children displayed improved social skills, teachers offered more high-quality instruction, and children felt more positive about school.

Teachers who used Responsive Classroom methods reported feeling more effective and positive about teaching in part because of their perceived ability to create a more positive school climate and the effectiveness of their responses to misbehavior (Rimm-Kaufman, 2004, p. 10). Through the analysis of teacher questionnaires, students in Responsive Classroom environments displayed higher levels of pro-social behaviors and assertiveness (e.g. making new friends, introducing themselves to others, initiating conversations), as well as a higher comfort level to try new things at school (Rimm-Kaufman, 2004, p. 11). Such pro-social behaviors fall into the categories of relationship management and social awareness as discussed previously, and supported by Zins et al. (2007), as skills necessary to aid students in current and future academic and social success. According to this study, teachers offered higher quality instruction as observed by a person not affiliated with Responsive Classroom. Teachers using the Responsive Classroom approach offered more social-emotional support to students, in that they created a classroom space conducive to students’ social-emotional learning. Teachers using Responsive Classroom methods also promoted higher level thinking (e.g. analyzing data and making inferences) and offered students more instructional support (e.g. increased feedback of learning) (Rimm-Kaufman, 2004, p. 12).

Students also felt more positive about school than students in school not using Responsive Classroom approaches. Rimm-Kaufman (2004), noted “Children in classrooms using many Responsive Classroom practices did appear to do better academically. But the two circumstances were independent of each other; that is, children who reported feeling good about school were not always the ones who showed high academic performance” (p. 13). I found the same to be true in this study. Students in the
classroom who showed positive perceptions of school (as noted by verbal comments throughout the school day), did not necessarily excel academically. The opposite also proved true in this study, particularly with the study’s focus student. His perceptions of school early in the year were quite negative; however, he achieved high academic success at school.

From 2008-2011, Rimm-Kaufman continued her study of the effectiveness of the Responsive Classroom approach to teaching and learning with the Responsive Classroom Efficacy Study (RCES). This study involved 24 elementary schools in a large suburban school district in a mid-Atlantic state and looked at Responsive Classroom practices, with special emphasis on math teaching and learning. Preliminary findings revealed that classrooms using Responsive classroom practices demonstrated increase student achievement, higher quality math instruction, and improved teacher-student interactions (Rimm-Kaufman, 2011). Further analysis of the Responsive Classroom Efficacy Study is currently taking place.

**Dramatic Inquiry**

Two modes of teaching and learning used in the classroom that may promote social-emotional growth through learning and community building are dramatic play and dramatic inquiry. Dramatic play provides opportunities for students to use their imaginations to pretend to be in another world or act as another character. As supported by Brown & Playdell (1999), “Drama facilitates emotional development by creating an ambiance that inspires children to express and explore their feelings...children often express thoughts or concerns that would otherwise go undiscovered or remain repressed” (p. 5). Dramatic play oftentimes occurs sporadically with young children during free play times and when used in the classroom fosters students’ social-emotional learning. Dramatic inquiry takes dramatic play to a deeper level by combining dramatic play with an inquiry question that students want to explore. Dorothy Heathcote (Johnson & O’Neill, 1984), first explored the use of dramatic inquiry in education as a more active way of experiencing curricula with children and adults (Schneider, Crumpler, & Rogers, 2006). As stated by Edmiston (2013), “We develop understanding across time through sequenced inquiry-based
tasks. Dramatic inquiry is inquiry learning extended by social imagination” (p. 134). To frame dramatic inquiry experiences I rely on the ABCDs of dramatic inquiry. The ABCDs involve an inquiry question that within dramatic inquiry we “All agree to imagine together we face a Big problem/question that we all Care about and will Dialogue about from diverse positions” (Edmiston, 2008). When using a dramatic inquiry approach students must be interested in a significant issue and agree to explore the issue through multiple viewpoints. The use of drama and dramatic inquiry as approaches to community building has the potential to allow students to experience other realities in different, multi-dimensional ways within a safe environment while further developing social-emotion skills.

In the classroom, dramatic inquiry provides students with opportunities to act as someone (or something) different while exploring an inquiry question with others in class. Beyond dramatic play and working through an important question as themselves, dramatic inquiry allows students to use their knowledge of certain topics to facilitate the learning of other members of the community. For example, if a class studies ocean animals and needs to know how to protect endangered ocean wildlife from becoming extinct, the class may draw on information from students in class who are familiar with such animals and possibly even involve families who have expert knowledge of endangered wildlife or ocean animals. Students use their prior understanding and newly learned information to inform their dramatic actions. By building off of one another’s understandings, students begin to view their peers as vital members of the classroom, thus, further facilitating the development of classroom community.

In this study, I used the following dramatic inquiry techniques: Teacher in role, mantle of the expert and tableau. Teacher in role is a strategy where the teacher structures the work of the class from within the drama and participates alongside students (Edmiston & Wilhelm, 1998, p. 20). By doing so, teachers respond to students while acting as someone else and even somewhere else. Mantle of the expert, used as a strategy, refers to times when students or teachers assume a fictional role that put students in the position of becoming the expert or experts within the dramatic inquiry (Heathcote & Herbert, 1985, p. 173). Using Mantle of the expert deemed useful in this study when students possessed a
greater knowledge of a particular subject area and were put in positions of power relative to their usual social positioning within the classroom community. As supported by Heathcote & Herbert (1985), “In the mantle of the expert the power of communication is invested with the group; the teacher does not assume the role of the main communicant” (p. 174). When a student presented facts and information to the group, that we did not know beforehand, this placed him closer to the center of the community.

Another strategy used in this study is called tableau. Tableau is “a still, silent performance that involves three-dimensional representations” (Wilson, 2003, p. 375). Although the end product of tableau is a still, silent representation, prior to that moment students are expected to work together by communicating ideas and listening to other’s ideas to create a still image of their collective thoughts. In order to do so students much practice social skills related to listening, communicating ideas and working together. Within tableau, students can also come to life and people can use words to explain their representation.

Dramatic inquiry also provides students with chances socially interact in other imagined worlds and in doing so they can develop their social identify. In addition to the possibility of stepping into the role of another person, dramatic inquiry lends itself to authentic dialogic conversations in the classroom community. Many times when students work through dramatic inquiry experiences questions arise that lead the entire group to stop and discuss. Typically, the questions are thoughtful, related to the guiding inquiry question and important for the experience at hand. It is through such conversations mediated by teachers that students begin to share and develop their knowledge and understanding of topics and those students may be viewed as an important resource in the development of the classroom community.

Community

In the classroom, I think of community as a space where students are able to feel comfortable, safe, respected, and feel a sense of belonging and significance. As a teacher, I know the academic dimension of “school” will happen throughout the time we spend together, but the act of building community in a way which fosters students’ social growth cannot happen unless everyone in the community are actively working towards the same goal of becoming a community. Edmiston (2013)
stated, “Building community is not an option. What is optional is the quality of the community you or I build with young people and the tasks chosen or agreed to do today that will affect the ongoing building of your community. Every task affirms (or undermines) social practices: these are ways of being together (or being apart from one another) that become ‘normal’ for us” (p. 129). Therefore, the effort given into building a classroom community will yield similar results.

Within that community I include myself as the teacher. As supported by Greene (1978), “It is absurd to exclude the teacher from membership in the group. As the most mature member of the group he has a peculiar responsibility for the conduct of the interactions and intercommunications which are the very life of the group as a community” (p. 23). Many times educators view the classroom as the students and the teacher, rather than our classroom, including students and teachers. Without involving everyone who functions day to day in the space of the classroom, it would be challenging to create a full sense of community.

As stated by Edmiston (2013), “All shared activities will be richer when experiences are created, repeated, and adapted over time by an evolving diverse community of people with overlapping and intersecting relationships and interests who are learning how to build on one another’s different strengths as well as how to acknowledge and accommodate to one another’s differences” (p. 135). The implications of such an environment have proved to yield increased academic success by students and higher teacher satisfaction (Rimm-Kaufman, 2011). In this paper I analyze ways in which I facilitated the building of community in my elementary classroom.
Chapter 3: Methods

Participants

I chose a case study methodology to expand my understanding of the factors that contribute to how community is formed in the classroom by focusing on individuals in relation to the whole group. “A case study is an in depth analysis of one or more events, settings, programs, social groups, communities, individuals, or other’ bounded systems ’in their natural context” (McMillan, 2012, p. 279). As supported by Dyson & Genishi (2005), by using a case study approach to research, “…researchers might gain insight into some of the factors that shape, and the processes through which people interpret or make meaning…” (p. 3). This case study draws upon the observations of one or more students’ social-emotional development and creation of community, along with the researcher’s reflections of such developments in the classroom. I hope by using a case study approach I will find useful information about the formation and progression of community building in the class that will inform future community building practices.

I, the researcher, identified the participants in this study through a purposeful sampling strategy targeting my first grade students. As stated by McMillan (2012), “In purposeful sampling, the researcher selects individuals or cases because they will be particularly informative about the topic” (p. 105). The students in the classroom ranged in age from five to seven years old and totaled 21 students. Students in the class were considered a typical case sampling, meaning most students displayed typical social-emotional skills similar to like peers (McMillan, 2012, p. 105). Of the 21 student participants, I chose one student from the class through purposive sampling methods as an extreme case study example, meaning the child displayed atypical social behaviors when compared to his peers (i.e. he had difficulty connecting and creating relationships with other students in class) (McMillan, 2012, p. 105). Due to his behavior challenges with other students in class I chose him as the focus student and case study example for this study.
Context

All observations took place in my middle to upper middle class suburban school district on the Northeast side of Columbus, Ohio. I kept a weekly reflection journal outlining the development of classroom community while highlighting specific students’ social-emotional struggles and growth. The data collection period began the first day of school, August 27th, 2012 through November 9th, 2012, totaling 10 weeks. The ten week time period provided opportunities to observe students through the initial phases of social-emotional growth and community building.

Elementary School

The elementary school opened in the fall of 2003 and during this study housed over 650 Kindergarten and First grade students. The teaching staff consisted of 16 first grade teachers, 8 kindergarten teachers, 8 specialist teachers, and 11 additional support staff. Over half of the teaching staff had Responsive Classroom training within the past two years and 4 staff members received additional training and were working towards becoming Responsive Classroom Teacher Leaders. Several of the staff members participated in an on-site book study based on the text “Rules in Schools: Teaching Discipline in the Responsive Classroom” during the first 3 months of the school year. A majority of the staff worked to implement elements of Responsive Classroom into their daily classroom routines.

Approximately 4 teachers were heavily involved in professional development related to dramatic inquiry and used such practices in their classrooms. Two teachers in the building (including myself) were trained in Responsive Classroom and dramatic inquiry techniques and implemented both approaches into the daily teaching and learning practices in the classroom.

During the first week of school the classroom consisted of a few teacher made signs and notes to welcome students to first grade. The inside of the classroom included 6 round tables with 4 chairs around each, a large rug space, books, computers, and materials that lent themselves to dramatic play (i.e.
puppets, scarves, puppets, blocks). As the weeks progressed and community building began to take shape the physical space and décor also changed.

Procedures

To investigate the Responsive Classroom approach to teaching and learning and document the social-emotional growth of students and the effectiveness of such an approach to build classroom community, I chose to conduct a within site, observational case study research method. During this time I acted as an active participant and documented observations in a field note journal once per week. I conducted formal one-on-one student interviews with one key student, once a month, to probe at the student’s own reflection of his social-emotional growth in the classroom as it related to self awareness (e.g. identifying and recognizing emotions), social awareness (e.g. perspective taking, empathy), responsible decision making (e.g. problem solving), self management (e.g. impulse control, self motivation), relationship management (e.g. communication, social engagement, building relationships), and perceptions of self among his peers. Data analysis occurred by looking through the field notes observations and interviews with Patrick* and drawing conclusions related to the progression of the development of community and ways in which Patrick’s social skills changed through the course of this study. I determined reliability through prior prolonged engagement with the staff and students and triangulation by using multiple methods of data collection.
Chapter 4: Findings

Through my conversations with students, observations of the progression of the building of classroom community, and the review of the notes taken throughout the first 10 weeks of the school, several areas related to building classroom community appeared throughout the study and progressed as the classroom community developed. The areas consisted of shared power between students and the teacher, specific teacher and student language, Responsive Classroom practices, open conversations, and the use of dramatic inquiry, all of which helped facilitate students’ social growth and community in the classroom. Outlined below is the progression of the creation of classroom community through the first 10 weeks of school.

Weeks 1-2: Getting to Know Each Other

The first day of school consisted of us getting to know one another, meeting and making friends and figuring out what we might learn and explore together this year. Right away I recognized the multitude of personalities in the classroom. The students I considered to be particularly social had arguably higher developed social skills in the areas of initiating conversations with others and solving problems in a fair way that presumably contributed to their abilities to easily make friends. As supported by Ramsey (1991), “Successful social behavior requires a number of different skills...They include initiating social contact and entering groups, maintain social encounters, resolving conflicts, controlling aggression, and responding prosocially to the needs of peers” (p. 26). Whereas, I noticed some students’ presumable lack of social skills related to initialing conversations with other had more trouble fitting in and seemed less interested in making friends with students in class.

At the end of the first week, I reflected on the entire class and where students seemed to be in relation to one another. Specifically, I thought about my perceptions of students’ initial social-emotional status and in regards to the whole group as a community through the use of a sociogram, as developed by
Edmiston (2012). Figure 2: Week 1 Sociogram, depicted the perceived social positions of students during the first week of school. The closer I placed students to the center of the circle indicated the more I felt they were central to activities that built community and demonstrated an increased sense of wanting to be a member of the classroom community. Whereas, students I put closer to the outside of the circle indicated the more I felt they were distant to activities that built community and demonstrated a disinterest in wanting to be a member of the classroom community. Students who I placed neither at the center of the circle or outside of circle showed expected behavior, typical of students at this time of the year, in regards to their interest in activities that built community.

Figure 2 also demonstrated the relationships of students during the first week of school. The pictures of students who overlapped with another picture had existing friendships prior to the start of the school year while spaces between other students indicated the lack of a pre-existing relationships prior to this school year. As displayed in Figure 2, I positioned myself at the center of group due to my goal and week one behaviors to bring all students together to create my vision of an exemplar classroom community. This pivotal figure helped track the progress of student relationships, student’s social-emotional growth, and the progression of community building in the classroom throughout the course of this study.

Figure 2: Week 1 Sociogram
During week one, the student in the circle right outside of mine talked to every student and willingly helped where needed in the classroom. Of all of the students, she involved herself in classroom routines, lessons and social conversations and play more frequently than others. The student on the outward circle displayed typical behaviors of first grade students during the first week of school, as supported by my observations of students during the first week of school in previous years of teaching this grade level. The overlapped group of students at the bottom right hand corner came in as long time friends. They lived in the same housing community, their families were friends, they played together outside of school, and they rode the same bus to and from school. In the classroom, they sat next to one another throughout the first week and frequently played together at recess.

I placed three students on the outside of sociogram, Timothy* on the upper left hand corner, Joe* on the upper right hand corner and Patrick* on the lower right hand corner. I viewed these three students distant from the rest of the group for a few reasons. Timothy missed the first week of school; therefore, I felt unaware of where he might fit into the group once he arrived. Joe moved to our school from another state and played alone with little interaction with other students during week one.

Patrick had a silly, yet, serious personality from the start. Before the year began our guidance counselor and Patrick’s kindergarten teacher notified me of his behavior struggles the previous year. In Kindergarten, he had difficulty making appropriate choices and showing respect towards others. Although he struggled with his own behavior management in kindergarten, I believed this year held new opportunities for him and felt what happened in the previous year should not affect what will happen this year. Very early on, I observed many behaviors consistent with children’s methods of attention seeking from Patrick.

On the second day of school, during the middle of a lesson, Patrick acted very silly by rolling his eyes and repeating what I said in a silly voice. I redirected his behavior and continued teaching. I
privately pulled Patrick aside to reflect on his choices during the previous lesson. He very honestly said to me “I was just trying to get your attention.” We spoke about appropriate ways to seek attention rather than rolling his eyes and repeating my words. I shared with him that I wanted to hear what he had to say and what he says is important to me, just like when I am teaching what I say is important for students to hear. He looked at me and shrugged his shoulders. At that moment I realized that Patrick did not recognize what it meant to me a contributing member of a community where everyone gives their best so we all can do our best. Furthermore, I realized that Patrick needed more time in our classroom to be able to thoughtfully reflect on himself as an active member of the group. He viewed other students in class as just other kids at school, rather than members of his community. Although we had what I considered to be a nice heart-to-heart chat, his attention-seeking behavior continued throughout the week as did our conversations about his behavior. Each and every time we discussed his choices I shared with him that I believe he could make better choices and I trusted he would during our next learning time. The confidence that I displayed in Patrick’s ability to make appropriate choices deemed pivotal in his social-emotional growth and member of the classroom community throughout subsequent weeks.

I chose Patrick as the focus student in this case study based on his initial behavior challenges and difficulties connecting and creating relationships with other students in class. At the end of week one, I interviewed Patrick to get an initial idea of his thoughts regarding his own perceptions of community and social-emotional behaviors (See Appendix A: Interviews with Patrick). I based the interview questions off of social-emotional behaviors related to self awareness (e.g. identifying and recognizing emotions), social awareness (e.g. perspective taking, empathy), responsible decision making (e.g. problem solving), self management (e.g. impulse control, self motivation), and relationship management (e.g. communication, social engagement, building relationships), and perceptions of self in relation to the classroom community.

I created two questions for each social skill listed above based on what I wanted to know about Patrick’s views related to his perceptions of his peers in class and himself. I hoped the list of questions
would help me see Patrick’s social growth in relation to himself and others in class. Question number one asked about Patrick’s community self awareness. I asked, “What does it feel like to be a part of a community?” Then followed his first response with “How do you think it would feel to belong to a community?” I wanted to hear Patrick’s existing concepts of “community” and track his development of the term throughout the study. Specifically, I hoped to observe changes in his behavior as a community member and hear more thoughtful and detailed responses through the remaining weeks. Question number two focused on social awareness. I asked “How do you think others feel when someone is being unkind to them?” I wanted to hear Patrick’s insight into how others might feel, in hopes to get a better perspective on where he stood when thinking about the feelings of others when someone else (not Patrick) acted in an unkind way. Then I asked the question “How do you think others would feel if you were being unkind to them?” The key change in the sentence is from “others” to “you.” I asked that question to get an idea of Patrick’s perceptions of others’ feelings towards him if he acted in an unkind way. I wondered if his response would differ when asked about the behavior of others versus his own behavior towards others. Question three focused on responsible decision making. I asked “What can someone do if they’re having a problem with someone in class?” Then I asked “What can you do if you’re having a problem with someone in class?” Similarly to question two, I wanted to hear Patrick’s thoughts on how he thought others could solve and problem, as well as how he could solve a problem. Question number four looked at self management. I asked “What does it mean to be in control of yourself.” Then I followed with the question “What does it look like to be in control of yourself?” I wanted to hear Patrick’s responses about what it means and might look like to have self-control at school. Many times students are able to tell what it means to be in control of one’s body but are unable to show an example. I added a third question, “Why is it important to be in control of yourself,” to better understand Patrick’s reasoning for his previous responses to what self control means and looks like in the classroom. Question number five asked about relationship management. I asked “Who are your friends in class?” and “What does it mean to be a good friend?” I wanted to know of Patrick’s friendships in class and document any changes with his friendship circles. As noted in Figures 2, 6 and 7, many students began
the year with no friends in class, including Patrick. The final question focused on Patrick’s perceptions of self within the community. I asked, “How do other students give to our classroom community?” and “How could you give to our classroom community?” Again, I asked two questions related to “giving” to the community, one focused on how others give and one focused on ways he could give to the community. I wanted to hear Patrick’s perceptions on how other students contributed to the classroom community along with his opinions on how he could contribute to our classroom. I created this set of questions to note Patrick’s initial thoughts in the areas of self awareness, social awareness, responsible decision making, self management, relationship management, and perceptions of self in relation to the classroom community and document any changes in his responses to better guide my observations of the formation of classroom community.

During the first interview, I realized Patrick had little experience with the term community and what that meant. Initially, he referred to being a part of a community as “like a police officer.” When asked about his feelings regarding his own self-awareness he responded with “sad” as the only feeling he or others might feel. Patrick’s problem solving skills consisted of telling me, the teacher, if anyone had problems with another person in class. Furthermore, Patrick did not see himself with any friends in class and could not name another student as a friend besides a child who lived in his neighborhood. He indicated his disinterest with the entire interview with shoulder shrugs and eye rolls. While thinking about our conversation, I realized that Patrick had very little experience to pull from when answering the questions. We had not discussed what it meant to be a member of a community, particularly the one in our classroom or what it meant to be a good friend. At first his answers and body language surprised me! The shoulder shrugs and eye rolls reiterated how he felt about the importance of our conversation. As his teacher, I took his responses to the questions seriously, even if he did not take the questions the same way, and found myself curious to see his responses to the same questions throughout the remaining nine weeks of the study and eager to plan activities to facilitate his social-emotional growth.
Morning Meeting: A Stepping Stone to Building Community

One hope I had for the classroom involved creating a classroom space where students felt they could be their true selves through self-expression, feelings of comfort and safety, and open and honest dialogue with everyone in class. To do this, students needed a safe space and time during the day to learn and practice those skills within the context of a community. In order to help this happen, I spent a lot of time helping students connect to one another through social activities and games. One way we began building our community was through Morning Meeting. We started each day with a morning meeting which consisted of a greeting, share time, activity, and morning message. Each day’s greeting allowed students to hear everyone’s name and learn the names of their classmates and practice appropriate social skills while greeting one another (i.e. eye contact and speaking in a comfortable voice that all can hear). The sharing process let children share information about themselves with the class. This allowed students to make connections with other students to help promote commonalities and friendships in class. Each day’s activity provided a fun way for students to work together towards a common goal, in turn creating a stronger sense of community and purpose. Morning meeting helped foster students’ sense of self while contributing to the community through sharing and open conversations that happened during morning meeting.

The following week we talked about our personal hopes and dreams for the school year. Students seemed excited to talk about the things I envisioned we would do this year school and what they hoped to learn in 1st grade. We spent two days brainstorming what we could do together this year and by the end of two days students settled on a hope and dream for the school year (See Figure 3: Beginning of the Year Hopes and Dreams). By sharing our hopes and dreams with one another, students started to make connections with students with the same interests. Many students hoped to learn to read, become better writers and learn more math skills. Some students hoped to learn about specific topics they wished to explore (i.e. visit the wetlands, learn about the human body, learn about dolphins). Patrick’s hope and dream for the school year is displayed in Figure 3. It stated: In first grade I hope to learn about tornados.
I displayed our hopes and dreams in the classroom on a large bulletin board where students could see and refer to their hopes and dreams throughout the year.

Figure 3: Beginning of the Year Hopes and Dreams

Once the children decided on their hopes and dreams I initiated the process of coming up with our classroom rules/guidelines. The procedures used to facilitate our discussion of classroom rules/guidelines follows traditional Responsive Classroom practices as outlined below. I posed this question to students “If we’re going to do everyone’s hope and dream what do we need to do to make sure this happens?” Students gave ideas about the tools we would need and rules we might need to follow. Many students’ responses started with the words “don’t,” which I immediately followed with “If we will not (named negative behavior), then what will we do?” This helped students frame their ideas in the positive so we would know what the expectations are for our classroom and school. I wrote down every single rule then we categorized the suggestions according to similarities. For the first time this year I noticed Patrick listening to others’ ideas, thinking about others’ suggestions and responding in a thoughtful manner. His involvement, particularly the thoughtful comments he made in response to others’ ideas, the rules he recommended and the connections he made with the suggested rules and how to follow them in class,
helped me realize his intelligence and how much he really did care about becoming a member of the group.

At the conclusion of our discussion, we decided on four classroom rules and created a classroom agreement poster titled “We agree to...” (See Figure 4: Classroom Agreements). Our classroom agreements stated: 1. Support and take care of each other, 2. Actively listen, 3. Treat materials nicely, 4. Be safe, and 5. Give your best.

Figure 4: Classroom Agreements

One girl in class suggested rule number 1, support and take care of each other, everyone agreed that it would be a great rule to add. I admittedly became teary eyed because I dreamt of students suggesting that rule! To me, the epitome of the meaning of community is to support and take care of each other. I felt elated when a student recommended such a powerful rule for our class agreements. Our next rule originally said listen, I suggested adding the word actively in front of listen, but it took some convincing and modeling with students of what actively actually meant. I modeled the behavior and students agreed that by adding actively in front of listen made the rule more meaningful. The most popular rule suggestions consisted of, treat materials nicely and be safe, therefore, without hesitation, we
put them to our list. We added our fifth rule, give your best, near the end of the study as discussed later in this chapter. Once we finalized the agreements, students signed their names on the poster and the rules were hung on the front board in our classroom. Each day we referred to the rules, if someone treated materials safely I pointed it out to that child and sometimes the entire class. I hesitated to point out student’s positive choices to the entire group and reserve such compliments for rare occasions. The reason is similar to why I do not point out student’s misbehaviors to the entire class. When students are frequently complimented in front of a whole group other students begin to view them as the ones who always make good choices and never make mistakes because they are typically the students who get complimented the most. On the other hand students who misbehave and are called out in front of their peers can be seen as a child who always makes mistakes. Either way, such comments, unconscious or not, can facilitate feelings in students that can be detrimental to community building. To help students further understand our classroom agreements I planned several dramatic inquiry experiences, group activities and encouraged open conversations about our agreements. I noticed students discussing our agreements with other students in class and working out ways to follow them throughout the day.

**Week 3: Logical Consequences**

Week 3 presented an unexpected set of challenges. Students came in Monday morning with a lot to say and little interest in hearing what I had to say. I had a million things I had planned to do with them, none of which they actually wanted to do. After much reflection, I believed the chattiness derived from their need to continue making friends and connecting with each other. Looking back on the lessons I planned to do that week, many of them required students to listen first then do the activity. They obviously struggled with the listening portion, so I decided to plan a drama activity to see how that would remedy such behavior. I planned our first dramatic inquiry based off of the book “Lily’s Purple Plastic Purse” (written and illustrated by Kevin Henkes) to open up a discussion about one of our logical consequences. Our guiding inquiry question stated “What happens when we don’t follow the rules.” We later named this consequence Loss of Privilege. I stuck close to the storyline in the book because this was
the first time we pretended and imagined together. I felt curious to see how students would react to drama and how they would react to each other acting in a different way.

I considered Lily’s Purple Plastic Purse a “safe drama.” In other words, I knew the plan and felt in control of the plan. I wanted to test the waters to see students’ reactions to such an activity. If things went awry I had the book to fall back on! During prior read alouds, I acted out different characters and used voices and costumes to enhance each character. Thus, students were used to me pretending to be someone/something other than my teacher self. This dramatic inquiry strategy is teacher in role, as I noted above (p. 16). When I asked students to pretend as if they were Lily, some students looked around to see what other students’ choices. While some students jumped right into acting as someone different than themselves, others hesitated. Patrick joined right in! He quickly took on the role of Lily and acted as Lily with another student nearby. I noticed Patrick enjoyed activities that involved creative expression, such as art and drama, so when given the opportunity to act as someone else he did so with ease.

In the story, the main character, Lily, brought a special purse to school and when asked to keep it in her book bag by the teacher she decided to play with it anyway. Then, the teacher took the purse from her and kept it until the end of the day. Lily became upset and wrote a mean note to her teacher. At the end of the story the teacher found the mean note addressed to him and asked Lily about it. Then, he gave her back her purse and Lily wrote him a note apologizing for the mean letter. First, students acted as Lily getting a special “thing” from a grandparent. Then I responded in role as the grandparent. We continued to act like Lily in different scenarios in the book. I kept this particular drama task a whole group experience rather than having one student act alone. I hoped by involving everyone, students would help students feel more comfortable with the experience, and it did. I observed quiet students open up a bit and more active students enjoying the experience of acting as Lily.

The most interesting part of watching Patrick act as Lily was his interactions with other students. He immediately turned to his neighbors and engaged as Lily with him and the child responded back as
Lily too. During other times of our day, I observed some difficulty with Patrick initiating school appropriate conversations and play with other students. During this dramatic inquiry activity, however, Patrick talked with other students while in character and appeared to make connections with others in the classroom. My observations suggested that Patrick felt safe when acting as someone else and comfortable enough to begin to make connections with others in class. We spent the next several days acting out various scenarios that could happen to us relate to losing a privilege and Patrick willingly participated in each activity. He oftentimes raised his hand to participate first or take on a lead role in a drama experience.

After acting as Lily throughout the story, I heard students referring back to Lily and her purse when they brought special things to school. As a school policy, students are not supposed to bring in toys or electronics from home but they bring them anyway. As Corsaro (2003) noted, “…while young children might lack the cognitive skills to infer the implications of both the embrace of and resistance to organized rules for personal identity, they do have a clear motion of the importance and restrictiveness of the adult world as compared to children’s worlds” (p. 141). When students brought in toys or electronics I noticed students reminded them to keep the items in their book bags or they would get taken away. Some students even referenced Lily and the catastrophe with her purse! I saw the interactions between students but understood the social reasons behind why they brought such items to school. Many students brought stuffed animals, trading cards, bracelets, or electronics to help make friends with other students and as a way of saying “Look what I have! Don’t you wish you had one too?” or “I’m cool because I have this. Be my friend.” Some students saw their material possessions as a way to make friends in the classroom and risked breaking school policy to make friends.

Weeks 4-5: Community: It’s happening!

We spent the past three weeks getting to know one another and created a foundation to build a community of friends and learners. In late September, we approached weeks four through five, and explored Fairy Tales based off of students’ interest in storytelling. We began the week by reading The
Three Little Pigs. I soon realized the students knew the story, in addition to a few fractured Fairy Tales based off of The Three Little Pigs. I chose to think of other, less familiar, Fairy Tale options to bring into the classroom.

I decided to investigate Jack and The Beanstalk as a class. From the get go the students showed an interest in the original version. Throughout Jack and The Beanstalk we took a stab at a few other drama activities based upon the text. Before starting, we decided on some guidelines for using drama in our classroom. We agreed that laughing with someone is okay but laughing at someone is not. We also agreed to use self control even if it’s hard. Finally, students agreed to freeze and listen when they heard the chime. This time, students acted out scenes from the text through partner tableaux. Students paired up and showed the rest of the class what Jack and his mom looked like when they first saw the beanstalk, Jack hiding in the cupboard of the giant’s house, and Jack escaping from the wrath of the giant. Throughout the tableaux tasks students explained their images, while other students asked thoughtful questions and gave thoughtful comments. At the end of the text I inquired about students’ favorite characters and who they might like to be in the story. We did an across the circle share and show where students could cross the circle acting like their favorite character while the rest of the class guessed the character. Most students acted as Jack, the giant, the giantess, the mom, or one of the animals. However, Patrick acted as the old man who sold Jack the beans. He crossed the circle the first time in full character and demonstrated a beautiful display of an old man! He walked hunched over and very slowly. Once each child went, everyone crossed the circle along with other students who acted as the same characters. Many students acted as Jack, the mom, the giant, and animals but only Patrick acted as the old man. When he crossed this time around, he did it in a silly way and out came the attention seeking behavior I noticed the first week of school. We paused, reviewed expectations as a class and he tried again. Still unable to stay in control, I privately told him to take a break and return to the group when ready.

The rest of the class sat down to debrief about Jack and The Beanstalk and the activities we did together. A few minutes into talking, Patrick returned to the circle and raised his hand. I called on him and
he shared with the whole class his reason for acting silly. Patrick stated, “I felt like other people were laughing at me and I had a hard time being in control because of that.” My jaw almost hit the ground due to the fact that he even shared his story with everyone and his honesty about it! I posed this question to the class “If Patrick feels this way what do we need to remember so he can participate and be successful in other dramas?” One child pointed out that one of our classroom rules says, support and take care of each other, and we began a conversation that I believe truly changed the way we interact with one another. The students shared that they did not laugh at him to be mean, rather, with him because they thought he liked it when people laughed at him. He corrected our assumptions by saying “Sometimes I do but I didn’t when I was being the old man. We said we wouldn’t laugh at people pretending.” Clearly, Patrick trusted us when we said we would not laugh and when he felt we laughed at him, we essentially broke his trust. I said to the class “It sounds like Patrick trusted us not to laugh.” Another child suggested we add the word trust to our first rule to remember that to help and support someone also means having trust.

Patrick shared with us that he saw some students change their person/animal when we crossed the circle the final time. At first, I did not understand the gravity of the issue. However, once we discussed students changing their person/animal to act as someone/something different, I understood Patrick’s concern. We agreed to add truthful and honest to our first rule and remember that being truthful and honest were important elements of supporting and taking care of each other. We moved on with our day but I kept on thinking about that particular conversation and how I knew it would change the way we interacted with one another and what this conversation meant for our community. Prior to this point I felt I tried to make students become a community and primarily facilitated the development of community. I saw community happen in pockets of two to three kids at a time, but until our whole class conversation and problem solving session I had not realized the existing community already built and the comradery of students in class. For the first time, I observed the progression of community right before my eyes! Although I did not observe an immediate change in Patrick’s behavior after our conversations, a few students privately apologized to Patrick for laughing at him and Patrick accepted their apologies. Further,
I did not notice any changes in his relationships with others or his position (movement towards the center of the sociogram) within the group after our dialogue. Yet, our expectations for the group’s behavior changed. Students started to develop empathy for their classmates and the content of our conversations showed further development of social awareness skills. Since community takes time, I realized the importance of our group reflections as a stepping stone to building a strong and caring community of learners.

At this point, I wanted to further explore the idea of building community with students. Right now they had a basic foundation of what it meant to be a member of a community through dramatizations and literature read alouds, but I continued to look for a way of bringing everyone’s ideas together with a collaborative project. I found a creative way to solidify the idea that although we are all different we still come together as a community of learners who are kind and take care of one another. The guiding inquiry question stated, “What makes a community safe and kind?” Drawing upon previous knowledge of communities we read about and dramatized, students came up with a number of thoughts on how community members contribute to the group and how people behave in communities. Some statements included “Communities are safe. Communities are friendship. Communities help others. Communities support each other.” We took those ideas and discussed individual characteristics that each of us possesses and their importance to make communities work. Some student related this idea to various community helpers, such as police officers who help us when we are injured and fire fighters who help when there is a fire in a town. After which, we looked at Keith Haring’s artwork. I chose Keith Haring because the people he uses in his artwork are unique in that they are of different colors but the same in that they are shaped similarly and typically working together. Once students made their own Keith Haring people to represent themselves they worked in groups to glue their people on paper and create a background. Then, students worked collaboratively to write sentences dictating what makes communities safe and kind. Figure 5 illustrates students’ work.
By pulling together ideas of what makes a community safe and kind, I saw students’ honest interpretations of “what makes a community.” Many students referred to our classroom agreements when writing their sentences and added words such as support each other, take care of each other and are safe, based off of our classroom agreement poster. Since students worked together to create their community sentences, they needed to listen to each other’s ideas about the meaning of community and draw upon each student’s knowledge of community to summarize the thoughts of the entire group.

At the end of week five, Patrick and I met so I could ask him the same set of questions as I did after week one. In my opinion, the past four weeks consisted of inspiring moments of community building and I could see the group coming together to help one another, support each other and make friends. Thus, I wanted to hear Patrick’s perceptions on where he stood as a member of the community (See Appendix A: Interviews with Patrick). Upon further analysis of this week’s responses, I viewed Patrick’s answers with respect to self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision making, self management, and relationship management more thoughtful and developed than before.

As compared to week one, Patrick’s idea of community changed from “Like a police man” to “When you’re in a community you help each other. Like in that book.” Up to this point we read and dramatized many stories related to communities and finished our Keith Harring inspired community
Many of Patrick’s responses to the questions related back to books we had read and/or dramatized and conversations we had as a class. Patrick also reported feeling “good” when asked about belonging to our community and referenced our classroom guidelines when asked about how others might feel if someone acted unkind to them. When asked what he or someone else should do if someone is being mean, he responded with four different options, all of which we dramatized as responses to problem solving skills in class. Patrick’s concept of self-control remained fairly consistent with week one, however, he did refer to our rule “be safe” and named a few more situations when being in control of one’s body might be important. When asked about his friends in class, Patrick named two boys that he plays with at recess as friends and shared that being nice and helping each other when hurt are signs of a good friend. Patrick answered the final question asked, how others along with himself give to the community, with “By being good and raising your hand” and “I’m a good reader. I can read books to (named another student in class). But I’m not as good as (named another student in class).” His answers showed he recognized raising hands and reading to others as behaviors associated with giving to the community. Further, Patrick spoke of a way he gives to community, through his ability to read literature and read to other students. I associated his responses to the final question with the development of his recognition of himself as a community member.

**Week 6: Friendships**

As illustrated in Figure 6: Week 5 Sociogram, students started making friends with others in class. Figure 6 showed the growth of students as a community, as discussed in the previous section, and displayed student relationships.
The pictures of students that overlap are those whom I noticed forming friendships with one another. The changes of friendships and formation of student relationships changed since the first few weeks of schools. Early in the year, very few students considered themselves friends, now, most students had at least one other friend in class. Furthermore, friendship circles with larger groups of students formed and become noticeable in class. When meeting on the carpet, students sat next to friends and saved seats for students who they wanted to sit next to them. As an all inclusive classroom, the behaviors seemed exclusionary in practice. I felt uncomfortable with the ways in which students excluded other students in order to maintain friendships with others in their friendship circles, I brought my concern up to the class, hoping for clarification and potentially change in such behavior. Through our discussion students shared that they did not intend to be “mean” to other students, rather, they just wanted to sit next to their friends. I interpreted their insights as another way of letting me know that some students feel most comfortable when surrounded by others that they feel support them. From that moment, I spent subsequent weeks reflecting on student’s friendships by observing who they sat next to on the carpet, played with at recess, named “my friend,” sat with at lunch, and preferred to speak with during class.
I noticed one girl, Sara*, became the nucleus of our community. Sara, a sweet girl with a quiet but demanding personality, related well to other students and used her knowledge of the class rules to ultimately help other students with their choices. She started the year with a group of three friends, all boys, from her neighborhood. By week five, Sara made friends with most everyone in class. She suggested our “support and take care of each other” rule and suggested we add the word “trust” to that rule after Patrick approached the class with why he acted silly during our Jack and the Beanstalk drama. Besides her strong verbal skills and advanced vocabulary development, throughout the past 5 weeks she became the “glue” that held us together. When students felt sad, she helped and gathered other students in class to help out too. Although I still did a lot of the more formal community building practices (i.e. planning activities), she truly practiced each of our guidelines and encouraged others to do the same. Although Sara and Patrick acted friendly towards each other they did not play with each other during free play time or choose each other for partner work or activities.

In relation to the sociogram from week one (See Figure 2), most students moved from a single spot on the outside circle to a spot closer to the inside circle with their picture overlapping with the picture of another student, indicating a friendship. Students had friendships with at least one other child while others formed friendships with two other children. Patrick and two other boys in class became good friends. Figure 6 depicted one of Patrick’s new friends towards the inner-circle on the sociogram, due to his social nature and surface friendships with most other students in class, while Patrick’s other new friend is located on the outer circle. The child’s position on the outer circle did not change on the sociogram from week one. While I find this particular child’s personality interesting and intriguing, his interests are different than other students in class. Both students displayed an interest in tornados, hurricanes, comic books, and reading non-fiction literature. Together, I observed Patrick sharing his knowledge of tornados and hurricanes with the other student and the other student shared his interest of comic books with Patrick. Their relationship formed over their shared interests of extreme weather.
systems and continued to grow during free play time at recess. I observed both boys play soccer together outside and begin to sit by one another during whole group lessons in class.

**Week 7: Teacher and Student Language**

Language is one of the most powerful tools available to teachers and the messages spoken and interpreted have a huge impact on how students perform in the classroom (Denton, 2007, p. 1). Denton (2007), referred to the term “teacher language” as “the professional use of words, phrases, tone, and pace to enable students to engage in active, interested learning and develop positive behaviors” (p. 3). Over the past few years I spent a lot of time thinking about the language I use when interacting with students, particularly with how the language used in the classroom promotes or may undermine the sense of community for students. According to Denton (2007), “Skillful teacher language is language that supports students in three broad ways: developing self-control, building their sense of community, and gaining academic skills and knowledge” (p. 7). The focus of this section looked at how teacher language affected community building with students and their use of such language with one another.

“I noticed…” and “What did you notice?” were common phrases that I introduced into the classroom. Oftentimes both were used to name certain behaviors such as, “I noticed how helpful we were during cleanup” or “What did you notice about cleanup today?” Up to this point, I initiated the “noticings” and referred to the classroom as “we,” “us,” and “our.” This week, some students used such terms on their own.

I overheard one student, Bob*, firmly telling another student, Cindy*, as she reached for a pencil in the caddy at the table, that the pencil she reached for was *his* pencil. Cindy looked at him and reminded him that the materials in the classroom belong to everyone. Unsatisfied, the child turned to me for help. Bob said, “Cindy won’t give me my pencil!” I responded with “What do you know about our supplies?” Cindy responded “They are all of ours.” I added on and said “What does that mean?” Clearly, Cindy knew the “correct” response and shared her thoughts about sharing our materials, pencils
included. I directed a question to Bob, in hopes to help him to think about our classroom materials as shared materials, “Why is it important that anyone can use our supplies, like pencils?” After thinking for a few seconds and looking down at his paper he responded “I just like that pencil because it’s the littlest one.” I repeated my original question again, “Why is it important that anyone can use our supplies, even the little pencils?” Bob replied, “Because they’re community supplies.” Ultimately, I encouraged the students to work out a plan so they both could use the pencil as needed for that activity.

The following day during morning meeting, we dramatized situations in our classroom related to sharing classroom materials. Student worked in groups of four to five to act out a solution to real-life classroom problems. Of the five groups, two groups had the same scenario and one group had a different scenario. Neither of the groups knew they shared the same scenario as another group. The classroom situations stated:

1. I need a red crayon but I cannot find one at my table. What can I do?
2. I need a place to sit and work on writing. What can I do?
3. I really want to read a book that another friend is reading. What can I do?

The groups that had situation one problem solved this scenario in different ways. One group showed a student getting a red crayon from an extra bucket of crayons on the back counter of our classroom while the other group showed the student asking others at the table if they had a red crayon. In the end, both students ended up with a red crayon, either by self-problem solving or group-problem solving. In situation two, one group acted out what they would do in that scenario. In our classroom, students have assigned seats to help promote friendship making early in the year and studio seating during work time. Studio seating allowed for student to sit wherever they chose in the classroom as long as they can do their best work. This type of flexible seating allowed for students to work together, if needed, and provided opportunities for student to work elsewhere in the classroom while taking responsibility for their learning. The group that dramatized this scenario showed a student walking to where he wanted to sit
when he saw someone else working at that space. Then the child thought about what to do and moved to a different space in the classroom to set up his work. The groups that dramatized situation three showed similar performances in the ways they acted out reading a book that someone else was reading. Both groups had students reading a book and another student calmly asking if they could join the child in reading their book. Then, they proceeded to partner read. Since both groups had similar responses to this scenario, I asked the groups what would happen if the child with the book responds with a no. A child in one of groups said “You can’t say no.” Although we never discussed not being able to say “no” if someone asked to join in a group, this comment reminded me of Paley’s (1992) study outlined in her book You Can’t Say You Can’t Play. Paley noticed students in her Kindergarten class excluding other students from play. She wondered what the ramifications would be if she implemented a new rule, “You can’t say, you can’t play.” Throughout the book Paley reflected on the conversations she and other students (in and out of her classroom) about the new rule and her observations of changes in student’s relationships and behavior towards one another.

I asked why they thought that and another child answered “It’s like that book, there’s always room for one more.” Earlier this year we read a book about a community of people who accepted others into their homes even when they did not have space. No matter who came to the door the characters responded “There’s always room for one more.” Since the enjoyment of that book, students referred back to it when thinking about accepting others to play and in this case, sharing with others. In a different way than Paley (You Can’t Say You Can’t Play, 1992), I told them they cannot say “no” when someone wants to join in because there is always room for one more. I continued to probe, wanting to know what students might actually do if someone did say no, and asked “But what if someone really did say no, how would you act?” The groups had a few more minutes to work out a response to present to the group. Once ready, one group showed a student saying no to another student when he asked to read the book with him and the child saying okay the going to the library to find another book to read instead. The other group showed the student saying no with the other child responding with “Please,” then the other student
welcomed the student to read together. We then processed as a class what others might do if that happens. One child reminded us of our classroom rule, support and take care of each other, while another student recommended if that happens we need to problem solve together. After each group showed us their dramatization of each scenario I would ask, “What did you notice?” However, students are familiar with that language and throughout the above scenarios students would respond with “I noticed…” rather than me having to initiate such responses.

In addition to dramatizing the above events, we revisited such situations on a daily basis to reiterate our collaboration as a classroom community through a jar with situations that have happened in class or might happen, appropriately named “The Situation Jar.” By constantly referring to the class as “we,” “us,” and “our” and using the phrase “I notice…” to name behaviors, students began to recognize our classroom as a community and used such language with one another and in reference to the class as a whole.

Week 8: Social Positioning through Drama

Each of us positions ourselves differently depending on those around us and the situations present. For students in elementary classrooms the experience of power and social positioning can be pivotal in the development of initial self identity and group identity. For classroom teachers, the experience of power and social positioning, as it relates to the students in the classroom, is often much more defined and less fluid than those of the students in the classroom. The social positioning that students take amongst one another can be facilitated by strong teaching practices in social-emotional development and community building.

Early on in the classroom students positioned themselves in positions of power as leaders and positions of less power, as followers, related to who they already knew in the classroom. Several students came into the school year with friends they had in the previous school year and peers they knew from their neighborhood outside of school. Lewis (2001) discovered that, “Achieving social and interpretive
power in the classroom also depended in part, on allegiances formed in and out of school” (p.101).
Similarly, in my classroom students that began the school year with existing friendships from their neighborhoods and extracurricular activities entered the classroom with more confidence and a higher level of comfort in the classroom. Such confidence and comfort translated into leadership and positions of power compared to other students in the classroom. Students that entered the classroom without preexisting friendships, because they were either new to the district and did not know other students in class outside of school, exhibited shyness and uncertainty at the start of the year. Their lack of confidence and shyness positioned them in less powerful roles in the classroom. Ways I tried to mediate the social positions students took among one another included planning classroom activities which allowed students of less power to position themselves with more power within the classroom.

The following represents one way Patrick achieved power in the classroom community. During week eight, Patrick wanted to know what I knew about Hurricane Sandy. I turned the question back to him by asking him what he knew about Hurricane Sandy. He went on for several minutes about what he knew about hurricanes and related Hurricane Sandy to the devastation brought about by Hurricane Katrina in the Southern United States in 2005. Patrick showed a deep interest in tropical storms and demonstrated a wealth of knowledge related to devastating weather systems, as noted in his hope and dream for this school year. When I spoke with his mother earlier in the school year, she informed me of his infatuation of such storms from an early age. Further, due to his high ready ability he preferred to read non-fiction adult books about storms to grow his knowledge base. Thus, I knew Patrick’s knowledge of Hurricane Sandy stemmed from his overall interest in storms, literature he read about storms and news programs he watched about Hurricane Sandy.

Throughout the day, Patrick’s interest in Hurricane Sandy filtrated throughout the entire classroom. Patrick shared his knowledge with everyone and other students showed interest in Patrick’s knowledge of the storm. The following day, I chose to use Patrick’s knowledge and the students’ shared interest in storms to plan dramatic inquiry tasks focused on bad weather and woodland animals. Students
recently studied raccoons, opossums, deers, skunks, and bats as a part of a study on woodland animals and non-fiction literature. The inquiry question posed to students asked “How can we use our knowledge of weather to keep woodland animals safe?” That morning Patrick and I met and discussed our roles in the dramatic inquiry experience. I shared with him that he could be the storm expert, to which he wanted to be a storm chaser, and use his knowledge to help the class keep woodland animals safe. He spent the morning writing down facts about hurricanes and tornados to share with the class that afternoon. Later in the day, we met on the carpet and began talking about what we knew about bad weather. Many students regurgitated information they learned from Patrick the previous day, while others made statements about their feelings during other storms and discussed a bad storm we had earlier this summer in which most students lost power. I asked the question, “I wonder what woodland animals do during bad storms?” One student responded, “I bet they run away” while others simply said they didn’t know. Then I added, “Sometimes during storms I’m curious how animals stay safe. Do you ever wonder about that?” The room buzzed with chatter and excitement! Students demonstrated as much curiosity as I hoped in exploring this idea together. On the board I wrote, “How can we use our knowledge of weather to keep woodland animals safe?”

Patrick joined me on a large seat near the board where I wrote the inquiry question. I introduced him as Storm the storm chaser and expert. I shared with the students that Patrick would pretend to be a real life storm chaser and storm expert and use what he really knew about storms to help us think about how to keep the woodland animals safe. I asked another inquiry question, “What might we need to know from our storm expert?” Together we made a list of questions. Patrick answered a few questions that he already knew but the list gave him an opportunity to do additional research on the topic in order to inform our project. In this situation I placed Patrick in a vital role in the classroom, that without him we would be unable to explore and answer the inquiry question at hand. Putting students in an expert role is an essential dimension of the Mantle of The Expert approach, as discussed previously (p. 16). Patrick saw himself as someone who belonged in the community and could use his knowledge to inform our work as
a class. Other students began to see Patrick in a new way too. Throughout this dramatic inquiry experience, students went to Patrick for advice and help to inform their own problem solving. Patrick experienced a position of power, which without dramatic inquiry may have been difficult to initiate or impossible to achieve.

Week 9: Support and Take Care of Each Other

One of our classroom rules (rule number one, see Figure 6) stated, support and take care of each other. As outlined in week two, a student in class, Sara, suggested this rule during a whole class discussion of our classroom rules/agreements for the year. Since that point we refer back to our classroom agreements multiple times a day and rule number one even more frequently than that. At this point in the year, I noticed students’ awareness of other students supporting and taking care of one another. Students help others tie their shoes, offer pencils to students in need and ask students standing alone at recess if they want to play. Such observations show just how serious students are about following our class agreements.

Patrick shared with the class a few weeks ago that his family got a puppy (a tiny Yorkshire Terrier). We were excited for him and eager to hear more about the puppy in the upcoming weeks. One day this week Patrick came to school upset and emotionally distressed. Normally, Patrick showed little emotion. To see him visibly upset we suspected something might be wrong. In class, students knew that when students appeared to be upset (i.e. crying, look upset, etc.) they could ask the student about his/her sadness, however, students could choose whether or not to talk about the issue. We refered to some issues as private (i.e. private news and private conversations), to make sure students feel comfortable knowing they can share such information if they wish but do not have to if they do not wish to share with others. For the first 20 minutes of the day students went to Patrick and asked him about his tears. He replied “It’s private,” meaning he did not want to talk about it at that moment. I too went up to him and asked if he wanted to talk about “it” (whatever “it” meant), to which he replied “no.” I respected his wishes. We began our day as always with our whole class morning meeting. While greeting each other, Patrick came
up to me and told me what happened. I asked him if he wanted to share with the rest of the class because other students wanted to know how to help. He agreed to share. Once we greeted each other, Patrick shared his news with the group. He remained seated (normally we stand when sharing), put his head down (normally we look each other in the eye), and told us that before getting on the bus this morning he held his new puppy and dropped her on the floor. He told us that he thought by dropping the puppy he hurt the puppy’s back and broke it. He shared that as soon as it happened the bus came and he had to go to school so he did not know if he hurt the puppy. We could all tell how guilty and sad Patrick felt!

The students stared at him with wide eyes, in silence, almost as if they did not know what to say. I stated “That must have been a hard way to start the day. Patrick, what can we do to support and take care of you today?” Patrick responded with “I don’t know.” Then other students began to chime in with ideas, all of which we ran past Patrick to make sure he agreed with the suggestions (one student referred to our first rule as a reference for us- coincidentally the same students who suggested this rule earlier this year). Some suggestions included giving him a hug, playing with him at recess, and helping him make something for the puppy. I named those things a little extra tender loving care (TLC). Students liked using the term TLC and it is a phrase they have used since to refer to extra support and care towards another person. Throughout our conversations I noticed Patrick’s body language, he began to sit up and look at us and eventually he stopped crying. After our talk we moved along with the rest of morning meeting and the rest of our day. Throughout the day, students kept their promises of giving Patrick a little extra TLC and by late afternoon Patrick acted as his typical self. The next day Patrick let us know his puppy was just fine.

Although the kind suggestions of an extra hug, playing with him at recess and helping him make something for his puppy helped with the situation, I felt impressed with the ways students wanted to help their peer and almost took the news of his puppy to heart, as their own pet! The development of empathy for students at this age is difficult but this week proved to me that developing empathy in young children can be done! I believe the classroom community formed so far this year has undoubtedly helped, students
feel as though the classroom is a space where they can share things with one another and feel supported. Due to the support offered in the classroom, students began to bring up to issues of injustice on the playground, concerns related to classroom routines and procedures, as well as personal problems that they want to discuss. The openness that students felt reiterated that our classroom is a place where we support and take care of one another, no matter the issue.

Week 10: Give Your Best

As we entered the final week of formal documentation of community building and students’ social-emotional growth we stumbled upon an issue affecting the entire community. During our time together in class students became so friendly and comfortable with each other and our space that I began to notice students making choices that not conducive to everyone’s learning. Students began to talk over one another, respond to questions with unrelated and silly answers and act in ways I had not observed before. Did they forget what it meant to be a contributing member of our community? Upon further reflection, I realized that earlier in the year (weeks 1-6) we spent a majority of our day focused on what it meant to be a contributing member of our community and acting as such throughout the day. During that time, we created our agreements, discussed consequences and dramatized literature related to communities and community building. For the past few weeks the intensity of instruction and formal practice related to communities has lessened. We continued to follow our class agreements and used logical consequences as needed, the classroom language remained consistent, and students continued to make friends. However, the ways students asserted themselves as members of the community changed and the time we spent focused on our community changed too. Our needs transformed as we grew as a community and the day to day experiences we had as a group affected the ways we responded to one another and continued to build or reconstruct our community. The agreements we made at the beginning of the year might not be the same agreements we end with at the end of the year. Our community will change and our expectations and agreements must be flexible enough to change too. Some agreements are non-negotiable, such as be safe and agreements dealing with kindness and/or respect. Yet, to keep our
agreements on our minds, we must be willing to alter them as needed by the group. Some of the issues we had consisted of students distracting other students from their own learning and displaying inappropriate behaviors during learning. When a student brought up the concerns to the group, I added on and said “Have you noticed these behaviors in class? What might we do about them?” Students responded with answers indicating they too noticed other behaving in distracting and inappropriate ways and referred to our logical consequences as the way to respond to such behaviors.

Throughout the past few weeks, I used the phrase “give to the group” but had not taken time to truly explore in enough detail what that actually meant in our classroom. Yet, one child suggested we do our best, which gave me the opportunity to start a conversation about giving to the group (by doing your best) and taking from the group (by behaving in a way that’s not conducive for the group’s learning). We role played different scenarios of what it meant to give your best to the group and what the opposite could look like. Once he realized what giving your best meant, I could see light bulbs go off as students began to give examples of giving their best to the group. Prior to this conversation, students did not realize that their behavior contributes to the group’s success and in order to have a successful community everyone must give their best.

As represented in Figure 7: Week 10 Sociogram, at this point most students developed friendships with several other students in class. The students who overlap onto my picture were those who wanted to sit by me on the carpet, always asked if I needed help and drew me pictures with hearts and invitations to eat with them at lunch. However, I placed Patrick close to me, not only because I spent the past 10 weeks focused on bringing him into the group and facilitating his social-emotional growth, but I also noticed a significant increase in his social relationships and contributions to our community. One student actually moved further away on the sociogram than where he started at week one through week five. His movement to the outside circle came as a surprise the past few weeks. Initially, he started the year with a group of three friends from his neighborhood then by week five moved to a friendship of two with another boy. By week ten, I noticed he played by himself at recess, worked alone in class and sat
alone during group activities on the carpet. In addition, he came to me several times in the past week for my help to solve social issues with other students. I noticed he struggled to maintain friendships and the use of the sociogram as a tool to track students’ social development I realized his struggles in way that I would not have been able to do otherwise.

Figure 7: Week 10 Sociogram

At the end of week ten, I sat down with Patrick for a final interview (See Appendix A: Interviews with Patrick). At this point Patrick seemed much more willing to answers the questions in a thoughtful way. When asked about how it feels to be a part of a community and belonging to a community, he responded with “good” because “I have someone to play with.” Initially, Patrick had difficulty identifying what it meant to be a community and during the week five interview he referenced a book we read as how it feels to be a part of a community. Question one looked at self-awareness, such as identifying and recognizing emotions. The most noticeable change in Patrick’s response to question one developed from weeks two through five. Although during our final interview he responded with a solid “good” as his answer (without hesitation), the basis of his response did not change from week five. When asked how others might feel if someone is being mean or if he acted mean to another student,
Patrick answered with much more detail and insight than in previous discussions. This time he explained why people interpreted his behavior as unkind when in all actuality he tried not to be unkind, rather sometimes accidents happened but others thought the behavior is purposeful. He shared an incident that happened earlier in the week during snack time. I felt excited to hear Patrick’s insight into other’s feelings, which proved his growth in the area of social awareness.

Question three dealt with responsible decision making. During our week one interview, Patrick problem solved negative situations with others by finding a teacher. At week five, Patrick shared a few other choices such as walk away or ignore the problem. During week ten, he shared a new set of choices called Kelso’s Choices. Three days prior to this conversation our guidance counselor came into the classroom to share with students types of problems and how to respond to problems. She referred to some problems as big problems (i.e. injuries, in danger) and other problems and small problems (i.e. untied shoelaces) then showed students a wheel of choices called Kelso’s Choices. The poster hung on the wall in our classroom and students referred to it frequently.

When asked about self management, the premise of Patrick’s answers stayed the same, however, the language that he used changed. He responded to being in control of yourself as “Have a calm body” and his reasoned with “That way you won’t hurt anyone.” The language “calm body” was used on a daily basis and another phrase I heard students use with one another.

The next question focused on relationship management. Initially, Patrick shared that he did not have friends in class and named two friends during the week five interview. This time he asked me to differentiate between a learning friend or a “regular” friend. Learning friends are the students who a student can sit next to and do their best learning and are chosen by students themselves. I told him he could tell me any friends. He responded by naming six other friends in class and one girl then proceeded to tell me about his birthday party and that he is inviting all of the boys in class. The fact that he has
chosen to invite all of the boys to his birthday and can name more than a few friends off the top of his head show an increase desire to make friends which ultimately affects his relationship management skills

The final question focused on how Patrick saw himself in relation to the community. In the beginning of the year, Patrick’s response proved unawareness as to what giving to the community meant. By week five, he shared that he gave to the group by “being good and raising my hand.” During our final interview, Patrick shared how another child in class gave to the group by raising her hand and in response to how he gave to the group he stated “I don’t be silly on the carpet. Giving is better than taking.”
Chapter 5: Discussion

Students who entered the classroom the first day of school did not appear to be the same students who existed in the same classroom at the end of the study. Over the course of 10 weeks students shared experiences everyday which helped facilitate the process of building community. I used dramatic inquiry as a tool to give students positions of power in which they would not otherwise take with other students, or the teacher, which proved to students that each and every student has something to offer to the group. This method proved successful in that those students began to see themselves as contributing members of the classroom and pivotal to the group’s success. The class’s ability to create such a space where students felt comfortable enough to bring issues of concern to the group and express their true feelings proved helpful in creating a stronger sense of belonging to the community. On numerous occasions, the group of students actively listened to other group members and responded to concerns and ideas in a thoughtful and helpful manner which ultimately helped the group grow closer together as a community. In addition to using dramatic inquiry as a tool to facilitate community building and encouraging students to have open and honest conversations in a safe space, I used specific language with students to further enhance the community building process. Rather than refer to the students as “you” and the teacher as “me,” she used such language as “us” and “we.” The use of such language positioned and demonstrated to students that everyone in class, including the teacher, were members of the community. Throughout the study, I noticed students using such language with each other when they referred to the classroom. Through the use of such language with one another, students showed others that they saw them as members of the community and reinforced such notions each day without prompts from me. As illustrated in Figures 2, 6 and 7, students’ navigation from their original standpoint at the beginning of the year in relation to the perceptions of where they stood within the community proves that by focusing on community building efforts within the classroom helps students grow as a stronger community. Although I used methods related to the Responsive Classroom approach, which presumably aided with the growth and development
of students as a community, such growth can also be attributed to the behaviors modeled by in the classroom and dramatic inquiry methods used to continue the development of community. Furthermore, the methods suggested by the Responsive Classroom approach do not account for students who struggle with social-emotional skills and may be viewed as “on the edge” of the classroom community, such as Patrick. To further develop Patrick’s growth, and other students like Patrick, teachers must also rely on additional methods to help facilitate such students’ social-emotional growth related to community building. In addition to Responsive Classroom techniques to develop community in the classroom, I reflected on the needs of the whole community, as well as Patrick’s strengths as a community member and used his strengths to plan activities to promote his social-emotional growth and progression as a vital component of the community. In order to plan activities to help develop community in the classroom, I reflected on my own teaching pedagogy throughout the ten week study in order to make changes to further facilitate the growth of community with all students.

**Implications for Future Research**

The findings in this study, in conjunction with future research, are important in expanding the ways teachers view teaching and learning related to students’ social-emotional development and the importance of community building in the classroom. As supported by sociocultural theorist and researcher, Vygotsky, “…changes in society, especially changes in societal demands on the individual, require changes in strategies for dealing with those demands” (Corsaro, 2005, p. 15). As it relates to the classroom, education is forever changing and the idea that academics are of higher importance than students’ social-emotional growth at school must change as well. Thus, future research must expand its breadth of research to include social-emotional studies to prove the importance of such practices within educational settings.

Future research questions might include: How is community constructed in a classroom including students with special rights? How are classrooms with strong social-emotional practices different from those without strong social-emotional practices? What role do the relationship between teachers and
families play in children’s social-emotional advancement in the classroom? How do students carry over the skills learned and practiced in the classroom to situations outside of the classroom?

In addition, future research related to community building in the classroom would benefit from an increased sampling size and participation pool beyond one classroom. Future researcher might also include students at multiple age levels and extend the geographical location of the study. By building upon this research, future researchers will be better able to replicate this study and with a larger sample size that could potentially be generalized across populations.

*Pseudonym*
Works Cited


Appendix A: Interviews with Patrick
Week 1 Interview with Patrick

1. Self awareness (e.g. identifying and recognizing emotions)
   a. T: What does it feel like to be a part of a community?
   b. P: “Uh…you mean like a police man.”
   c. T: “I mean like a classroom community.”
   d. P: (Sat for a minute, appeared to be thinking). “I don’t know.” (Shrugged shoulders)
   e. T: “How do you think it would feel to belong to a community?”
   f. P: “Like you’re helping. Like a police officer, I guess.”

2. Social awareness (e.g. perspective taking, empathy)
   a. T: “How do you think others feel when someone is being unkind to them?”
   b. P: “Sad.”
   c. T: “How do you think others would feel if you were being unkind to them?”
   d. P: “Sad?”

3. Responsible decision making (e.g. problem solving)
   a. T: “What can someone do if they’re having a problem with someone in class?”
   b. P: “Tell you (the teacher).”
   c. T: “What can you do if you’re having a problem with someone in class?”
   d. P: “I’d probably tell the teacher.”

4. Self management (e.g. impulse control, self motivation)
   a. T: “What does it mean to be in control of yourself?”
   b. P: “You sit still.”
   c. T: “What does it look like to be in control of yourself?”
   d. P: “Like this.” (Sat really still in his chair)
   e. T: “Why is it important to be in control of yourself?”
   f. P: “So you don’t get in trouble.”

5. Relationship management (e.g. communication, social engagement, building relationships)
   a. T: “Who are your friends in class?”
   b. P: “I don’t know.” (rolled his eyes)
   c. T: “What does it mean to be a good friend?”
   d. P: “I don’t have any friends. My friend Neil lives in my neighborhood. He was in your class last year.”
   e. T: “Tell me about your friendship with Neil.”
   f. P: “Well, he’s kinda rough. But we play football, he’s good at football.”

6. Perceptions of self as a part of the community
   a. T: “How do other students give to our classroom community?”
   c. T: “That could be one way. Can you think of another way?”
   d. P: “No.”
Week 5 Interview with Patrick

1. **Self awareness (e.g. identifying and recognizing emotions)**
   a. T: “What does it feel like to be a part of a community? Like our classroom community.”
   b. P: “When you’re in a community you help each other. Like in that book.” (Book - Always Rooms for One More)
   c. T: “How do you feel when you belong to a community?”
   d. P: “I think it feels good to help each other.” (Shrugs shoulders)

2. **Social awareness (e.g. perspective taking, empathy)**
   a. T: “How do you think others feel when someone is being unkind to them?”
   b. P: “Didn’t you already ask me this question.”
   c. T: “I did a few weeks ago. But answer it again, how do you think others feel when someone is being unkind to them?”
   d. P: “Probably mad.”
   e. T: “Why?”
   f. P: “Because of our rule.” (Turned head to read rule) “Support and take care of each other.”
   g. T: “How do you think others would feel if you were being unkind to them?”
   h. P: “Like I was breaking a rule.”

3. **Responsible decision making (e.g. problem solving)**
   a. T: “What can someone do if they’re having a problem with someone in class?”
   b. P: “Ignore it or walk away.”
   c. T: “What can you do if you’re having a problem with someone in class?”
   d. P: “Tell them to stop or move.”

4. **Self management (e.g. impulse control, self motivation)**
   a. T: “What does it mean to be in control of yourself?”
   b. P: “You would have a calm body on the carpet or when you get in line.”
   c. T: “What does it look like to be in control of yourself?”
   d. P: (Showed a still/calm body with the quiet sign)
   e. T: “Why is it important to be in control of yourself?”
   f. P: “Our rule says to be safe.”

5. **Relationship management (e.g. communication, social engagement, building relationships)**
   a. T: “Who are your friends in class?”
   b. P: “I play with (named 2 friends in class) at recess. We play football.”
   c. T: “What does it mean to be a good friend?”
d. P: “You’re nice to each other. Oh and you help each other, like when you’re hurt.”

6. Perceptions of self as a part of the community
   a. T: “How do students give to our classroom community?”
   b. P: “By being good and raising your hand.”
   c. T: “How do you give to our classroom community?”
   d. P: “I’m a good reader. I can read books to (named another student in class). But I’m not as good as (named another student in class).”

Week 10 Interview with Patrick

1. Self awareness (e.g. identifying and recognizing emotions)
   a. T: “What does it feel like to be a part of a community?”
   b. P: “Like our classroom community?”
   c. T: “Yes.”
   d. P: “Good.” (Shrugged shoulders)
   e. T: “How do you feel when you belong to a community?”
   f. P: “Good because I have someone to play with.”

2. Social awareness (e.g. perspective taking, empathy)
   a. T: “How do you think others feel when someone is being unkind to them?”
   b. P: “Probably pretty sad. Like they’re mad because you said you’d be nice and you’re not.”
   c. T: “How do you think others would feel if you were being unkind to them?”
   d. P: “Like I’m meaning to be mean, on purpose.”
   e. T: “What do you mean by being mean on purpose?”
   f. P: “Sometimes I don’t mean it but they think I did it to be mean.”
   g. T: “Can you think of a time that happened?”
   h. P: “A couple days ago, I knocked over (named another child)’s water bottle. It was an accident but I helped him clean it up.”
   i. T: “Do you think he was mad at you?”
   j. P: “No, if I would have knocked it over to be mean he would have been mad. But I didn’t.”

3. Responsible decision making (e.g. problem solving)
   a. T: “What can someone do if they’re having a problem with someone in class?”
   b. P: “They could probably make a Kelso’s Choice, or just ignore it. Maybe if it’s a big problem tell you. If it’s a small problem they could do a Kelso’s Choice.”
   c. T: “What can you do if you’re having a problem with someone in class?”
   d. P: “Work it out. Wait, I’d find someone else to play with.”

4. Self management (e.g. impulse control, self motivation)
   a. T: “What does it mean to be in control of yourself?
b. P: “Have a calm body.”

c. T: What does it look like to be in control of yourself?

d. P: (Stood up with his hands by his side and made a silly face)

e. T: “Why is it important to be in control of yourself?”

f. P: “That way you won’t hurt anyone.”

5. Relationship management (e.g. communication, social engagement, building relationships)

a. Who are your friends in class?

b. P: “Are you talking about a learning friend or a regular friend?”

c. T: “Any friends.”

d. P: “I play with (named 6 boys in class) at recess. (Named 1 girl) is a learning friend. I’m having a birthday party. I invited all the boys.”

e. What does it mean to be a good friend?

f. P: “You are nice to them and help them.”

6. Perceptions of self as a part of the community

a. T: How do students give to our classroom community?

b. P: “You mean give your best?”

c. T: “That could be one way. How do others giving their best?

d. P: “(Named one girl) raises her hand and listens.”

e. T: How do you give to our classroom community?

f. P: “I don’t be silly on the carpet. Giving is better than taking.”