

Rock Buddies: Getting To Know You



Jill Lynnae MacDonald

Penn State University Professional Development School Intern

Ferguson Township Elementary School, Fourth Grade

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jlm683@psu.edu

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I. Abstract:

How will implementing Rock Buddies into my classroom affect the relationships among my students (particularly relationships between Rock Buddies)? After noticing an increase in tension among students in my fourth grade classroom, I wondered what might lessen (or even eliminate) this troublesome distraction. This inquiry examines the impact of having an assigned Rock Buddy on the relationships of students in my class.

II. Description of Teaching Context:

My classroom and school environment

This inquiry project was completed in a self-contained fourth grade classroom at Ferguson Township Elementary School. Ferguson Township is a rural school that is part of the State College Area School District.

The socioeconomic status of the families in Ferguson consists of an even distribution of lower, middle, and upper class. The overall ethnic diversity in this school is very limited, as the majority of the student body is Caucasian. Although we have a limited ethnic diversity, our faculty, staff, and students make a sincere effort to acknowledge and embrace the differences that exist not only within our school, but also throughout our local community and throughout the world. This is accomplished through our diversity committee putting together monthly assemblies that highlight the traditions of other cultures. Overall, Ferguson Township is a fairly small school that presents itself as having a strong sense of community among teachers, students, and other staff members.

My own fourth grade classroom is made up of 22 energetic students (12 boys and 10 girls) who promise to bring challenges and excitement to each day I spend with them. Nineteen of my students are Caucasian, one is Asian American, one Iranian, and one Indian. The student who comes from India speaks Punjabi as his first language, and English as his second. Of the 22 students in my class, 3 of them come from divorced families.

Academically, I have a wide variety of learning levels in my classroom. One student has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for speech, two have IEPs for math, and two have IEPs for reading. Two of my students receive Title I instruction for reading, and two others receive Title I instruction for math. In writing, four of my students receive aid from an Instructional Support Team, while another group of four students receives writing enrichment lessons.

The social situations in my class are very interesting as social groups and cliques are frequently welcoming new members, asking old members to leave, and welcoming new members once again. At times it seems to be a vicious cycle, and my mentor, our classroom paraprofessional, and I find it difficult to keep up with the social happenings of our classroom community.

In my classroom, I have two different cliques of girls that stand out from the rest of the class. The girls in one of those cliques argue with one another on a daily basis. These arguments get to be so extreme that the girls' parents often attempt to become involved by prohibiting them from socializing with one another. The parents have yet to follow through with one of these demands, however. The arguments among these girls rapidly fade into the back of their memories and usually, within a day or two, they once again decide to be friends.

The second group of girls seems to be more tightly knit. Whether through discreet or obvious actions, they make it a point to stand out from the rest of the class in various ways. For example, when members of our class are gathered on the carpet and appropriately sitting on their bottoms, these girls are as far away from the group as they can be (along the wall or in the back of the group) usually sitting on their knees rather than on their bottoms. A more obvious example is when the class is asked to complete a writing assignment or an art project. These girls are typically the last to finish, as they find it necessary to not only try to outdo their classmates, but also to outdo each other.

The other girls in my class who are not part of either of the groups I described are fairly shy and quiet. They often spend their free time reading rather than socializing with their classmates.

For the most part, the boys in my class get along with one another. Rather than cliques that stand out, I have only one boy who truly stands out from the rest. He has difficulty getting along with others, as he has little patience and tolerance for his classmates. He is very insistent on getting his way, so when

things do not go according to his plan, he becomes very frustrated and angry. Other than this one student, the boys in my class seem to tolerate one another with ease.

All of the components described above come together to form a very special and unique community in my classroom.

III. Rationale:

What led me to my inquiry?

It is a Monday morning, and students have just returned from Music. We are ready to begin our spelling preview. Students open their spelling journals to a clean page, write today's date in the margin, and create the T-charts that they will use to record their core spelling words for this week's unit. I say to the students, "Close your eyes and visualize the word 'follow.' It is important to follow directions when completing a homework assignment. Follow. You may write the word 'follow' in your journal." As I instruct my class to write their first core word, I notice two students who sit beside one another arguing over who stole the other's pencil. At the same time, a student raises her hand to tell on a classmate for writing in pen when she should be writing in pencil. Moments later, yet another student raises his hand to point out that one of his group members is swinging his feet so that they are hitting his desk, creating a major distraction. I attempt to deal with each of these minor problems on an individual basis, and I realize that as I am handling one situation, another arises. I envision a snowball effect taking place, and immediately become frustrated and overwhelmed with the potential for disaster in classroom management. I stop the lesson, get the attention of the whole class, and announce that we need to stop arguing over such silly things. We are in fourth grade, so we need to start acting like it. At this point, I feel as though this might not be the most appropriate way to handle the situation, but it is the best I can come up with for now. I continue with my lesson feeling flustered and aggravated by the situation that has just taken place.

This vignette is an ideal example of a minor classroom problem that led me to wonder how I might be able to implement some kind of community building program into my classroom that would have a positive impact on my students' relationships.

In September, when the new school year began, Room 17 was buzzing with the excitement of being in a new classroom, with a new teacher, and a new group of classmates. As the school year continued and this excitement began to wear off, I noticed some tension beginning to show among my students. Of course, when these problems first began, they were easy to deal with, as I tried to handle each situation on an individual basis. But as the problems became more frequent and the tension started to increase, I began to see these minor disagreements as problematic. In addition to this situation frustrating me as a teacher, I was concerned that this could be negatively affecting the academic performance of my students. I knew from reading Denton and Kriete (2000) that "our learning...requires participation and focused effort, thoughtful questions, and the ability to cooperate and collaborate" (p. 5). I believed that since my students were finding it difficult to work together and cooperate, these small disagreements and somewhat petty arguments were distractions in the classroom. I felt that these minor issues were taking up a significant portion of our valuable learning time. Seeing these small problems grow into huge classroom distractions led me to decide that the focus of my inquiry project would be on building community. I believed that working on strengthening the sense of community in our classroom might lessen these distractions, and I wondered if my belief was correct.

Another factor that led me to my focus is my philosophy of education. At the beginning of my student teaching internship, I was asked to evaluate my emerging ideas regarding my philosophy of education. One of my main ideas was that it is important to have a strong sense of community in a classroom. I want my students to be successful. In order to achieve success, they need to be in a

nurturing environment that makes them feel welcome and comfortable. I believe that if students are in the most comfortable learning environment, they are more likely to learn to their fullest potential. A quotation from the Northwest Regional Educational Library (2000) confirms my belief: "Learning is an emotional activity. Cognitive scientists say that positive emotions and relationships enhance learning and memory. Thus, the classroom, more than just a physical space, can be a setting where understanding is enhanced by addressing the social and emotional dimensions of learning."

After deciding that I wanted to focus on implementing some kind of community-building program into my classroom, I needed to determine exactly what I would do. I chose to assign students a Rock Buddy. This meant that each student chose a rock (provided by me) and decorated it to display his or her own individual style. Once students were assigned a Rock Buddy, they exchanged rocks with one another as a reminder of their Buddy. The purpose of having a Rock Buddy was to get to know someone in our classroom on a deeper level who we did not know very well. I encouraged students to take the initiative to get to know their Rock Buddies in an effort to broaden their friendship circles. One benefit that Rock Buddies offered was the chance to evaluate the impact of implementing a community-building program into our classroom on the relationships of my students. I also saw this approach as a potentially effective way to help students learn to get along with each of their classmates. By having a Rock Buddy, they would be given the opportunity to find commonalities they shared with one another, thus developing a foundation for starting or improving a friendship.

This inquiry project affects my current teaching because it allows me to explore the implications of having Rock Buddies for student relationships. It will help me to determine if Rock Buddies positively impacts student relationships, and is thus a worthwhile system to include in a classroom environment. This project also provides me with a way to analyze if this method will allow me to minimize

classroom distractions that result from petty arguments. This decrease in disturbances might therefore allow me to use instructional time more effectively, and help me to avoid stressful and frustrating teaching situations similar to the spelling lesson previously described.

Finally, this inquiry project affects my future as a teacher in a very important way. If I find that implementing Rock Buddies into the classroom has a positive impact on the relationships of my students, I will continue to use this community-building approach in my future classrooms. On the other hand, if I find that this program has no impact or negatively affects the relationships of my students, I will know that I need to make changes to the program. Through completing this inquiry, I hope to find out what exactly those necessary changes should be.

IV. Wonderings and Questions

- o Main Question: How will implementing Rock Buddies into my fourth grade classroom affect the relationships among my students?
- o Sub-questions:
 - o Who are students in my classroom already friends with?
 - o Who do students in my classroom want to be friends with?
 - o Who do students in my classroom think they cannot get along with?
 - Will these students who cannot get along ever be able to get along?
 - Will Rock Buddies help these students to get along with one another?
 - Why do these students have trouble getting along?
 - o What are the most effective ways for students to get to know each other?
 - o What methods of getting to know one another have the best impact on the relationship between students?

- Will students believe that their friendship has improved after being Rock Buddies?
 - What did students who believe their friendship has improved do with one another during their time as Rock Buddies?
- How can I involve our school guidance counselor with this project?
- Will the impact of Rock Buddies be positive enough that it shows its merit as a worthwhile community-building tool?
- Will implementing Rock Buddies lead more students to think that the classroom belongs to everyone, rather than just the teachers?

V. Inquiry Versus Project

How is this project a true inquiry?

This project is a true inquiry because I do not know the impact that Rock Buddies will have on the relationships of my students. My wondering is *how* will this program affect my students' relationships? I began this project not knowing what the effect would be, not knowing whether it would have a positive or negative impact on the community in our classroom. Additionally, I did not know for sure if requiring students to befriend a certain person in our classroom would improve their relationships because the students did not have ownership over taking this initiative. While I am hoping that Rock Buddies has a positive influence on our classroom, my true goal is to discover the results of using this community-building tool. I plan to use this information to help me determine if this is a worthwhile component to include in a classroom community.

VI. Inquiry Plan Description:

What steps did I follow in my inquiry project?

Step 1: I started my project by making a card for each of my students, highlighting why I enjoy having them in my class, or what makes them special to me. Some examples of what I wrote include:

- I have had fun working with you in class

- o I am glad you are in my class this year
- o I have really enjoyed getting to know you

I placed the cards on the students' desks so that they would all get them when they came to school the following morning. Of the 22 students in my class, six of them approached me and thanked me for their card. Our learning support teacher told me that one of my students proudly carried her card with her the whole day, showing it off and refusing to put it down. Some interesting reactions I received from my students were questions such as, "Where are you going?" and "Why are you leaving?" My students were evidently confused by the act of kindness and thought that it was my way of saying goodbye to them. This told me that my students were not used to receiving such compliments, and that it truly was something unique for them. My true intention for this part of the project was to let students know that I cared about them, and to get them to see that receiving such a nice compliment in the morning was a great way to start their day. Later that same day, I met with my students in a circle on the rug. I used a tape recorder to record our conversations. I asked students to share how they felt when they received the card that I had made for them (see Appendix B.1 for notes on student reactions). Students' reactions were consistent in that they shared with me that they felt good when they read their cards and they thought it was nice that I showed how I cared for them. I explained to my students that I gave them these cards to show them how nice it feels when someone takes the time to recognize them and show them how special they are. After sharing my motive for giving students the cards, I actually introduced Rock Buddies. I gave each student a handout that explained what Rock Buddies is and why I thought we could use it in our classroom (see Appendix C.1). I also sent home a letter to parents introducing Rock Buddies and explaining its purpose and what I would be doing with the data that I collected (see Appendix C.3).

Step 2: I asked students to complete a pre-survey (see Appendix A.1).

This survey consisted of questions that would allow me to learn about the status of friendships in my classroom, as well as the impression of community that students had. For example, I asked students to tell me who their friends were, who they wanted as a friend but were not actually friends with, and who they thought they could not get along with in our classroom. I encouraged them to be completely honest with me. I told them that I would be using this information to help me, and I promised that I would never let this information get out to other classmates. I was hoping that students would trust me to share their most truthful opinions, so that I could get a true sense of the relationships in my classroom. I was surprised at the truthfulness that my students displayed in their survey responses. While I was not surprised by the existing friendships that students shared with me (because they are displayed on a daily basis), I was surprised when I learned of students' dislikes for their classmates. I chose to investigate this further so that I could find out the basis for these students' negative feelings. I did this through interviewing these students in private. (For student responses, see Appendix B.2) Many students felt that they simply could not be friends with another student because they had different personalities or different interests. Some of the more extreme cases included more harsh reasons, such as the person is just annoying in general, the person is too much of a show off, or the person is mean. One particular student's name appeared several times on these surveys. The most common response for why students felt that they could not be friends with him was simply that he was annoying. I planned to use this key information to assign the first group of Rock Buddies, but I was not sure exactly how I should go about it. I met with Kerry Wiessman, our school guidance counselor who specializes in friendship, and she advised that I assign the first group based on who students want to be friends with in the classroom (for meeting notes, see Appendix B.4). This way, students would take an interest to Rock Buddies and feel happy with it,

since they were assigned to get to know someone they were interested in, rather than someone they did not like.

Step 3: We spent time in class choosing and decorating our rocks. I picked names out of a cup to determine the order in which students would be able to choose their rocks. I then provided students with many craft supplies, such as paints, paint brushes, “google eyes,” pipe cleaners, yarn, glitter, and buttons. I encouraged them to make their rocks unique, just like them (see Appendix D.1 for pictures of rocks)

Step 4: I matched students with their first Rock Buddies. Again, we met in a circle on the rug, and I recorded our discussion. Before telling students who they were paired with, I provided them with a list of “Rock Buddy Rules” that they had to follow (see Appendix C.2). These rules reminded students to show respect for one another by not making mean faces or hurtful comments. I informed students that they could come to me if they had a major problem with their Rock Buddy, but at the same time I encouraged them to give everybody a fair chance. After much anticipation, I told students who their Rock Buddies would be for the next two weeks. I asked them to complete a survey that analyzed how students felt about their current relationship with their Rock Buddy (see Appendix A.2). This survey asked students to tell me if they were already friends with their Buddy, if they thought they knew a lot about their Buddy, if they were excited about their Buddy, and if they thought they would continue to be friends with their Rock Buddy after the two weeks were finished.

Step 5: Throughout the two-week cycle, I offered various suggestions to students for getting to know their Rock Buddies. Our school counselor and school librarian offered me many of the suggestions I shared with my students. When I first introduced the project, I told students that using their free time (morning time, lunch, or recess) would be a great opportunity to talk to their Rock Buddy and get to know him or her. I also shared handouts with students that provided

prompting questions to help them get to know one another (see Appendices C.4 through C.7). I encouraged students to respond to these questions through interviewing each other (as suggested by Kerry Wiessman) so that students could make more of a personal connection through learning about one another verbally. I also provided students with an incentive to spend time with their Rock Buddy through creating a class paper chain. I found this idea from Caring, Sharing, & Getting Along by Betsy Franco (2000) (p. 58). I asked students to record anything they did with their Rock Buddy by their own initiative on a strip of construction paper, along with the date and their Rock Buddy's name (see Appendix E.1 and E.2 for examples and notes). We hung the paper chain from the ceiling, and each time the chain reached the floor, the class earned a reward, such as pajama day or getting to eat lunch in the classroom. Although I offered suggestions for students to get to know each other, I also encouraged them to use their own ideas for learning about their Rock Buddies.

Step 6: At the end of the two-week cycle, I took my students to the computer lab so that we could use Kid Pix to make cards for our Rock Buddies. I used this as a way to implement some teaching with technology, in addition to leading students to think about what they had learned about their Buddy. It was my hope that they would be able to think of some kind of compliment to share with their Rock Buddy. I also conducted a post survey with my students (see Appendix A.3). This asked them to tell me what they learned about their Rock Buddies, if they would still be friends with their Buddies, and if they felt like their relationship with their Buddies had improved. After students completed all of the surveys, I compared them to see if feelings or relationships among Rock Buddies had changed.

Step 7: I assigned students to new Rock Buddies based on the very first survey they completed, this time matching them with someone they did not list as a desired friend, but also did not list as a classmate with whom they could not get

along. I did not want to pair students with someone they felt they could not be friends with, as I wanted them to continue to feel comfortable with this inquiry project. I went through steps four through six once again, asking students to complete a survey about their Rock Buddy before they got to know him or her (see Appendix A.4); having students take advantage of the suggestions I offered them for getting to know their Buddy; and asking students to complete a survey about their Rock Buddy after they were assigned to them for two weeks (see Appendix A.5).

Step 8: I asked students to complete a "check-in" survey (see Appendix A.6). This survey asked students the same questions as the very first survey they were given. I wanted to use this survey to see if students' responses had changed after having had Rock Buddies in our classroom for a while. Additionally, I wanted to see if students added their Rock Buddies to the list of names that represented people they considered to be friends in the class.

This was my stopping point in my inquiry for writing this paper. Although this is all I was able to complete for this assignment, my inquiry project will continue by me repeating the process described above. Students will once again be assigned to someone who they did not list as someone they wanted to be friends with, but not with someone who they listed as a person with whom they cannot be friends. I plan to ease students into less comfortable Rock Buddy pairs. Although I want them to be comfortable in their learning environment, I feel that it is appropriate for me to provide them with the experience of stepping outside of their social norms.

My goal is that by the end of the school year I will match students with a person they feel they cannot be friends with, and I will be able to analyze the impact of Rock Buddies on these relationships. Of course when this matching takes place, I will be sure to use the data that I collected through interviewing students about why they feel they cannot be friends with certain people. If any situation

is too extreme that pairing two students would be harmful to our classroom environment, I will not complete this match.

I will continue providing students with surveys throughout the remainder of the school year, analyzing student responses to see if I need to change any of my claims or if I can find additional claims.

VII. Data Collection

My first step in the data collecting process was to record the conversations that I had with my students regarding Rock Buddies. Each time we met as a class to talk about how the cycle was going, I recorded our discussions. I did this so that I would be able to give my students my full attention while we were having these conversations rather than be distracted by note taking. I saved the audio recordings so that I could later go back to listen to and analyze students' responses and comments.

Another data collection method I used was to give students an introduction to Rock Buddies survey (see Appendix A.1). I designed this very first survey with my last survey in mind. The first question I asked, "When you come to school everyday, who does it feel like the classroom belongs to?" served the purpose of helping me to determine how Rock Buddies impacts the overall impression of community that my students have. I wanted to know if students felt like the classroom belonged to my mentor teacher, to my mentor teacher and I, or to the students and the teachers. Analyzing the responses to this question would allow me to determine students' initial notions of who is in charge of our classroom. The remaining questions that I asked allowed me to discover which classmates my students wanted to be friends with and which classmates my students thought they could not be friends with for a few reasons. The first of these reasons was that by the end of the school year, I would be able to compare if the friendships of my students changed over the course of Rock Buddies. I would know if students were friends with more people, less people, or different people; I would know if students

had new classmates with whom they wanted to be friends but were not friends; and I would know if students felt as though they could not be friends with more people, less people, or different people. Another reason I wanted to know about the friendships in my classroom was to use the information to help me with matching Rock Buddies. For the first round of Rock Buddies, I decided to match students with somebody they liked and wanted to be friends with, based on the suggestion from Kerry Wiessman. She explained that this way, students would be open to this new idea that we were using in our classroom and share in my excitement about broadening our friendship circles. I wanted them to give this project a chance, and I agreed that if they were paired with somebody they felt they could not get along with, they would immediately take a disliking to the inquiry. I did not want to create an environment in which my students felt uncomfortable or unhappy.

The next step I took in collecting data was to ask students to complete surveys in reference to their actual Rock Buddies once they were assigned. Students were given a survey on the day they received their Rock Buddy (see Appendices A.2 and A.4), and another at the end of the cycle (see Appendices A.3 and A.5). I planned to use this information to analyze what changes, if any, took place within their friendships. By asking students at the beginning of a cycle how they felt about their Buddy and what their prediction was for their relationship, I could compare this information to how they felt about their Buddy at the end of the cycle.

Another way that I collected data was to record what was written on our class paper chain (see Appendices E.1 and E.2). I implemented this aspect of Rock Buddies as a way for me to keep track of what students were doing with their Buddy on their own initiative. I wanted to know how often they made an effort to spend time with their Buddy, and in what ways they got to know each other. I planned to use this information to help me determine what kinds of initiative lead

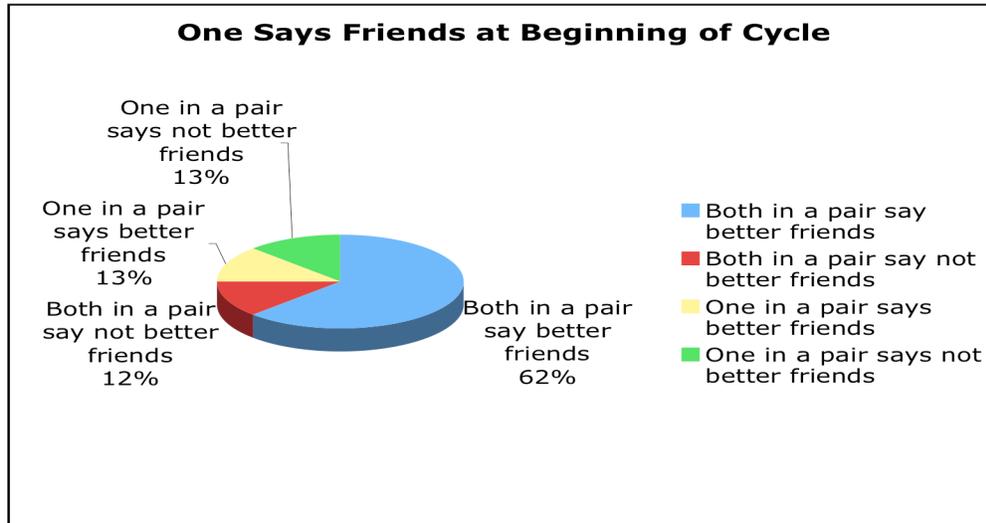
to the improvement of student relationships. I wanted to see if students who claimed that they felt like their friendship had improved had recorded any information on the paper chain.

A final data collection approach was to provide students with handouts to use as interview questions for one another (see Appendixes C.4 through C.8). My reasoning for this method was very similar to the reasons for the paper chain. Again, I wanted to know how often students made an effort to spend time with their Buddy and to see if this suggestion was used by students who felt that their friendships had improved.

VIII. Data Analysis

What process did I use to analyze my data?

To begin my data analysis process, I created tables that allowed me to record students' responses to the surveys they were asked to complete (see Appendixes E.3 and E.4). I assigned each student a number alongside the table, and I assigned each response a number across the top of the table (the response that is represented by each number is indicated below the table). I also recorded students' responses next to those of their Rock Buddy so that I could compare the impression that they each had of their relationship. For example, I could easily see if both students felt that they were better friends after being Rock Buddies for two weeks. I recorded the responses of one student within a pair in pink, and the responses of the other student in that pair in blue. If both students' responses matched, I colored over them both in yellow, making them stand out to me from the other markings on the table. I then transferred this information into six different pie charts, based on students' impressions of their relationships at the beginning of a Rock Buddy cycle. An example of one of these pie charts is shown below (for all pie charts on student responses, see Appendix E.5):



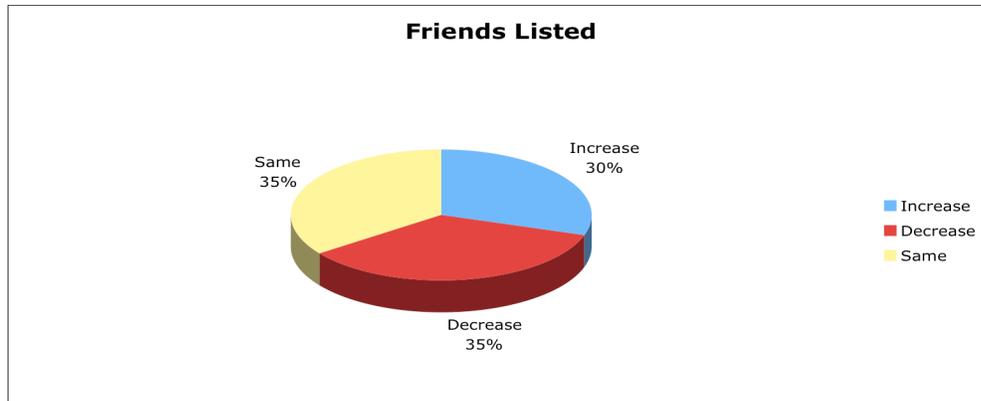
After recording students' responses in the tables and pie charts, I was able to compare the overall impact of Rock Buddies on the relationships of the class as a whole.

I also used the tables that I created to record survey responses to compare students' opinions of their relationships with data from our class paper chain. I used this information to help me determine if there was a positive correlation between students spending more time together and an improvement in their relationships. This was the same process that I planned to use for analyzing handouts with interview questions for students to ask one another (no students actually used the handouts provided). I used these to help me conclude if pairs who took extra time to learn about one another claimed that they were better friends after being Rock Buddies.

Through having students complete a pre-survey and a check-in survey that asked the same questions, I was able to analyze what changes, if any, took place in the friendships of the students in my classroom. I took both surveys for each student and compared them next to one another. If, on the second survey, a student listed a person as his or her friend who was his or her Rock Buddy, but was not listed as a friend on the first survey, I highlighted the Rock Buddy's name in pink. For example, if Sara did not list Jose as a friend on the first survey, but

after being Rock Buddies for two weeks Sara listed Jose as a friend on the second survey, I highlighted Jose's name in pink. Similarly, if, on the second survey, a student listed a person as someone he or she cannot get along with and that person was the student's Rock Buddy, I planned to highlight the Rock Buddy's name in blue. For example, if Penelope did not have Cara's name listed as someone she could not get along with on the first survey, but after being Rock Buddies for two weeks Penelope decided that Cara was someone she could not get along with, I highlighted Cara's name in blue. This kind of result did not appear on any of the surveys, so I did not highlight any names in blue. I kept a tally of the number of names I highlighted in pink (see Appendix E.6).

I also used these surveys to see how many students claimed to have more friends after Rock Buddies was in place for a few weeks. Comparing each student's survey side-by-side, I kept a tally of how many students had an increase in the number of classmates they listed as friends, how many students had a decrease in the number of classmates they listed as friends, and how many students listed the same number of classmates as friends. Likewise, I kept a tally of how many students had an increase in the number of classmates they listed as someone they could not get along with, how many students had a decrease in the number of classmates they listed as someone they could not get along with, and how many students listed the same number of classmates as people with whom they could not get along. I compiled this information into pie charts. An example of this pie chart is shown below (for the other pie charts illustrating comparison between the two surveys, see Appendix E.7 through E.9):



As mentioned earlier, I decided to use our class paper chain as an incentive for students to get to know one another, and as a way to collect data. I went through students' surveys to see which Rock Buddy pairs claimed that they were better friends after being Rock Buddies. I then looked at what I recorded from our paper chain to see if these same students had added their own links to the chain. I gave each Rock Buddy pair a number and compiled this information into a table (see Appendix E.10). Additionally, I found the student pairs who claimed that they were not better friends after being Rock Buddies and looked to see if they had added anything to the paper chain. I found that every pair of Rock Buddies who claimed a better friendship had in fact added at least one link to the paper chain. I also found that each pair of Rock Buddies who did not claim a better friendship had not added any links to the paper chain.

Although I provided students with handouts that offered questions for helping students get to know one another, none of my students took advantage of this resource. Because no students used these materials, I was not able to collect and analyze data from this source. Although students did not choose to utilize this resource, improvements in relationships still took place, and I used this information to help me come to claim 3 listed in the Claims and Evidence section of this paper.

In order to determine the kind of impact Rock Buddies had on the overall sense of community in my classroom, I asked students to answer the question, "When you come to school everyday, who does it feel like the classroom belongs

to?" I asked this question on the first Rock Buddies survey and on the Check-In survey. I counted the number of students who responded that the classroom belongs to my mentor teacher, the number of students who responded that the classroom belongs to my mentor teacher and I, the number of students who responded that the classroom belongs to the students, and the number of students who provided another response. I put this information into a bar chart that allowed me to compare responses side-by-side (see Appendix E.11).

IX. Claims and Evidence

What has this inquiry lead me to claim, and what is my evidence?

Claim 1: Implementing Rock Buddies into a classroom community has a positive impact on the relationship between the Rock Buddies.

Claim 1 Evidence: After recording responses from student surveys (found in Appendix A) and transferring the information to pie charts (Appendix E.5), it is quite evident that Rock Buddies has a positive effect on the relationship of Rock Buddies. Of the six possible scenarios for responses at the beginning of a cycle to the statement "I am already friends with my Rock Buddy," (both students in a pair stated they were not already friends, one student in a pair stated they were not already friends, both students in a pair stated that they did not know if they were already friends, one student in a pair stated that he/she did not know if they were already friends, both students in a pair stated that they were already friends, one student in a pair stated that they were already friends) five of the scenarios showed that over 50% of students in the class responded that their friendship with their Rock Buddy had improved. The scenario in which students did not claim that their friendship with their Rock Buddy had improved was the scenario in which both students claimed at the beginning that they were not already friends. The results were as follows:

- o Both students stated they were not friends at the beginning of the cycle:
0% claimed that their friendship had improved after Rock Buddies

- o One student stated they were not friends at the beginning of the cycle: 83% claimed that their friendship had improved after Rock Buddies
- o Both students stated they did not know if they were already friends at the beginning of the cycle: 67% claimed that their friendship had improved after Rock Buddies
- o One student stated that he/she did not know if they were already friends at the beginning of the cycle: 72% claimed that their friendship had improved after Rock Buddies
- o Both students stated that they were friends at the beginning of the cycle: 75% claimed that their friendship had improved after Rock Buddies
- o One student stated that they were friends at the beginning of the cycle: 62% claimed that their friendship had improved after Rock Buddies

In addition to student responses on surveys showing that Rock Buddies improves relationships within a Rock Buddy pair, my mentor teacher and I have noticed an improvement through our own observations. We have seen Rock Buddies sitting together at lunch, playing together at recess, and playing games with one another on the carpet during morning free time. We even saw one pair of Rock Buddies sitting beside each other and leaning on one another while watching a movie during lunchtime. These observations, coupled with the results of multiple student surveys, demonstrate that having a Rock Buddy has a positive impact on the relationship between two Rock Buddies.

While I have made the claim that Rock Buddies has a positive impact on the relationships of students in a Rock Buddy pair, I am aware of some potential occurrences in the near future that might lead me to change this claim. I made this claim based on data and evidence from the first two cycles of Rock Buddies. In the first cycle, students were assigned a Rock Buddy based on who they stated they wanted to be friends with on their introductory surveys. In the second cycle, students were paired with someone they did not list as a

friend, but also did not list as someone with whom they could not be friends. As Rock Buddies continues, I plan to pair students with a classmate with whom they feel they cannot get along. Once these pairings take place and data is collected, it is quite possible that Rock Buddies will not have a positive impact on all relationships, but only on the relationships of students who had an interest in developing stronger friendship, or students who were indifferent to beginning a friendship with their assigned Rock Buddy.

Claim 2: In order for a positive change to occur within a Rock Buddies relationship, the two students within that pair must make an extra effort to spend time with one another. This extra effort must be more than a simple, possibly meaningless task, such as greeting one another on a daily basis. Rather, this effort must consist of Rock Buddies doing something more meaningful and significant together: something that allows them to spend a considerable amount of time together so that they may learn about one another.

Evidence for Claim 2: While this claim is one that seems obvious, it was important for me to have evidence that would support this claim. I have found this necessary evidence through my data collection using our class paper chain. Students within a Rock Buddy pair who claimed that they were better friends after having been Rock Buddies had added at least one link to the class paper chain (for contents of paper chain links, see Appendices E.1 and E.2). These students shared a variety of ways they spent time making an effort to get to know their Rock Buddies. For example, many students ate lunch together, some played together at recess, some played games with one another, some made crafts or cards for one another, and some chose to work with one another on a library project. Accordingly, all Rock Buddy pairs who did not add any links to the paper chain (indicating to me that these students did not make any effort to spend time together or get to know one another) claimed that their friendship was not better after being Rock Buddies.

Claim 3: It is not necessary to provide Rock Buddies with resources that will guide them to find common interests they share in order for the pair to experience a positive impact on the relationship: students are able to find their own ways to learn enough about one another so that their relationship is positively affected.

Evidence for Claim 3: Through my data collection, I have found that of the 21 Rock Buddy pairs that were assigned in this inquiry so far (and thus the 42 responses to the question “Do you think your friendship with your Rock Buddy has gotten better than before you were Rock Buddies?”), 73% of these students claimed that their friendship had in fact gotten better. Students were able to achieve this friendship status without using the resources provided for them to find their common interests.

This third claim was made based on data and evidence collected from the first and second cycles of Rock Buddies. As previously mentioned, I will eventually assign students to a Rock Buddy based on who they listed as someone with whom they cannot get along. With this upcoming scenario in mind, I am aware that I may need to change this claim. The Rock Buddy pairs up to this point did not use the provided resources with interview questions in order to experience an improvement in their relationships; they were positively affected through other means. With the upcoming Rock Buddy pairs, however, it is possible that these students will need some type of resource that will guide them to find their common interests. I anticipate that students will struggle with making an attempt to get to know (and possibly befriend) their Rock Buddy, and I think it is possible that providing these students with resources that guide them to find commonalities will promote an improvement within their relationships. Keeping this information in mind, I may need to make adjustments to this claim in the future.

Claim 4: Implementing Rock Buddies does not lead students to see the classroom as a space belonging to both themselves and the teacher.

Evidence for Claim 4: It was my hope that through using Rock Buddies in my classroom, students would broaden their friendship circles and experience a positive impact on their relationship in addition to seeing the classroom as a space that belongs to both the teachers *and* the students. After analyzing student responses from the very first survey and the Check-In Survey, I found that there was no change in students' impressions of whose classroom they came to everyday. In the beginning of Rock Buddies, 7 students stated that the classroom belonged to my mentor teacher, 6 students stated that the classroom belonged to my mentor teacher and I, 6 students stated that the classroom belonged to everyone, and 3 students provided some other response. On the Check-In Survey, 7 students stated that the classroom belonged to my mentor teacher, 9 students stated that the classroom belonged to my mentor teacher and I, 6 students stated the classroom belonged to everyone, and no students provided some other response. This data shows that there was no change in the number of students who viewed the classroom as a space belonging to both the teacher and the students. An increase in the number of students who viewed the classroom as belonging to my mentor teacher or my mentor teacher and I did take place. This data shows that implementing Rock Buddies does not lead students to feel that they are in a classroom space that belongs to both them and the teacher.

X. Conclusions

What are the implications for my future practice as a teacher?

In my current teaching, I plan to continue to use Rock Buddies in order to find the answers to my remaining questions. I will discover the impact of this community-building tool on the relationships of students who believe they cannot get along with one another. Continuing this inquiry will also allow me to learn what kinds of resources are necessary or not necessary in order to help students strengthen their friendships.

Because I have found, so far, that the impact of Rock Buddies on student relationships is positive, I will continue to use this community-building tool in my classroom in the future. Since implementing Rock Buddies, I have noticed a huge difference in the tone of my classroom. While I realize that this is not something that can be confirmed and illustrated through using data as evidence, it is understood that a teacher knows the tone of his or her classroom, and I know that our tone has grown into something strong and positive. Through my own experiences this year, I have seen a tremendous improvement in the relationships among my students. Additionally, I have experienced fewer classroom interruptions as a result of petty arguing. It is my belief that these changes in the classroom are directly related to one another. In the future, I plan to continue using Rock Buddies, and I will hopefully find new ways to make it more exciting and allow it to have an even greater impact on my classroom.

XI. New Wonderings

What new questions do I have after initiating this inquiry?

After completing this portion of my inquiry, I have some wonderings yet to be answered in addition to new wonderings.

- o Wonderings yet to be answered:
 - o Will these students who cannot get along ever be able to get along?
 - o Will Rock Buddies have a positive impact on the relationships of students who cannot get along?
- o New wonderings:
 - o Would Rock Buddies be more effective at the beginning of the year?
 - o Would there be a greater improvement in relationships if students got to choose their Rock Buddy?
 - o Would Rock Buddies be as effective if students were matched randomly rather than based on data collected in surveys?

- What are some variations I could use on Rock Buddies so that students will still show enthusiasm once the novelty of the idea has worn off?

XII. References:

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