

Morning Meeting: A Welcoming and Caring Way to Start the Day

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Abstract

“Good Morning, Everybody!” Follow my journey through Radio Park Elementary School where I observed how teachers are using the first precious moments of the school day to enhance their classroom learning environment. I wondered, “How can I justify using a significant amount of time in my future classroom for Morning Meeting?” This inquiry has allowed me to see first hand how the respectful, trusting tone that is set during Morning Meeting carries on throughout the school day.

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Background Information

Teaching Context

The first moments of each school day always seem to set the tone for the remainder of the day. Students have a variety of responsibilities they need to accomplish in a set period of time in order for the day's activities to get underway. For a teacher, it only takes a few minutes to realize the type of day you and your students are going to have.

Through my experiences in a first grade classroom at Radio Park, I have had the opportunity to work in an environment where Morning Meetings begin each school day. Before my internship, I had never experienced Morning Meeting. When it was first introduced to me, I enjoyed the concept of an organized and transitional start to the school day. Initially, I saw Morning Meetings as only that; a structured morning routine in which children greet one another and participate in a few calendar activities as a class.

As I received more experience observing and conducting my own Morning Meetings, I began to notice how richly packed each gathering was. Quickly, Morning Meeting began to be more than just a time to say good morning to one another. I noticed many opportunities for students to share information and to get to know their classmates through the dissemination of news. I observed students learning math, reading, and writing concepts through whole group academic activities and games. I also noticed my first grade students using the

strategies that had been given to them, such as listening to one another and contributing to whole class discussions.

As these qualities of Morning Meeting began to emerge for me, I had the urge to learn even more. I wanted to know how I could professionally justify using this portion of time each morning while there are so many subject areas and concepts to be taught in one given day. I asked myself, "When I have my own classroom, what concrete evidence will I have to defend using Morning Meeting each morning with my students?" I had seen the effects first hand but wondered what other teachers and researchers found on the topic.

Two areas I was interested in finding more about were how teachers at Radio Park etc and where the philosophy of Morning Meeting began. I had observed the immediate effects in my first grade classroom, but wondered how these gatherings were effecting students throughout our school building. I questioned how teachers felt about their classroom community as a result of Morning Meetings. Did sharing news from their personal life, help students feel more connected to their classmates?

I began to tackle these questions by researching the topic by using a variety of resources. I also realized that some of my research could come right from Radio Park and I should try and visit other classrooms. I visited Kindergarten through fifth grade classrooms to obtain information from teachers and students about their morning procedures and the results were exciting. I was able to interview both teachers and students about Morning Meeting and how they felt it contributed to their classroom experience.

Wonderings

My inquiry is centered on the wondering:

- How can I justify using a significant amount of time each morning in my future classroom for Morning Meeting?

From this central inquiry question, stem the following sub-wonderings:

- Why/How do teachers at Radio Park Elementary school use Morning Meeting in their classroom?
- How is the classroom environment affected by Morning Meeting across the grade levels?
- What are the benefits of conducting a Morning Meeting?
- What activities, games, and strategies are teachers currently using in their Morning Meeting?

Research

What is Morning Meeting?

According to The Morning Meeting Book, Morning Meeting consists of four major components each with their own purpose. A Morning Meeting can last anywhere from anywhere from 15-30 minutes depending on the grade level and the individual teacher. All classroom members, adults and children, gather in a circle, and participate in the following Morning Meeting structure:

1. **Greeting:** Students are given an opportunity to welcome one another by name, either through a handshake, singing, or clapping activity.

2. **Sharing:** Children share something special that is taking place in their personal life. Classmates listen and then have the opportunity to respond with questions or comments.
3. **Group Activity:** Children participate in a community building activity in which all students need to work together to accomplish one common goal.
4. **News and Announcements:** Students get a chance to preview the school day and hear any announcements their teacher may have to share. (Kriete, 3)

Morning Meeting was built on the accepted practice that all children need social guidance, structure and interaction. Children of all ages need to have frequent opportunities to practice being a member of a group. At Morning Meeting, everyone in the classroom, children and teachers alike, are at the same level. Everyone gathers together as a community with one common goal, to begin another wonderful and successful school day.

What is the purpose of Morning Meeting?

Each of the four sections of Morning Meeting- greeting, sharing, group activity, news and announcements- has specific goals and purposes. The greeting sets a positive tone for the Meeting, puts everyone on the same page, and provides a sense of recognition and belonging in the classroom.

The sharing portion of the Meeting helps students build social skills to communicate with others as well as respect and care for them. Students are

also given a chance to practice speaking to others while projecting their voices and strengthening their vocabulary.

The group activity encourages active participation, cooperation, and inclusion among students. These activities contribute to a sense of community through developing a common ground by use of familiar songs, poems, and games of which everyone is a part.

The purpose of News and Announcements is to serve as a transition into the remainder of the school day. Students are presented with the day's schedule and become excited about what they will be learning. Language and math skills are developed in an appropriate manner and a sense of community is built through written information every classroom member shares in.

In general, there are many skills and purposes Morning Meetings serve overall. According to the *Responsive Classroom Website*, Morning Meetings:

- Build community and creates a climate of trust
- Increase student's confidence and investment in learning
- Improve children's reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills
- Provide a meaningful context for teaching academic skills
- Encourage cooperation and inclusion
- Give children daily practice in respectful communication

The group setting that Morning Meeting provides, allows students to practice social skills they will use for the rest of their lives. This is an excerpt from Jo-Anne Lake's, [Lifelong Learning Skills](#):

“Through interaction with their social group and participation with its members, students can strengthen personal traits. They have numerous opportunities to use their initiative, accept responsibility for their decisions, and demonstrate perseverance and more while interacting with group members. As well, they can enhance verbal and written communication skills in both formal and informal group discussions. Developing social skills in a group problem-solving environment lets students think through ideas and assimilate new experiences, integrating them with their own.” (Lake, 82)

This daily powerful teaching tool allows students to share and respond to each other, to think and play together. When students are given opportunities to share knowledge with each other, they are enhancing their communication skills as well as learning how to work as a team. (Lemlech, 15) Children and teachers are able to begin their day in an organized fashion in which numerous critical skills are developed and reinforced.

My Inquiry Plan

Procedure

There were four distinct parts to my inquiry plan and each served a vital role in answering my wondering “How can I justify using a significant amount of time each morning in my future classroom for Morning Meeting?”. I researched the topic in order to discover what experts had to say about Morning Meeting and related programs. I performed observations in a variety of classrooms at different grade levels. I also conducted teacher surveys and student interviews in the hopes of understanding how Morning Meeting affects the classroom environment.

Data Collection

1. Research: I researched the topic of Morning Meeting in order to find out how it came about and what purposes researchers see in conducting one in the classroom. This research helped me to confirm what I was seeing in my own classroom and encouraged me to venture out to see if the same types of things were taking place in other classrooms throughout my school building. I did research on the concept of morning meeting and found many books and articles written on this topic. These resources ended up being a major piece of evidence for my claims.
2. Teacher Surveys: A teacher survey was created and distributed via teacher mailboxes. (Appendix A) Teachers at Radio Park in grades Kindergarten through fifth were asked to respond to the survey and

return within 8 school days. The objective of the survey was for me to determine how many teachers at my school are presently using Morning Meeting, what the meetings included, and how the meetings affected the environment in the classroom. Teachers were to answer the following questions:

- Do you have a Morning Meeting in your classroom?
- What do you include in your Morning Meeting?
- When did you start including Morning Meetings in your classroom and why?
- Do you think Morning Meeting affects your classroom environment? If so how?

3. Observations: I visited several classrooms and keep notes on the Morning Meeting that took place. I was interested in discovering the types of activities that were taking place at the various grade levels as well as how Morning Meetings were affecting the classroom environment. I enjoyed watching students as they participated in a wide-variety of activities and games that teachers had planned for their Morning Meeting. (Appendix B)
4. Student Interviews: After observations in classrooms took place, I spoke with two or three children from each class. I was interested in finding out how students felt about the Morning Meetings in their classroom. I asked students, "What is your favorite part of Morning Meeting?" I would respond to the student's answer with additional questions such as,

“Why do you feel that way?” or “Can you tell me more about that?,” as needed. (Appendix C)

Data Analysis

1. Research: As I conducted my research I was looking to answer two overarching questions: “What is Morning Meeting?” and “What is the purpose of Morning Meeting?” The answers to these questions were rather easy to locate and organize due to the large amounts of research done on the topic. I used much of the research I found as evidence to support my claims on why this type of program is an excellent way to begin the school day at all grade levels. As stated in my research portion, the numerous social, emotional, and academic needs that are met during this portion of the school day prove to benefit students not only during their schooling career but for the remainder of their lives.
2. Teacher Surveys: Of the nineteen teacher surveys (Appendix A) that were distributed to the teachers at Radio Park, seventeen were returned. I first separated the results into two piles: the teachers who use Morning Meeting and those who do not. I was intrigued by the small amount of teachers who do not use the program. Of the seventeen participants, only three do not use Morning Meetings in their classrooms. Next, I then took note of the reasons why these teachers do not use the program. One teacher stated that she did not know enough about Morning Meetings or even how to begin having one if she chose to. The other two teachers explained that their mornings have to get started as

soon as the school bell rings due to early “Specials”. I then took a look at the surveys of teachers who do use Morning Meetings in their classrooms. Many teachers stated that they used the program because it created such a great sense of community in the classroom. Others loved how it served as a transition into the remainder of the school day and how it set the tone for all of the day’s activities. From these teacher surveys, I scheduled time to visit each of the classrooms using Morning Meeting so that I could see first hand how it was working in other classrooms.

3. Observations: I visited 15 different classrooms, representing all grade levels ranging from Kindergarten through fifth grade, in order to get a sense of how Morning Meetings were working across grade levels. When I was in a classroom, I took notes on the structure of the specific Morning Meeting. I found that not all teachers use the exact four components of a Meeting as listed above, but they personalize it to fit the needs of their students and their individual personality. (Appendix B)
4. Student interviews: The answers given during student interviews were compiled and I sorted through them creating two piles. I made one grouping of all comments pertaining to sharing news and the other contained all other statements. Of the thirty-five students surveyed, twenty-three of them enjoyed sharing their own personal news and/or listening to their classmates share news. The remaining twelve students

enjoyed a variety of aspects of their classroom's Morning Meetings ranging from playing games to solving problems together. (Appendix C)

What I Learned

Through this inquiry project, I now have the confidence needed to defend conducting a Morning Meeting each and every day in my future classroom to principals and colleagues, as well as parents. Through research, observations, surveys, and interviews, I have recorded numerous benefits supporting the use of Morning Meeting and what it brings to the classroom. Morning Meetings are vital in the social, emotional, and academic growth of students. They are a calm and predictable way to begin each school day and that calmness has proven to carry throughout the entire day. Morning Meetings also foster a great sense of classroom community that is built through the sharing of news and participating in cooperative activities. The claims I will use to justify having a Morning Meeting in my future classroom and the evidence I will use to support them are as follows.

Claim 1: Morning Meeting provides the opportunities students need to develop the social, emotional, and intellectual skills critical to lifelong success.

Evidence:

Through my research, I discovered the main purposes of Morning Meeting. The four sections of the Meeting give numerous opportunities for

students to develop and build upon life skills such as listening to others, forming thoughtful sentences, reading for meaning, and working as a member of a team. The follow passage from The Morning Meeting Book, clearly states the overarching purpose of the program, which is to help students develop the skills they will need in order to be successful throughout their lives.

“Teachers have long known and researchers are now confirming that social skills are not just something to be taught so that children behave well enough to get on with the real business of schooling. Rather, they are inextricably intertwined with cognitive growth and intellectual progress. A person who can listen well, who can frame a good question and has the assertiveness to pose it, and who can examine a situation from a number of perspectives, will be a stronger learner. All of those skills -skills essential to academic achievement- must be modeled, experienced, practiced, extended, and refined in the context of social interaction.” (Kreite, 8)

Morning Meeting gives teachers multiple opportunities each morning to model and teach students the skills they will not only need in order to be successful in their education, but throughout their entire lives. An example of this was when I was observing in a second grade classroom. The teacher took time out of morning meeting to talk to the students about waiting patiently with their hand raised for their chance to share. Patience is extremely important to have in the classroom, but it is also a vital characteristic for the remainder of a child’s life. This particular educator took a “teachable

moment” and made the most of it for her all of her students. According to

Lifelong Learning Skills:

“Our students will need to see education as a continuing process in their lives. They will need to know how to use many different learning methods, both old and new, and to develop transferable skills. They will need to have not only a foundation of knowledge acquired in school but also the ability to acquire new knowledge easily and skillfully.” (Lake, 5)

In today’s world, teaching our students how to be successful, critical thinkers is the key responsibility of an educator. We strive each and every day to help our students achieve academically, but also to create a well-rounded citizen prepared to take on whatever life has in store for them and that is truly rewarding.

Claim 2: Morning Meetings set a positive tone for the entire school day.

Evidence:

Through observations in both my own classroom and the classrooms of other teachers at Radio Park, I have seen first hand how Morning Meetings serve as an organized and predictable transition to the school day. Students understand that each and every day when they come to school, they will begin with a Morning Meeting where they can gather with the members of their classroom community. This sense of community that is built through Morning Meeting activities, creates bonds of trust and friendship amongst students.

When students respect one another, they are more likely to support, encourage, and help each other to achieve their highest potential.

At the Meeting, students are walked through the daily schedule, which allows them to look forward to the remainder of their day. (Appendix D)

In regards to the daily schedule, one of my first grade students said, "I like knowing what we are going to in school every day. I get excited about what we are going to do next." I have observed that children need to have a sense of "knowingness" to help them get through the day and that it helps transitions run more smoothly.

The structured and calm tone of Morning Meeting, sets the stage to the remainder of the school day. In my classroom, I have observed how calm students are when they proceed from Morning Meeting into the first activity of our day, which is Language Workshop. Students quickly settle into their work and know exactly what is expected from them. (Appendix D)

Claim 3: A sense of community and trust is established through the sharing and community building activities that take place during Morning Meeting.

Evidence:

Through teacher surveys and student interviews, I discovered how many teachers view Morning Meeting as a way to build up the classroom community among their students. Each teacher surveyed, had comments supporting the use of Morning Meeting in their classroom because it created a sense of unity among their students. The following statements support my claim that through

the cooperative activities and sharing time allotted during Morning Meeting, students are able to able to establish trust and community with one another.

- Third Grade Teacher:

“Morning Meeting helps establish a team, helps promote a caring classroom, and helps to get everyone off to a good start each morning.”

- Second Grade Teacher:

“It begins our day on a positive foot with everyone feeling welcomed and included.”

- Second Grade Teacher:

“Morning Meeting helps build/sustain our classroom community. The children really get to know each other and it is a low-key, predictable way to start the day.”

- Kindergarten Teacher:

“It helps set the tone for the day. It is a good team and classroom bonding time too.”

- Fifth Grade Teacher:

“My hope is that Morning Meeting helps establish good relationships and builds a team.”

Students also had many comments supporting Morning Meetings in regards to building a sense of community. When I personally interviewed students from the classrooms I visited at Radio Park, I asked each of them,

“What is your favorite thing about Morning Meeting?” Here are just a few of their responses: (Appendix C)

- First Grader:

“I like being able to ask my friends questions after they share something.”

- First Grader:

“I like when we all sit together in a circle and say good morning.”

- Second Grader:

“I like sharing news. I was excited about what I did over the weekend. I like knowing what my classmates did too.”

- Second Grader:

“I like Monday mornings because we get to do headline news. My classmates do lots of fun things on the weekends that I like to hear about.”

- Fourth Grader:

“I like when we all have to work together to solve a problem”

These responses prove how successful Morning Meeting is in creating a classroom environment where children appreciate one another and look forward to sharing pieces of their lives. When children respect the individuals in the environment they are more likely to take risks. According to The Morning Meeting Book:

“In order to learn, we must take risks- offering up a tentative answer we are far from sure is right or trying out a new part in the choir when we are not sure we can hit the notes. We can take these risks only when we know we will be respected and valued, no matter what the outcome. We must trust in order to risk, and Morning Meeting helps create a climate of trust.” (Kreite, 11)

Conclusions and Future Directions

Implications for teacher practice

I now have the confidence and the knowledge to defend Morning Meeting to future principals, colleagues, and parents. The first moments of the school day are so critical and I can not think of a better way to set the tone for academic, social, and emotional learning. There is no doubt in my mind that I will conduct a daily Morning Meeting in my future classroom. There are countless reasons why students should be exposed to such a richly packed morning procedure. I hope to pass my knowledge of Morning Meetings on to other teachers because of the success the students and teachers at Radio Park Elementary school have had with it.

New wonderings

1. How will I set up a Morning Meeting in my own classroom?
 - Now that I have observed and researched the variety of activities that can be performed during Morning Meeting, I am wondering

which I will choose to include in my own classroom in the future. I look forward to experimenting with many of the teaching strategies and community building activities I now know so much about.

2. Which community building activities will be the most beneficial for my students?

- I am now well aware of the classroom community that Morning Meetings help to build, and I am interested in experimenting with many different games and activities to see which will be the most beneficial to my students.

3. Will I have success encouraging other teachers to conduct Morning Meetings in their classrooms?

- Now that I have so much knowledge on the benefits of Morning Meetings, I wonder if I will be able to pass on what I have learned in order to help other teachers begin to use an organized routine in their own classroom.

Overall, I have truly enjoyed my first inquiry experience. I have learned about my school, my classroom, and most importantly myself as a teacher. I can clearly see the wonderful benefits of conducting a Morning Meeting in a classroom, how it affects the lifelong learning of students and how it enhances the learning environment. I look forward to using the knowledge I have gained through this inquiry to start each school day off on the right foot.

Works Cited

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Appendix A

Morning Meeting Survey

Do you have a morning meeting in your classroom? Yes No

If Yes....

- What do you include in your morning meeting?

- When did you start including morning meetings in your classroom and why?

- Do you think morning meeting affects your classroom environment? If so how?

If No....

- What does your morning routine consist of?

- Have you ever tried morning meetings in your classroom?

***I am interested in observing your morning meeting/routine within the next few weeks. If this would be ok, please fill out the following:

Morning Meeting/Routine starting and endings times: _____

Dates that **DO NOT** work for you: _____

I will let you know in advance the day I plan to observe. Thank you so much for your time and support! Ashley ☺