

**Morning Meetings:
Are they the right way to start the day?**

**Cynthia Inman
Intern, Panorama Village Elementary School
Second Grade**

cji108@psu.edu

**State College Area School District—Penn State University Teacher
Inquiry Conference
April 29, 2006**

ABSTRACT:

Every minute of the school day is valuable to both teachers and students. With such a short school day, some teachers find themselves wondering how they will meet the increasing needs of their students in such a short amount of time each day. So what makes morning meetings worth the time spent on them every morning? The purpose of this inquiry is to explore this and other related questions regarding morning meetings.

A. Background Information

Description of Teaching Context

Since the start of the school year, I have been interning in a second grade classroom at Panorama Village Elementary School. The seventeen students in my class represent a diverse group of learners in terms of culture, behavior, academic level, and social skills. Each student brings his or her own unique personality and learning abilities into our classroom. Taken as a whole, my class has been described by many (including my mentor teacher, many experienced guest teachers, myself, and others) as an exceptionally quiet and well-behaved class of second grade students.

Consisting of six boys and eleven girls, the gender ratio of male to female students is quite large. Being an inclusive classroom, three of my students have Individualized Education Plans (I.E.P.'s) and receive learning support services for some part of every school day. Three students also receive reading instruction from the Title I teacher four times per week. Two of my students attend learning enrichment for math once a week. As you can see, my class represents a wide range of academic ability.

About half of the students show good social skills with peers and express themselves and their ideas well. The other half is exceptionally quiet and anxious to conform to others. Most of the students exhibit appropriate behavioral skills and get along well with others, with a few exceptions. These few students are either uncooperative, inattentive, excessively talk out of turn, and/or hurt others' feelings only some of the time.

Most of the students who attend Panorama Village come from affluent areas of the district. However, the socio-economic statuses of my entire group of students do vary to some

degree as well. Ethnicities vary widely among my students; however, race does not. Sixteen of my students are Caucasian and one is African-American.

Rationale for This Inquiry

The foundation of this inquiry rests on wonderings about morning meetings and the effects that they could have on my classroom of second graders or more generally, to any elementary classroom. There are several factors that led me to this inquiry. One factor is the innately quiet nature of my students. Having few behavioral issues and conflict problems is beneficial to my classroom learning environment, but I wondered if this minimal social interaction among my students could be disadvantageous to them. I wondered if morning meetings could aid in the acquisition of appropriate social skills among my students. My belief, backed by research, that the social curriculum in schools, especially at the primary level, is just as important as the academic curriculum, was thus part of what drove me to this inquiry.

Another factor that led me to this inquiry is my experience in a fourth grade classroom last year. As a work-study student serving as an aid for two mornings every week, I was able to sit back on the sidelines and watch a class of twenty-four fourth graders develop a tight bond among themselves and their teacher. By the end of the year, I had witnessed a great deal of growth in compassion, kindness, and community. The students sincerely cared about each other and their teacher. I wondered if this had partly been a result of their daily morning meeting routine. I used this wondering to drive my inquiry this year with my new class of second graders.

A final factor that led me to this inquiry is a pure passion for something that I did not see in my classroom. As an intern, I was witnessing a successfully run classroom with happy, high-

achieving students, but there were no morning meetings to begin each day. My passion for morning meetings had developed from my experiences with them in the fourth grade classroom and methods classes, the literature that I had read about them for my coursework, and the information about them that was presented to me in my classes. At the completion of my methods courses, I realized that the classes that began with a morning meeting were the classes that I enjoyed the most. However coincidental this might be, I knew that I looked forward to our morning meetings, and I also was able to get to know my classmates more easily and fully as a result of them. My passion emerged into a curiosity to see what effects morning meetings would have on my students.

Through my inquiry, I sought answers to my questions about the effects of morning meetings. If my evidence showed positive effects of morning meetings on my classroom and students, I would continue to use them as an effective classroom tool. On the other hand, if my evidence did not show that the way I conducted morning meetings was beneficial to my students, I would consequently change what I was doing and inquire into the effects of my new wonderings.

Finally, I knew that my inquiry would show the effects that morning meetings had on my particular group of second graders. However, I also wanted to know what effects morning meetings might have on any group of elementary students. In order to use this inquiry for professional growth, I wanted to find out what it was about morning meetings that was so beneficial to the growth and development of students in general. I asked myself, "What makes morning meetings so important in any classroom, regardless of class size, demographics, or any other differences among schools?" Knowing this would encourage me to continue planning a morning meeting each day in order to provide the best education possible for my students. Prior

to the start of my inquiry, I knew that my results would also affect my future teaching because I would be able to take what I learned and apply it to my own classrooms in the future.

Additionally, before I began this formal inquiry, I was in the process of developing an inquiry stance toward my teaching. I felt confident that my experience with my inquiry regarding morning meetings would help provide me with the extra tools I needed to more fully develop an inquiry stance toward my future teaching.

What the Literature Says

Research on the topic of morning meetings overwhelmingly supports them. The concept of morning meetings originate from the Responsive Classroom approach to teaching and learning, a system of beliefs developed at the Northeast Foundation for Children (Kriete, 2002). The Responsive Classroom is based on a set of core components involving the classroom learning community, and morning meetings affect that learning community in a number of ways. According to *The Morning Meeting Book* by Roxann Kriete (2002), there are five main purposes of morning meetings as a component of the Responsive Classroom:

1. *Morning Meeting sets the tone for respectful learning and establishes a climate of trust.*
2. *The tone and climate of Morning Meeting extend beyond the Meeting.*
3. *Morning Meeting motivates children by addressing two human needs: the need to feel a sense of significance and belonging and the need to have fun.*
4. *The repetition of many ordinary moments of respectful interaction in Morning Meeting enables some extraordinary moments.*
5. *Morning Meeting merges social, emotional, and intellectual learning.* (p. 9)

Although morning meetings can be structured in any way that the teacher desires, the literature supports and emphasizes four contributing components of morning meeting: a greeting, sharing, group activity, and news/announcements. All components are completed with

students and adults sitting in a circle so that everyone is able to see and interact with every other person in the room. By starting each meeting with one of a variety of lively and interesting greetings to recognize each person present in the classroom, students are able to gain a sense of belonging (Bondy & Ketts, 2001). Sharing allows students to learn about each other's lives and interests and is "designed to stimulate face-to-face conversation," which provides students with "opportunities to develop and practice skills of listening, presenting to a group, taking turns, formulating relevant questions, and taking different perspectives" (Bondy & Ketts, 2001, p. 145). The group activity can have one of three goals. These short, usually fast-paced activities can relate to academic skills, relate to general social skills such as following directions, problem-solving, or exercising self-control, or simply be for fun (Kriete, 2003). The news and announcements part of morning meeting gives an opportunity for students to hear about what their day will entail, and it helps everyone look forward to the day's events (Kriete, 2003).

Every piece of research that I found regarding morning meetings presented them in a positive way. I was not able to find any drawbacks or disadvantages of using morning meetings from the authors I read who wrote about them. Rather, the literature supports using them, gives concrete examples of the effects they have on classroom learning environments and students, and presents real classrooms where morning meetings have had a positive impact on the learners.

Many people in the field of education would agree that in order to learn, individuals must take risks. Risk-taking is not easy for everyone, and in many situations, students will only take risks when they know that others will "respect and value them, no matter the outcome" (Kriete, 2003, p. 70). The community that morning meetings establish help students to feel safe and comfortable and therefore more willing to take risks ("Teachers Talk About," 1999).

By allowing integration of social, emotional, and academic learning, morning meetings can have significant effects on student growth in all areas of development. According to the writers of “‘Like Being at the Breakfast Table’: The Power of Classroom Morning Meeting,” morning meetings can lead to profound effects on student attitudes, productivity, engagement in learning, academic achievement, assertiveness, responsibility, and sense of belonging in a classroom; they also help students develop their ability to empathize, cooperate, exhibit self-control, communicate, and build relationships (Bondy & Ketts, 2001).

My research introduced me to several teachers who use morning meetings in their practice. One of those teachers is Eric Henry, a fifth grade teacher at John Middleton School in Skokie, Illinois. When he decided to try out this approach to begin each day, he was skeptical about taking time away from other classroom activities to gather together for a morning meeting. After implementing them, however, and using them for four years, he wrote, “I can’t envision my classroom without it. It’s the best routine I have for the day-to-day management of the learning environment.” (“Teachers Talk About,” 1999, p. 1).

Used as an approach for a successful classroom learning environment and to ultimately benefit the development of student growth in all areas of learning, morning meetings have proved to be an important part of the school day in a myriad of classrooms across the country. After conducting extensive background research on this topic, I now wanted to find out for myself what effects such a daily event could have on my own students. My mind was filled with questions, and I was eager to get started with my inquiry.

Wonderings and Questions

Generally speaking, teachers are starved for time. All teachers have time constraints to deal with, and many elementary teachers find it difficult to “fit in” everything that they want to teach in one school year. With the increased focus on our students’ diverse needs and the increasing demand for standards combined with a short school day, teachers often wonder how they will get through the curriculum in time. In my own classroom, I was running into a problem with the clock. How would we find time in the day to fit in a morning meeting? This led me to my main wondering:

- What makes morning meetings worth the time spent on them?

From this question, a plethora of related questions quickly emerged. In addition to my main wondering, I used five sub-questions to drive my inquiry:

- Could morning meetings help develop a better community among my students?
- What kinds of effects could morning meetings have on my students’ self-esteem, motivation, and/or success?
- Can morning meetings relate to, or reinforce, academic content or incorporate short activities that would otherwise be done during instructional time?
- Do morning meetings help establish a positive tone for the day?
- Does each component of morning meeting (greeting, sharing, activity, and news/announcements) always need to be included at each meeting?

B. My Inquiry Plan

Inquiry vs. Project

This long-term project is a true inquiry, not simply an improvement project. A main component of a true inquiry project is that it is driven by questions, not answers. My entire project was driven by questions, or wonderings, that I developed at the start. My goal was not simply to see what improvements I could create in my students or what benefits I could see as a result of implementing morning meetings into my classroom. My goal was to search for the effects of morning meetings in my classroom. I did not have a set agenda of things that I expected to see improve as a result of this project.

Inquiry Plan Description

My plan for this inquiry began with an idea. I had read a lot of literature about morning meetings, and I had learned a lot about them in my courses. However, I had not seen them take place in my classroom. I began to develop wonderings about morning meetings, and later I created an inquiry brief detailing each aspect of my inquiry. (See appendix A.) Although my wonderings remained the same throughout my inquiry, my plans slightly deviated from what I had outlined in my inquiry brief at the start of this project.

On February 8, 2006, I began collecting data in my classroom. The following week, I began implementing morning meetings into our daily morning routine. The first day, I introduced the concept to my students, and each subsequent day, we continued with the routine. The activities that I implemented during each meeting differed each day, and eventually the meetings evolved into a more structured event. Only one thing was the same about them each

time: a greeting. For every meeting, I introduced a new kind of greeting. For example, the first day, we said a simple “good morning” to each other as we went around the circle. With time, I introduced other greetings that were fun and interesting, such as saying hello in different languages, as well as song and chant greetings. (See Appendix B) Other parts of the meetings that differed from day to day were sharing, a group activity, and news/announcements.

Sharing—Sharing is something that my students were familiar with in our classroom because it had been a regular routine that took place every Monday since September. Students and adults always gathered in a circle on the first day of the week to share one thing we did over the weekend as a precursor to the day’s writing assignment. For the first two weeks of morning meetings, every person had the opportunity to share something about him- or herself each day. We talked about the idea of sharing “news” and not “things” so that we could all learn about each other’s lives and interests rather than our possessions. Students were also given the option to “pass” if they did not wish to share.

For the next four weeks, I changed our sharing routine to allow only a few students to share each day. On Monday, everyone was able to share one thing they did over the weekend, and for the remainder of the week, students signed up for one day per week to share. With this system, we also began a “reflection” component of the sharing that took place at morning meeting. After a student shared his or her news, students volunteered to give a reflection for that sharing that identified how the sharer probably felt about their news. I felt that this component of sharing was necessary because many students were sharing news that I felt needed a response. For example, one day, one student shared that her grandmother died and was clearly saddened by her news. I responded sympathetically, but later I reflected on the meeting and realized that I did not want to be the only one to respond to such news; I wanted other students to be involved and

be able to respond to their peers. By focusing on feelings with the reflection, I felt that empathy skills could be built into our meetings. After four weeks using this system of sharing, I reverted back to the first system of allowing everyone to share each day for a few weeks in order to see if there had been any changes in the amount of students who used the “pass” option.

Group Activity—Our group activities, when included in the meetings, involved either short activities that related to an academic concept or whole-group games. One whole-group game is called “zoom” and involves each person subsequently saying the word “zoom” until someone stops the flow of the game with the word “eek.” Upon this interruption, the direction of the zoom is reversed. The activity I planned for Valentine’s Day involved a Valentine exchange. On other days, the activities included such things as editing letters that I wrote to the class or reading fact cards about sea animals, an activity that related to our *Life Under the Sea* thematic social studies unit.

News/Announcements—This component of the meeting was usually present in the form of a discussion of the day’s schedule. Other times, I also included important announcements for the students.

During most weeks, I strategically planned a morning meeting only four out of the five days of the week. My motives for this action were to find out if students noticed that I did not plan a morning meeting on certain days and comment either favorably or unfavorably toward the idea of not having a morning meeting.

Throughout my entire inquiry, my data collection continued. Although I will continue this inquiry in a less formal way throughout the remainder of the year, my formal data collection ended on April 7, at which time I began my data analysis.

Data Collection

Fieldnotes: Each day that I held a morning meeting in my classroom, I kept a record of the events of the meeting in a notebook. I also wrote down interesting quotes my students said regarding the meetings in general, specific components of the meetings, or how they felt.

Sharing Sign-up Sheets: These were the pieces of paper students used to sign up for sharing one day out of the week. I kept these sheets to see if there were trends in the numbers of students who volunteered to share over time or trends in specific students' willingness to share over time.

Student Surveys: Before I implemented morning meetings into my classroom, I issued an anonymous survey to every student asking them to respond honestly to five questions. For each question, I provided a list of three to five statements, and their job was to circle the one statement that best described them. I created these questions in order to gauge how well the students felt they knew their peers, how confident they felt in their work, how comfortable they felt talking and sharing ideas in front of others, and how much they enjoyed being in school. Toward the end of my formal inquiry, I asked my students to fill out another survey anonymously. This post-survey had all of the same questions on it worded the exact same way as the pre-survey.

Student Interviews: On the same days that I surveyed my students, I also interviewed them with additional questions that I felt were less personal. I decided to ask these particular questions to the students in an interview format so that I could record their responses. In doing so, I felt that I would be able to record more thorough data than if they were to write down their own responses. During the first round of interviews, I asked questions that required the students to think about

their experiences with morning meetings in first and second grade and their likes and dislikes about our current morning routine in our classroom. I recorded their responses not only by what they said verbally but also with observations of their facial expressions and enthusiasm levels when possible. During the second round of interviews, I asked questions that required students to respond to their likes and dislikes about our morning routine and morning meetings. I also asked a question that would help me gauge how they thought morning meetings made them feel for the rest of the day (i.e. whether they changed their moods or not.) I wanted to be able to use these pre- and post-interviews to compare each student's responses before and after implementation of morning meetings, so, unlike the student surveys, I did include each child's name on these interviews.

Observational Notes: For several morning meetings, both my PDA and/or my mentor took observational notes of our morning meetings in order to document events, student participation, quotations, student reactions, and other relevant data. (See Appendix C)

Mentor Interview: At the end of my formal data collection period, I interviewed my mentor in order to gain her perspective of the effects of morning meetings on our classroom. I asked her what changes she had noticed in the students, either individually or as a whole, that she felt might have been a result of morning meetings. I also asked her several other questions regarding specific students and specific changes she has noticed. For example, two questions I asked were, "Have you noticed a greater community among the students that may not have existed without morning meetings?" and, "Have you noticed any changes in any specific students' self-esteem, motivation, or success that you think might be a result of the morning meetings?"

Paraprofessional Interview: I also conducted an informal interview with the paraprofessional who works with a special needs child in my class. This child, whom we will call Steven*, has Down's Syndrome and is in our classroom only part time. The other time he learns with his paraprofessional in the learning resource room. I asked her a few simple open-ended questions such as, "What changes have you noticed in [Steven] since we have started morning meetings?" and, "Do you think our morning meetings have helped [Steven] become more comfortable in our class?"

*Name has been changed.

Teacher Surveys: I sent a list of questions to five primary and kindergarten teachers who use morning meetings in their classrooms. I asked these teachers what kinds of effects they have seen in their classrooms as a result of morning meetings. I also asked them each specific questions about morning meetings that related to my wonderings, such as "What makes morning meetings worth the class time you spend on them?" and "Do you believe your morning meetings help establish a positive tone for the day?"

Data Analysis

As a precursor to my data analysis, I organized all of the data that I had been collecting throughout the entire inquiry by sorting it into piles based on method of data collection.

Fieldnotes: Already organized into a notebook, and therefore ordered by data, the fieldnotes provided a running record of each morning meeting. I read through the entire notebook once,

and then read it a second time, highlighting the most interesting notes. I used a yellow highlighter to mark students' reactions to our meetings. For example, one section that I highlighted on April 4 regarding the day's greeting was, "[Cole]*: 'Can we do it again?' Smiles. Excitedly sat down." These were notes to myself about a quote that one of my students said about the greeting that indicated his pleasure with the activity. I also knew that many students appeared very excited about the greeting because of their smiles and enthusiasm when sitting down. I used the yellow highlighter to also mark students who chose the "pass" option during our sharing activities.

Using a pink highlighter, I was able to mark dates that I did not plan morning meetings. For each of these dates, I also highlighted all student reactions observed by myself or my mentor regarding this change in routine. For example, on April 12, the students reacted to my plan for no morning meeting by requesting that we hold one that morning. The last color I used to analyze my fieldnotes was blue.

With the blue highlighter, I marked other reactions or feelings that I had about our meetings, as well as new wonderings that I developed throughout the process. For example, on March 30, I wrote, "...many students were not loud enough and had to repeat themselves several times because other students complained that they could not hear them...should I include more shared reading in morning meetings to help students become comfortable projecting their voices?"

*Name has been changed.

Sharing Sign-up Sheets: In order to analyze this data, I created a table with each of the students in my class. I placed a check in the column(s) that each student signed up to share. Once the

table was complete, looking for trends among each individual student's participation became easy. (See Appendix D) However, after studying the table carefully for trends, I did not notice any that I believed to be significant.

Student Surveys: I used a series of charts to analyze this data. For each question, I recorded the amount of responses for each option by using tally marks and then adding up the total number of tallies. I put the pre- and post- survey result charts next to each other in order to easily recognize trends or changes in responses before and after implementation of morning meeting.

Student Interviews: To analyze my student interviews, I made several comparison charts. For the first chart, I compared the responses the students made to the same question in both the pre- and post-interviews: "What is your favorite part about our morning routine?" I used tally marks to record all favorite activities and made notes of non-verbal reactions when possible (i.e. a student smiled when responding). I used the same method to compare another question that was the same during both interviews: "What is your least favorite part about our morning routine?" (See Appendix E)

Next, I recorded the number of students who remembered having a morning meeting in first grade or kindergarten, a question from the first interview. Again, I used tally marks to record which of these students remembered one thing they enjoyed about the meetings and which remembered one thing they did not enjoy. I also made a list of the activities they did enjoy and a separate list of activities they did not enjoy, noting interesting quotations from the interviews.

(See Appendix F)

Then I looked at only the second interviews. I used tally marks to record responses to the questions, “Is there anything I can change about morning meeting to make them better?” and “How do our morning meetings make you feel?” (See Appendix G)

Finally, I read each student’s interview responses from both interviews and noted any outstanding changes that I noticed in their responses to similar questions. (See Appendix H)

Observational Notes: To analyze these notes, which were taken by my cooperating teacher and supervisor, I organized each record according to the date of the meeting. Then, I read through the entire stack of observational notes just to get a feel for what kind of information I had. Finally, I went back through each record and used highlighters to mark notes that I felt might be able to help show trends over time. I used a yellow highlighter to highlight student responses, quotes, those students who used the “pass” option in our sharing activities, and those students who volunteered to share a reflection during sharing. I used a blue highlighter to mark areas of concern about morning meetings. For example, several observational notes mentioned that students were not loud enough for everyone in the circle to hear what they were saying and had to repeat their words one or more times. And, I used an orange highlighter to highlight activities that involved academic skills or information related to our curriculum.

Finally, I created a table to show which students used the “pass” option during the times when every person had the opportunity to share. This chart was able to visually represent trends in participation levels during sharing. Beside this chart, I created another chart to show which students volunteered for reflections during the month-long period when we used signing up ahead of time to share during morning meeting. (See Appendix I)

Mentor and Paraprofessional Interviews: I read this data, consisting of only one page of information each, to remind myself of the responses. I used symbols to note the type of response each question elicited so that I could compare the responses to my teacher surveys. The symbol system that I created and utilized follows:

T = effects of morning meeting on the tone of the school day

C = effects of morning meetings on classroom community

SE = effects of morning meetings on students' self-esteem

M = effects of morning meetings on students' motivation

S = effects of morning meetings on students' success academically

A = ways that morning meetings can incorporate academic content

4C = the necessary or lack of necessity in using all four components of the morning meeting

B = effects of morning meetings on students' sense of belonging in the classroom, or ownership of the classroom

O = other important information regarding effects of morning meetings

Teacher surveys: I read through each of the teacher's responses without trying to analyze them at first. Then, I read through them again looking for and noting trends in responses among teachers. Finally, I used the same symbol system from my mentor and paraprofessional interview data to mark the topic that each response addressed.

Claims:

Claim 1: *Morning meetings help establish a positive tone for the day.*

Evidence:

A common trend that was outstandingly obvious when analyzing my data was that my students thoroughly enjoyed our morning meetings. This daily morning routine sets a positive tone and outlook for both the students and the teachers for the rest of the day. My evidence comes from several sources, including my fieldnotes, observational notes, student interviews, mentor interview, and teacher surveys.

Throughout my fieldnotes notebook, I wrote down on most days that most, and sometimes all, students smiled or laughed during our greetings, sharing time, and/or activities during morning meeting. I noted that during many meetings, students looked pleased or said things that indicated their interest in the meeting. For example, after one greeting in which I set the timer and told the students to greet as many people as they could in one minute, many students made comments as they sat down, which included, “That was the best greeting ever!” and, “Can we do it again?” These observations indicated the students’ pure interest and enjoyment in our gatherings. I also noted on several days that my mentor told me she enjoyed the activities we did or that she noticed that the students really enjoyed our meeting.

Additionally, our first meeting took place on a day when one student was absent. When that student returned the next day, I asked for a volunteer to explain to him what a morning meeting was, and “several students raised their hands excitedly” to explain. Many were very eager to fill the student in on this new routine, which indicated to me their interest in it.

My fieldnotes helped me keep track of the days that we did not hold a morning meeting in our class. On three of those days, I noted comments that I heard students say about the

missing component of our morning. On February 15, one student said disappointingly, “I can’t believe we didn’t have our meeting this morning where we shake hands!” On February 22, another student asked me, “Are we doing a morning meeting this morning?” When I confirmed for her that we were indeed going to have one, she replied, “Oh good, because yesterday we didn’t do morning meeting.” On April 12, there was not a morning meeting scheduled, and my mentor unexpectedly had to go to the office before she started the lesson she had planned as the first activity of the day. She asked the students to talk quietly until she returned. Upon this announcement, one student turned to me and asked, “Can we have a morning meeting while we are waiting?” At this suggestion, several students said, “Yeah!” Of course, I enthusiastically agreed to the suggestion by saying, “If you would like to join us for a morning meeting, please meet me on the carpet.” Not one student turned down the invitation. All of this evidence indicates that the students enjoy our daily morning meetings and are therefore happy at the start of our day together.

Evidence from observational notes taken by my mentor and PDA also indicate the enjoyment students get out of our gatherings and the happy tone that they set for our classroom. Notes from this data include such phrases as, “children enjoyed sharing,” “students were very excited,” “students seemed to enjoy,” and, “students appeared excited to go back to carpet and get seated [to begin the meeting.]”

The fact that my students thoroughly enjoy morning meetings as a school activity is evident in other data. When I interviewed my students before I implemented morning meetings, I asked them if they remembered having morning meetings in kindergarten or first grade. Fifteen of the sixteen students I interviewed did, and many smiled, used enthusiastic voices, or perked up when responding. Of those fifteen students, fourteen were able to tell me at least one thing they

liked about them and only three were able to remember things they did not enjoy about them. One student said, “I wish we did it in this class.” During the post-interviews with my students, all sixteen students told me that their favorite part of the daily morning routine in our classroom was the morning meeting, or more specially, one aspect of morning meeting such as the greeting or sharing. One student in particular shared with me during the first interview that he did not have a favorite part of our morning routine. During the post interview, however, he enthusiastically declared with a smile that morning meetings are his most favorite part of the morning. Over half of the students indicated that morning meetings put them in a good mood for the rest of the day, while the other few students declared that the meetings don’t change their mood. None of the students indicated that morning meetings put them in a bad mood.

Other evidence that morning meetings set a positive tone for the day come from the interview I conducted with my mentor, an elementary teacher of 15 years, who had never held morning meetings in her classroom before. She indicated that since we began the morning meetings in our classroom, she does indeed believe that they set a positive tone for the day. “Everyone comes together and has fun,” she said.

Finally, the responses from experienced teachers who have used morning meetings in their classrooms for years overwhelmingly support the idea that morning meetings set a positive tone for the school day. All five teachers responded with a “yes” to this question in their questionnaire. One teacher noted that setting a positive, respectful tone during morning meeting for the day is a very important part of the school climate.

When students are excited during morning meeting, they are more likely to be excited for the rest of the day. This positive tone also affects my teaching. A positive beginning to each day

affects my instruction because when I see happy students, I am encouraged even more to do my best as a teacher.

Claim 2: *Morning meetings affect students' self-esteem in a positive way.*

Evidence:

Within my classroom, this claim became evident with the sharing component of our morning meetings. During our whole-group sharing meetings, four students continuously used the pass option rather than sharing for the first two weeks. These same four students signed up to share at least two out of the four times that we used the sign-up method for sharing. During the last few weeks when we returned to the whole-group sharing method, these students used the pass option either once or not at all. Since sharing is a voluntary experience for the students, this change in willingness to share with the group shows an increase in comfort and self-esteem or self-worth. These students began opening up to others and sharing their lives with others in the class.

Other evidence for this claim comes from the interview I held with my mentor. As a participant and occasional outside observer of the morning meetings, she was able to see a change in one particular student's apparent self-esteem. This student, one of the targeted students mentioned above, is one of the students with special needs in my class, and according to my mentor, this student may not have been able to gain that self-esteem and be willing to participate without having the opportunity to share during morning meeting.

My final source of evidence for this claim comes from the surveys from experienced teachers. All five teachers agreed that students' self-esteem is positively affected with the climate of morning meetings. One kindergarten teacher commented, "Even some of my shy

children seem to come alive during this time. They know it is a comfortable and safe time to share what they know/feel to the class.” Other teachers noted that morning meetings provide a time for all students to have a voice and be in the spotlight while feeling comfortable about what they are sharing. Two first grade teachers also stressed that the greeting that begins each of their meetings is a very important self-esteem booster. One teacher wrote, “Without a morning meeting, children could go an entire day without hearing their name used in a positive manner.” Morning meetings help students start the day feeling good about themselves.

Claim 3: *Morning meetings help build a solid classroom learning community.*

Evidence:

Morning meetings truly are a community builder. During the post interviews with my students, one student responded to my question about anything he dislikes about morning meetings with, “Not much. It’s hard to think because I like a lot of things about it. I like to know how everyone is doing and stuff.” Getting together to share feelings and news about our lives and learning about each other during morning meeting is a great way to build that sense of community within a classroom of students and adults alike. Students were comfortable sharing both happy and sad news during our meetings, which shows even more of a sense of community among them.

My mentor agreed that she had noticed a greater community among the students since morning meetings were implemented. She noted that students weren’t always picking the same partners during paired working time and most of the students liked to be in the circle to greet each other and share. She also noted that many students really liked to reflect about each other’s sharing news. This shows an interest that students have in each other’s lives.

Again, all five teachers that I surveyed emphasized the value that morning meetings have in building community within a classroom. Since community building should be an ongoing process throughout the school year, morning meetings can be effective in helping to build that community, even within the last half of the school year. Additionally, new friendships and bonds can be formed among students at any time of the year. One teacher also emphasized the importance of her role in helping to establish community. She noted that her morning meetings provide that “moment of connection to say that I am happy that they are all here today.” For students to hear this from their teacher each morning during morning meeting is a great way to aid in that sense of community.

Claim 4: Morning meetings provide a way to integrate the social curriculum and the academic curriculum of a classroom of learners.

Evidence:

There is no doubt that morning meetings can be used to enhance academic skills as well as social skills. My fieldnotes provided me with some examples of ways that I incorporated intellectual stimulation into my morning meeting activities. On March 14, I wrote a letter to the students on the white board, but I intentionally created the letter with punctuation, spelling, and capitalization mistakes. I presented the letter to the students as part of my sharing and asked the students if they noticed any problems with my letter. They were able to pick out all of my mistakes which were common errors that I had seen in their own writing. My mentor noted in her observational notes that day that the students did a great job working together to edit the letter.

Throughout the month of March, students brought in sea animals that they had created at home as part of a homework assignment given by my mentor for our *Life Under the Sea* thematic social studies unit. During morning meeting, I allowed those students to share their creations and facts about their animal that they had found while creating their project. These facts tied in nicely with our unit and added an academic skills component to our meetings. On other days I shared facts about sea life for our unit with *True and False* fact cards. The students enjoyed telling their neighbor whether the facts I read were true or false (as noted by both my PDA and mentor in their observational notes), and this provided a good way to reinforce ideas that we had talked about in our guided reading groups as well as introduce new ideas about sea animals to them. Math skills were also incorporated into our meetings with the game “Buzz,” a short, fast-paced activity that requires students to think about the multiples of 5. This game tied in nicely with our math unit.

My fieldnotes also provided evidence of ways that our morning meetings enhanced the social curriculum. For example, after several weeks of holding the meetings, I decided that we needed to discuss what it means to be a good speaker and what it means to be a good listener. On other days, I noted times when we also discussed and practiced looking at the person we were greeting, not interrupting, using a voice that everyone can hear, and remembering to include everyone in the circle, especially if someone came in late.

The reflections that I incorporated during sharing time also helped the students think about how others feel as well as gain empathy skills. Evidence that the students’ reflections improved over time can be seen in the observational notes. On February 28, one of the first days that the reflection component was added to sharing, one student guessed that the sharer was excited to go to the dentist. Although some children may be excited to go to the dentist, the

student who shared was clearly not happy about his visit. Over time, the reflections given by the students became more accurate and detailed.

After reflecting on the entire two months that we had incorporated morning meetings into our morning routine, my mentor noted in our interview together that morning meetings have helped students listen more carefully to what others have to say. For example, she noticed that many students were listening more carefully to students share their news because they wanted to be the one to give the reflection. The reflection was an exciting chance for many students to share their ideas, and it provided a great opportunity to enhance social skills in our meetings.

The experienced teachers that I surveyed about morning meetings shared several ways that their morning meetings incorporate academic skills and social skills. Some of the academic skills they described include calendar skills, equation writing for math, mini-language lessons with the morning message, math activities, letter-writing skills, and read alouds. Some of the social skills that they mentioned include learning how to have conversations, shaking hands with eye contact, and oral language skills. One teacher also noted at the end of her questionnaire that morning meetings “merge our social-emotional and our intellectual, or educational, lives.”

Claim 5: Morning meetings can help special needs students gain a sense of belonging and communicate with others in their classroom.

Evidence:

For this claim, I will focus on the changes observed in Steven as a result of our morning meetings. As mentioned previously, Steven, whose name has been changed for the purpose of the publication of this inquiry, is a child with Down’s Syndrome in my classroom. His attendance at our morning meetings, I believed, was important for both him and his classmates,

and I encouraged his participation daily. The paraprofessional who works with him provides his foremost source of instruction, which takes place in the learning resource room, and therefore, he is only scheduled to learn in our classroom part of the time. My evidence for this claim comes from three sources: the interview with Steven's paraprofessional, the interview with my mentor, and my observational notes.

I believe the most solidified evidence for this claim comes from the interview with Steven's paraprofessional. She has seen many changes in Steven since we began holding morning meetings. For example, Steven now greets students during our greetings, something that he would not do at first. He also participates more during our sharing time and activities than he ever did before. Steven's paraprofessional has also noticed changes in Steven's interactions with the other students in the class at other points in the day. She believes that he is communicating with the other students more than he ever did before, and she believes that this could very well be a result of our morning meetings. Before we started our daily meetings, Steven would not voluntarily talk to other students at any point in the day; however, lately she has noticed him trying to communicate with them by saying hello. Morning meetings have helped him learn his classmates' names. He now knows many of the other students' names and will voluntarily point to some students and say the students' names to the paraprofessional during the time when he is in our room before and after lunch. He also loudly and clearly says goodbye to both my mentor and me before he leaves the room to go to the learning resource room, something that he would not do before. Although this change could also partly be due to external factors, both his paraprofessional and I believe that morning meeting has aided in Steven's willingness and ability to communicate with others in our classroom. At the end of our interview, Steven's paraprofessional noted, "We don't do a lot of work in the classroom. The

morning meetings provide an opportunity for [Steven] to interact with the other students and to be comfortable talking to them. That's the big thing—the interaction that he's getting with the other students as a result of the morning meetings.”

My mentor agrees that she also has seen changes in Steven's behavior during morning meeting. She believes that his greetings have improved, and he sits in the circle where he is supposed to now, rather than moving to the middle of the circle, which is something he did during the first few weeks that we held the meetings. She has also noticed the wonderful change we see when Steven says good-bye to us before he leaves the room and noted that this could have been due in part to morning meeting.

Finally, the observational notes written by my mentor and PDA provide evidence that morning meetings have helped Steven gain a sense of belonging and become a part of our classroom community. Several times it was noted that Steven “enjoyed participating” in our activities or sharing. There is also evidence in the observational notes that show how other students in the class react to Steven's participation and inclusion in our classroom. Many students show compassion and caring toward Steven by making sure he is always included, wanting to be his partner during morning meeting partner activities, and saying good-bye to him before he leaves the room. On April 6, it was noted that several students “mentioned that sometimes [Steven] was forgotten during zoom,” our whole group activity. This provides evidence of compassion and concern for Steven as a member of the classroom community.

Limitations:

As with almost any type of research, my inquiry involved several limitations. I have summarized three different limitations that I recognized throughout my inquiry. First, I was

careful throughout my inquiry to collect accurate, concrete data to analyze and use to make claims. However, there may have been other unrecognizable external factors aside from morning meetings that affected my data. For example, perhaps other factors besides morning meeting contributed to the changes I saw in some of my students.

Second, the data that I collected through my student interviews and anonymous surveys both at the beginning and end of the inquiry may not have been perfectly accurate. Many of my students are shy, hide their feelings, and are eager to please me as their teacher. Although the surveys were anonymous, I believe that many of my students may have been fearful to disappoint me with their honest responses. However, this is only pure speculation, and I cannot know for sure.

Finally, although my data did show positive effects of morning meetings on my students and classroom environment, the actual amount of time that I had to gather data was limited. To observe social changes in students takes time. Additionally, leading morning meeting expert, Roxann Kriete (2003), states, “Developing community and the sense of belonging that defines it takes time” (p. 69). I believe that if the formal data collection for this inquiry began much earlier in the school year, the evidence to support the claims may have been much stronger.

Conclusions:

This inquiry gave me deep insight into the effects of morning meetings on a classroom of social and academic learners. My mentor teacher, an experienced teacher who had learned about morning meetings in previous years but never found the value in them would now like me to continue holding them throughout the rest of the school year. Additionally, she plans to continue holding morning meetings herself in her classroom next year.

There is no doubt that I will use morning meetings in my own classroom every day. My interest in them from the beginning was great; now, after I have inquired about morning meetings in my own practice, I have an even deeper appreciation and interest for them. Each group of students that comes into my classroom will be different, and each individual student who enters my classroom will bring his or her own unique qualities, personality, culture, learning styles, and ways about him or her. Morning meetings will affect each group of students in different ways; they will affect each individual student in a unique way as well. However, I am certain that these daily gatherings will prove to be a beneficial addition to our classroom many times over.

It is true that some of the data I collected showed no evidence of change or effect on students. For example, the sharing sign-up sheets showed no change over time regarding individual students' willingness to share. (See Appendix D) The results of the students' surveys also showed no significant changes when I compared responses before and after implementing morning meetings. Considering all of my data together, however, showed significant positive effects of morning meetings on my classroom environment and my students. Additionally, the formal research I conducted using literature about the topic of morning meetings also yielded a tremendous number of benefits that morning meetings can have on a classroom of students.

I plan to continue to read literature about morning meetings and keep up to date with new research that is published about them. I will inevitably confer with colleagues about their use of morning meetings and continue to inform other teachers about my findings in this inquiry. Inquiry is ongoing. Although my formal data collection is complete for this school year, I plan to continue my inquiry about morning meetings as I begin my career as a certified teacher.

New Wonderings:

After several months of planning for this inquiry, implementing morning meetings, and collecting and analyzing data, new questions arose regarding this inquiry. I have developed several new wonderings that will make this project not a finished product, but a true inquiry that continues to be driven by more questions.

- How much of an effect do my skills as a meeting facilitator have on the outcomes of morning meetings?
- What effects would allowing my students to be involved in facilitating morning meetings have on them?
- How would class community, self-esteem, motivation, or success be different within a classroom if morning meetings were implemented from the beginning of the school year?
- What effects could morning meetings have on intermediate or upper-intermediate level students?
- What effects can morning meetings have on speaking skills (i.e. speaking clearly and loudly for others to hear)?

References

- Bondy, E., & Ketts, S. (2001). "Like being at the breakfast table": The power of classroom morning meeting. *Childhood Education*, 77, 144-149.
- Kriete, R. (2002). *The morning meeting book*. Turners Falls, MA: Northeast Foundation for Children.
- Kriete, R. (2003). Start the day with community. *Educational Leadership*, 61, 68-70.
- Teachers talk about: The benefits of morning meeting. (1999). *Responsive Classroom Newsletter*, 11, 1-3.

APPENDIX A

Cynthia Inman
 Inquiry Brief
 February 8, 2006

Purpose: The overall purpose of my inquiry project is to investigate the purpose and advantages of implementing a morning meeting into my second grade classroom. In doing so, I hope to develop a more complete understanding about the presence of morning meetings in elementary classrooms and therefore be able to make a more informed decision as a teacher about whether to use class time for such activities or not. Every minute of the school day should be time well spent in order to promote the maximum amount of student learning and growth. My intention with this inquiry is to find out for my own professional development what makes morning meetings so valuable (or not so valuable) in elementary classrooms.

Research Question: What makes morning meetings worth the time spent on them? How can I justify using class time for a whole class gathering everyday?

Sub-questions:

Could morning meetings help develop a better community among my students?

What kinds of effects could morning meetings have on my students' self-esteem, motivation, and/or success?

Can morning meetings relate to or reinforce academic content or incorporate short activities that would otherwise be done during instructional time?

Do morning meetings help establish a positive tone for the day?

Does each component of morning meeting (greeting, sharing, activity, and news/announcements) always need to be included at each meeting?

Data Collection:

I will use several different methods of data collection in my classroom.

- I will keep an observation notebook and record the events of each morning meeting as well as any interesting things that transpire during the meeting/any interesting things students say (fieldnotes).
- I will survey my students both before and after implementation of the morning meetings, asking them questions about how well they feel they know the other students in our class, how confident they feel in their work, and how they feel about participating in class discussion. If they have had morning meetings in other classes, I will find out what they remember, liked, and disliked about them. I will also gauge their attitude toward the morning routine in our classroom. (This would probably be done more effectively in interview format.)
- I will ask my mentor and PDA if they would be willing to take observational notes of student interactions during morning meetings. I may also ask them to complete a survey before implementation about student interactions as well as after implementation about noticeable changes they see in the students.

I will use several different methods of data collection outside of my classroom.

- I will use a set of interview prompts to question other teachers in my school through informal interviews, asking them if they use a morning meeting, why or why not, and what advantages or disadvantages they feel morning meetings have on the school day. If a teacher does use morning meetings, I will ask them how they implement each component and if they always use each component every day. I will keep my notes from these interviews for analysis.
- I will send a survey home to parents asking them what kind of discourse they are hearing from their child about morning meetings at home as well as whether they notice any changes in their child's self-esteem, motivation, success, or relationships with classmates.
- I will also use evidence from my literature-based research.
- I may use some of the time that my students are at specials Monday and Tuesday mornings to observe other teachers' morning meetings after implementation of morning meetings in my classroom. (Mary Beth will help me find teachers.)

Data Interpretation: I will analyze observational notes, noting specific events or trends that might provide answers to my questions. I will compare student surveys before and after implementation of morning meetings, looking for noticeable changes in the ways students feel about their work, self-esteem, and community in the classroom, as well as how they feel about morning meetings. I will analyze parent surveys, notes taken during teacher interviews, and literature on the topic in order to gain insight regarding the value of the time spent on morning meetings at all grade levels as well as the positive changes that have been noticed in my second grade students. I will also compare responses among teacher interviews. I will analyze and compare responses from surveys given to my PDA and mentor both before and after implementation.

Literature/Experts to Consult:

- The Morning Meeting Book by Roxann Kriete
- The First Six Weeks of School by Paula Denton and Roxann Kriete
- Rules and Rituals: Tools for Creating a Respectful, Caring Learning Community by Patricia Horsch, Jie-Qi Chen, and Donn Nelson (EBSCOhost)

Timeline:

February 8-April 14, 2006

Feb. 8-10: Survey/Interview students; Survey PDA and mentor if time

Week 1 (Feb. 13-17): Implement morning meeting into every day's routine and continue through Week 8 (take detailed notes); ask mentor and PDA to collect data (take notes) during morning meetings once a week

Weeks 1-3: interview teachers (send email of interview prompts beforehand); begin collecting literature-based research

Weeks 2-3: Observe morning meetings in other classrooms

Week 6: send home parent surveys

Week 7: follow-up interviews with students; survey for PDA and mentor

Weeks 7-8: Data Analysis

Weeks 8-9 (April 10-19): Write up results

April 19: Inquiry Rough Draft due

APPENDIX B

A LIST OF SAMPLE GREETINGS

Ways to say “Good Morning”

- ❖ Handshake
- ❖ High five
- ❖ Pinkie shake
- ❖ Silly face
- ❖ Butterfly shake (interlock the part of your hand between your thumb and index finger with a partner)
- ❖ Elbow shake
- ❖ Snowball greeting (Everyone writes his or her name on a full sheet of paper, crumples it up in a ball, and throws it in the center of the circle. Then, everyone grabs someone’s “snowball” and reads the name of the person he or she will greet that day.)
- ❖ Ankle shake
- ❖ “Hello Neighbor” song with motions, facing a partner (Hello, Neighbor, What do you say? It’s going to be a wonderful day! Clap your hands and boogie on down. Give me a jump and turn around.)
- ❖ Make up your own handshake
- ❖ “Hello” in “Pig Latin” (ellohay)
- ❖ “Good morning” in “Pig Latin” (oodgay orningmay)
- ❖ Greet as many people in the room as you can in one minute
- ❖ A chant with each person’s name in the blanks, one at a time: We like _____. _____ is our friend. We like _____. And here we go again.
- ❖ Greetings in other languages:
 - French (Bonjour)
 - Italian (Buon giorno)
 - Hebrew (Shalom)
 - Spanish (Buenas dias)
 - Japanese (Ohaiyo)
 - German (Gutten morgän)
 - Swahili (Jambo)
 - Polish (Jen dobre)

*Many of these ideas (and more) can be found in Roxann Kriete’s *The Morning Meeting Book* (2002).

APPENDIX C

AN EXAMPLE OF OBSERVATIONAL NOTES DATA

 PENNSSTATE	COLLEGE of EDUCATION Office of Curriculum and Instruction Field Experiences
NAME <u>Inman</u>	DATE/DAY <u>4-6-06</u>
SUBJECT/GRADE <u>MM/2</u>	TIME <u>8:50</u>
NO. OF STUDENTS <u>17</u>	OBSERVER <u>Amund</u>
SCHOOL <u>Panorama</u>	DISTRICT <u>SCAP</u>

Greeting - Japanese
 students greet each other using names and Japanese greeting include other adults in class;

look at map - student shares trip route - will she share more about trip later?

Flower used to pass along during sharing - over the weekend...
 (Is this from last weekend?)

^{students used} different starters - over the weekend, a couple days ago, yesterday, today

2 students passed - seems like they've passed before
 P - shared "
 did you share?

activity - zoom (a specific table gets to 'back')

student mentioned that sometimes Sam was forgotten during zoom. 2nd round Sam tries to play evidence of compassion or concern for others? Has MM helped Sam become more involved in class community?

review day's schedule

APPENDIX D

SHARING SIGN-UPS TABLE

Student	Feb. 27-Mar. 3	March 13-17	March 20-24	March 27-31
1	X			
2		X	X	X
3	X	X	X	X
4	X	X		
5	X	X	X	X
6	X		X	X
7	X		X	X
8	X	X	X	
9		X	X	X
10	X	X	X	
11	X	X	X	X
12	X	X	X	X
13	X		X	X
14	X	X	X	X
15		X		X
16		X	X	X
17	X	X	X	X
Totals:	13	13	14	12

APPENDIX E

STUDENT INTERVIEW RESULTS

What is your favorite part about our morning routine?

Initial Interviews:

Centers	1
Checking our new jobs	1
Going over the schedule (and participating)	1
Monday morning sharing	9
Nothing	3
Read Alouds	1

**Many students struggled to think of their favorite morning activity.

Post Interviews:

Greeting/Saying hello in different ways	2
Morning Meeting	8
Sharing	5
Zoom	1

**Many students smiled or replied enthusiastically.

What is your least favorite part about our morning routine?

Initial Interviews:

Editing their letters	1
Jobs	2
Multiple Skills	1
Nothing	10
Spelling	1
Writing	1

**Student 2: "I'm always sorta tired and not as happy as I wish I was."

Post Interviews:

Centers	1
Jobs	1
Nothing	11
Spelling	3

**Student 2: "Nothing. I like school!"

APPENDIX F

INITIAL STUDENT INTERVIEW RESULTS

Do you remember having a morning meeting in kindergarten or first grade?

Yes: 15

No: 1

**Many smiles, enthusiastic voices, many students perked up and were anxious to tell me about their experiences with morning meetings.

Number of students able to remember one or more things they enjoyed about them: 14

Number of students able to remember one or more things they did not like about them: 3

What the students remember liking about their morning meetings in kindergarten and/or first grade:

Sharing, telling something about themselves, they were fun, having privileges and choices, handshakes, greetings in different languages, songs, fun greetings, going over their new jobs, talking about what they would do that day, everything, rolling a ball around the circle, predicting what they would be in the future, saying good morning to everyone.

“I wish we did it in this class.”

What the students remember not liking about their morning meetings in kindergarten and/or first grade:

Being required to share; some people had snacks, but not everyone; they were too long; the boys made funny faces sometimes

APPENDIX G

POST STUDENT INTERVIEW RESULTS

Do you have any suggestions for things I could change about our morning meetings to make them better?

YES—0

NO—16

Is there anything you do not like about our morning meetings?

YES—0

NO—16

How do our morning meetings make you feel?

They put me in a good mood for the rest of the day: 9 (3 very enthusiastic responses)

They put me in a bad mood for the rest of the day: 0

They do not change my mood at all: 7

APPENDIX H

STUDENT INTERVIEW RESULTS

Comparing initial interviews with post-interviews
Changes that I noticed:

- ❖ Student 12 responding during the initial interview that he did not have a favorite part about our morning routine. However, during the post-interview, he was my most dynamic responder in favor of morning meetings. He answered my question regarding his favorite part about our morning routine with a huge smile, and he did not hesitate in his response.

- ❖ Student 2 commented during the initial interview that she was always tired in the morning and not very happy. During the post interview, she responded that she liked school and that our morning meetings put her in a good mood for the rest of the day.

APPENDIX I

SHARING AND REFLECTIONS

date	SHARING: STUDENTS WHO DID NOT SHARE														REFLECTION VOLUNTEERS						
	F13	14	16	17	23	24	24	27	M21	A3	5	6	7		M16	17	22	23	24	28	30
1	x					x											x				
2														x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
3														x				x			
4							x							x		x		x			
5	x	x	x			x	x						x		x	x			x	x	
6														x	x			x	x	x	
7				x		x							x		x	x	x	x	x	x	
8													x		x						
9																					
10	x	x	x	x	*		*				x				x	x	x			x	
11	x	x	x			x	x							x	x	x	x	x	x		
12	x												x	x	x						
13															x	x		x		x	
14		x					x							x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
15	x	x		x	x	x					x										
16		x	x				x	*						x	x	x	x	x		x	
17														x	x	x	x	x	x	x	

SHARING:

X = used the “pass” option during whole group sharing

* = used the “pass” option initially, but requested that we come back to him/her

REFLECTIONS:

X = volunteered to give a reflection for one or more person’s sharing