We were gathering in the reading corner. This is our usual spot for holding our class meetings. However, it is a place we use for other things as well. We gather in the reading corner for story time, class meetings, sharing and learning. Today, we were gathering in the corner to read about and discuss different types of communities in the United States such as rural, urban and suburban. As I approached the students, I noticed that they were sitting in a circle. One student had the class meeting box and another student had grabbed a beanie baby for us to use as our talking item. I told them this was not class meeting time but that I was going to share a book and we were going to have a discussion. Latoya said, “Darn…I wanted a class meeting. I love class meetings!”

Please note that the names of the students used in this text have been changed.

Background

I am a third grade teacher at Marquette Elementary School. I have held this position for four years. Prior to teaching I worked in the area of Finance and Investments. I went back to school to get a Master’s in Education from the UW Department of Curriculum and Instruction. I was in the third cohort of the Teach for Diversity program. I was fortunate enough to have been placed at Marquette Elementary School for my practicum and student teaching. It was at that time that I fell in love with the students, staff and families of this near eastside neighborhood.

Marquette Elementary School is one of the smallest schools in the Madison Metropolitan School District with a population of roughly 225 students. It is located on Madison’s near eastside on the Isthmus and is attached to O’Keeffe Middle School. Our student population is diverse economically, ethnically and culturally. We also have a
very high special education population, one of the highest percentages in the Madison Metropolitan School District. Marquette is paired with Lapham Elementary School, which is located just a few blocks from the Capitol. Lapham houses the students in grades kindergarten through second while Marquette houses the students in grades third through fifth. Thus, when the students arrive at Marquette they move from being “the top dog” at Lapham to becoming the youngest students in an unfamiliar environment. There is traditionally a lot of initial anxiety prior to the move to Marquette, so it is critical for these new three grade students to feel safe and feel like they belong.

I have nineteen students in my classroom. There are eight boys and eleven girls. I have seven special education students (37%), five minority students (26%), four students who are free and reduced lunch (21%), one student who is homeless (5%), and one half-time Special Education Assistant. The academic levels in my classroom vary significantly. I have students who began the year reading at the mid-first grade level, students who read at the eighth grade and above level, and students in between.

I was once again blessed with a special and unique group of students this year. Right away, at the beginning of the year, community was being formulated and created. I found many students in this year’s class who possessed leadership qualities, good problem solving skills and empathy for others. I felt excited about trying an action research project with this group of students.

**My Search for a Question**

I initially entered into the action research process with a team of four teachers from Marquette. We were given the task to take the Tribes philosophy and the Stress Challenge philosophy and create something unique to Marquette. Both Tribes and Stress Challenge help teachers facilitate community in their rooms through various stages of development. They both help create a safe and respectful community for children and adults through the use of activities that allow people to build trust and respect for each other. Our team met a few times over the summer and created a simple model that infused some of the Stress Challenge elements with Tribes. We created common guidelines (school-wide norms) for the school, some common language for us to use with
staff and students, created our own version of the Tribes Trail (the stages of development), and incorporated some of the Tribes activities into our staff meetings.

Initially, the staff was open to and accepting of our suggestions and ideas. We, however, felt as if our work was not fully supported by our principal. While we felt he liked the idea of the Marquette TEAMM (Together Everyone Achieves More at Marquette) model, it became difficult for us to get the time we needed at staff meetings to implement the activities and spend time reflecting on Community. Also, as the year progressed, the four of us were feeling pulled by other issues that felt more pressing inside our own classrooms. I was beginning to formulate many different ideas about what I wanted to research in my own classroom. It was through my reading, researching, self reflecting and conversations with fellow teachers that I decided to focus my action research on the use of class meetings. More specifically, my question is, How does the frequent use of classroom meetings help foster community and help students see themselves as effective and capable problem solvers?

**Research**

In the book *Positive Discipline in the Classroom* by Jane Nelsen, Lynn Lott and H. Stephen Glenn it is stated that

“Class meetings teach essential skills and empower young people with a positive attitude for success in all areas of life, school, work, family and society. Students learn social skills, such as listening, taking turns, hearing different points of view, negotiating, communicating, helping one another, and taking responsibility for their own behavior.”

This quote spoke to me. After taking the Tribes training in the fall of 1999, I struggled with how to incorporate Tribes into my day to day activities and not simply to use them as “fun” activities that we did once a week. Since I was already using class meetings, I decided to refine what I was doing and focus more energy and class time to them. The class meeting times gave us time to focus on classroom issues, a time to give appreciations and compliments, and a time to reflect on our day, week, or units of study. It has felt more consistent and cohesive.
In the book *Ways We Want Our Class to Be: CLASS MEETINGS THAT BUILD COMMITMENT TO KINDNESS AND LEARNING*, by the Developmental Studies Center, class meetings are presented as a time to talk and to listen. It is a forum for the class to gather, to reflect, to discuss problems, and to make decisions about the way things should be in the classroom. The authors stress that it is a time when the students and the teacher have an *equal* say in discussions and decisions. It is not a time for teachers to impose their desires nor is it a time for students to sit in judgement of one another. It is a time for students to begin to take ownership of the class and feel like they are valuable members of the classroom community. The teachers role is to be a member as well as a leader. As a teacher you are to model respect for all ideas and to model the willingness to explore various ideas, not to impose them.

**What is a Class Meeting?**

Class meetings are used for the following purposes: to check in with each other, for problem solving, to discuss feelings on an issue, to have the class share their feelings about an issue or problem but not look for the problem to be solved, to plan future events and to give compliments and appreciations. The more frequently a class meeting is held, the more effective it is. We are now holding class meetings a minimum of 3 times a week for 20 minutes a time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Meeting Format</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Compliments and Appreciations</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Follow up on prior solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Agenda Items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Share feelings while others listen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Discuss without fixing</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. Ask for problem-solving help</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Future plans (field trips, parties, projects)</td>
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I adopted this class meeting format from the book *Positive Discipline in the Classroom*, by Jane Nelson, Lynn Lott and H. Stephen Glenn. The Class Meeting agendas are set by either the students or the teacher. We created a class meeting box and class meeting form
(Appendix D) for students and teachers to use if they want to put something on the class meeting agenda. The forms are then used to set the agenda.

At the beginning of the year I held one half hour class meeting a week. We gathered in a circle and went directly into discussing problems. We did not begin the meeting with appreciations and compliments. We practiced the class meeting format by discussing the classroom/school-wide norms I mentioned above in the section **My Search for a Question.** The norms we adopted are **Mutual Respect, Attentive Listening and Effective Communication, Appreciations--No Put Downs, Right to Pass and Right to feel Safe.** Our discussion involved students addressing each norm and brainstorming what a classroom would look like, sound like, and feel like if, for example, the classroom had Attentive Listening. The process of adopting these norms gave students a chance to practice discussing with and listening to each other.

When an issue or an item from the agenda is brought up, we go around the circle twice to discuss this item. We chose a talking item (one of four beanie babies) to pass around the circle. Only the person with the beanie baby may speak. All students have the right to either share or pass. If a student passes, they have a chance to say something the second time around the circle. The students were insistent that we go around the circle twice.

I have found the talking circle to be an effective way to include the voices of all my students and not just the students who always have their hands up or always have something to say. It has been interesting for me to observe various students in my class during class meeting times. At the beginning of the year, many students exercised their right to pass. However, as students have felt more comfortable, safe, and valued by their peers, fewer students choose to pass.

**Classroom Experience Before**

I have conducted class meetings every year that I have taught. Most of what I did during class meetings I modeled after a few class meetings I observed during my practicum and student teaching experience. When I began teaching I decided to include a regularly scheduled class meeting into my weekly schedule because I wanted to provide a forum for students to bring up issues they felt needed to be discussed as a class. I
provided a class meeting box where students put in issues or ideas for our class to discuss and I provided a half an hour every week to discuss these issues and ideas. Many times the same issues would come up (for example playground issues like four square and the tire swings.) Students would discuss the problem and we would attempt to come up with a solution. While this was fine, I never felt like we had enough time to really address these issues or that students were moving beyond the “tire swing” issues.

Last year, I took the TRIBES training that the district was offering. There were many things about the TRIBES model that I like and there were many things that I used already. TRIBES stresses forming a sense of community. I have always stressed building a supportive classroom community and devote a lot of time to this throughout the year. One thing I was not doing was allowing students the opportunity to offer compliments and appreciations to each other or spending time reflecting on our day. I incorporated more of this into the week, and while it was a wonderful aid in improving classroom climate, it still felt disconnected from everything else we were doing.

Two elements of the TRIBES model that I wanted to focus on this year were the opportunities for reflection and appreciations. As I reflected on my teaching over the past few years, it became clear to me that I had not offered much opportunities for us as a class to stop and reflect on what we were learning. I wanted to give my students more opportunities this year to reflect on their various school and classroom experiences and wanted to incorporate more opportunities for us to offer compliments and appreciations for each other. I scheduled in a weekly class meeting time and in addition, scheduled a time at the end of the week for the class to do a TRIBES type activity, including an appreciation time. However, like last year, this still did not seem like enough. I did not feel like I was devoting enough time to the TRIBES activities to move beyond the stage of inclusion and I felt our class meeting times could be more effective. I have a group of students this year that are insightful and empathetic and I was excited to see what we could accomplish if we devoted more time to problem solving. For example, during class meetings at the beginning of the year, there were several students who actually brought up issues where other students, outside of our class, were being unfairly treated. The students felt this was unjust and wanted to find a way to deal with this problem. This is pretty amazing for a new group of third grade students. I wanted to try more. This is
where the books *Positive Discipline in the Classroom* and *Ways We Want Our Classrooms to be* came in.

**Classroom Experience Now**

These books changed the way I viewed class meetings and how they could be a powerful forum in my classroom. I realized I needed to devote more time during my week to class meetings. I rearranged my schedule so that I could conduct class meetings three times a week for 20 minutes each time. I wanted to have my class see themselves as problem solvers and to allow them a voice in how things in the classroom are done. The latter goal meant that I had to give up some control. While I do not think of myself as a controlling person, I have realized that it can be hard to sit with my mouth shut while students are working through problems and issues. I try to limit my role to clarifying what the issues are and clarifying the suggested solutions.

I’ve been excited at how receptive the students have been to the increased use of class meetings. Students quickly transition to the reading corner when it is class meeting time. When I gave the students the class meeting survey (Appendix B) in January and again in March (See results in Appendices A & F) the majority of the class liked class meeting time. They are disappointed if we are not able to hold a scheduled class meeting due to a conflict. I have also been encouraged by the evolution of the type of class meeting issues we address. We have moved beyond the “tire swing” issues and onto more significant issues such as “Some people in our class are lying,” or “I feel like I am ignored by some people.” We have had some lively and honest discussions around these issues that I will detail later in the paper. We had begun the journey out of what TRIBES calls the inclusion stage and into the influence stage.

**Appreciations**

Probably the biggest surprise and delight for all of us has been our appreciation time. In December we decided to begin each meeting with giving appreciations. Initially the students were given the option to give an appreciation or to pass. We always go around the circle twice. Initially, the compliments were pretty superficial like “I appreciate you being my friend” or “You are nice.” However it did not take long for a few students to
help raise the bar and provide examples of appreciating people for what they have done or accomplished. I started hearing compliments like, “Andy does a good job of reading,” “I appreciated the way Devon helped me in math,” “I like the way our class solves problems,” and “I like the way our class doesn’t judge people based on skin color.”

We use a stuffed animal to pass around the circle to help students focus on the speaker and to give everyone a chance to speak or to pass. During our appreciation time usually about one half to two thirds of the students would give an appreciation and the others would pass. In the book Positive Discipline in the Classroom, by Jane Nelsen, Lynn Lott and H. Stephen Glenn, the authors suggested that once students have practiced giving and receiving compliments from each other, give them the opportunity to give a compliment to a classmate, ask for a compliment from a classmate or pass. We say Give, Get or Pass. For example, when Sally receives the stuffed animal, she may say “I would like to get an appreciation.” At this point, the other students in the circle think of something nice they would like to say to Sally and raise their hands. Sally then chooses one of her peers to give her an appreciation. The peer would then say something like, “I appreciate the way Sally included me in her game at recess today.”

We practiced this process by having everyone in the class think of something for which they would like to receive a compliment. For example, “I feel like I worked hard in math today.” I then asked the students to raise their hands if they had thought of a compliment for themselves. A little more than half the class raised their hands. I then asked who could not think of anything nice to say about themselves. About one third of the class raised their hands. We then went around the circle and several people offered compliments to those who could not think of anything nice to say. Every time we asked for a compliment for someone several hands shot up right away. Pretty soon, the whole class wanted to hear compliments from their peers. It was a powerful experience! The compliments and appreciations were phenomenal. I heard things like “Alicia is always nice to me and kind to others, thank you!” “I appreciate the way Kara and Larry help me understand my math today.” “I appreciate the way LaToya is so encouraging of others.” “I noticed how hard Ellen was working in math today.” “I appreciate the way Alicia and Andy worked with me on our science project.” “I have noticed that Erica is persistent and determined.” We now begin our class meetings with an option for students to Give, Get
or Pass. Usually about 98% of the class opts to either Give or Get a compliment and rarely do people Pass.

I feel that the effect of this appreciation time has reached beyond the class meeting time. It showed up on the survey I conduct about class meetings. Students stated that they feel appreciated by the teacher and their peers. (See graphs in Appendix A.) Students stated that the appreciation time was their favorite part of class meetings (Appendix F.) It has also influenced certain students’ participation during our regular academic times. An example is Devon’s participation. Devon is a student who is new to Marquette Elementary School. He has a learning disability in reading and math. He began the school year pretty angry and really avoided reading, especially out loud. Devon receives a supplanted curriculum for reading and math. He has made huge strides with his reading abilities this year. He has also received several compliments from students stating that he is a good reader. Because of the combination of feeling successful and receiving compliments, he actually volunteered to read out loud in class the other day. This was a huge breakthrough for him. Even though he stumbled over a few of the words, his classmates were very patient with him and he trusted them enough to do something about which he feels vulnerable—read.

The appreciation time has allowed us to set a positive tone to our meetings and has helped foster the sense of community. Students feel valued by their teacher and peers and the classroom feels like a safe and caring environment.

A Glimpse into Class Meetings

An issue that always seems to be a problem every year is lining up and students jockeying for positions in the line. The following is a synopsis of a class meeting we held about the issue of the line. This item was put on the agenda by one of the students.

We had a lengthy and honest discussion about issues of lining up and budging. As

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<th>Problem:</th>
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<tr>
<td>The initial problem presented on the class meeting agenda was budging in line. If someone leaves the line can they get their spot back?</td>
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we went around the circle and had people share their feelings, the problem was expanded to include the following:

- should people be able to get their spot back in line if they get out of line
- What happens when two people run, get to line at the same time and argue occurs over who was there first
- arguments over where the line begins
- saving spots in the line
- people argue over how to solve the problem
- students goofing around and exhibiting unsafe behaviors

We had a good honest discussion about the problems and students were able to express their feelings to their classmates. While students were talking I could see a lot of heads nodding in agreement with the issues and problems being addressed. Because the problem was expanded, we spent several class meetings brainstorming ideas for a solution. Students were able to come up with solutions that everyone could live with and they had several choices about how to deal with the problem. One solution the students came up with was to add a line leader and an end of line person to our weekly jobs chart to help alleviate the issue of students fighting for the very front and the very back of the line. If there was a dispute about who was first, the students decided to use rock-paper-scissors to determine who would be first and who would be second. While we weren’t able to come up with a concrete solution for unsafe behaviors, students were able to express their feelings.

At first glance, these solutions seem simple and obvious. In the past, I would have simply imparted a solution and “solved” the problem. In the past, the students would have had another experience of an adult “solving” their problem. In the past, the problem would continue to be a problem all year. However this year, after our class meeting, the line is not a problem. The students took ownership of the problem and the solution. It is their words we used for the solution and they are simple strategies everyone agreed on, including me.

At the beginning of the year, the class meeting agenda was full of playground issues such as the tire swing, four-square, football, etc… These are the same issues that come up every year and in the past, my weekly class meetings were full of playground issues
almost all year long. I felt like we discussed the same problems over and over and never came up with any viable solutions. This year, we have actually been able to move beyond playground issues. I do not mean to say that the playground is not a hot bed for conflicts. It is. However, because we came up with the Wheel of Choice (See section labeled Wheel of Choice and Appendix H), students have been given some other options for problem solving.

The following class meeting issues are two examples of playground problems we discussed and how we addressed them during a class meeting this past fall.

| Issue: Four Square |
| Problem: The rules: people are making up rules and are not playing fair. |

The problem basically came down to students feeling as if they needed some guidelines for the four square court. Some students were making up rules and special moves as they played and would refuse to leave their square if they were out. This caused a lot of arguments and frustration. We had a lively discussion about four square and issues of cheating. This had become such a heated issue that some parents felt the need to come observe the four square games at recess.

It was decided in our class meeting that we should come up with some simple school rules the whole school could follow. The students felt empowered by this: they were going to be a part of the solution and not just the problem. One student, Ellen, volunteered to get the rules from Ms. K, our physical education teacher. I was really excited that Ellen agreed to do this. She tended to be one of the students who caused some of the problems during four square. She took ownership of the problem by agreeing to be a part of the solution. The next day Ellen showed up with a book of rules for playground games. She and Ivan wrote out the simple rules for four square, with some assistance from me. We typed up the rules, copied them and distributed them to the
other classrooms in the school with a note explaining what they were. The students also posted the rules around the school.

After about a week, the students said they were still having problems so we decided to have a meeting with all the third grade students who played four square. This was a chance to clarify the rules and air feelings. During this meeting, the rules were discussed. It was agreed upon by the group that if there were disputes about who was out they could quickly solve their problem by using rock-paper-scissors. Many students expressed feeling frustrated that much of the recess was wasted with petty arguments and disputes so they were happy to try to find a solution that would work.

While this did not alleviate all the problems with four square, it did allow the students to see that they had options for solving problems. They were able to be a part of creating a solution for a common problem. Students also came up with strategies for quickly solving disputes on their own without the assistance of an adult.

| Issue: Taking the four square ball out for recess. |
| Problem: I feel like the same people are always taking out the ball and I never get a chance. |

We started discussing this issue by having people share their feelings. Most people passed, stating that they did not use the ball at recess so it was not a problem for them. We determined that this was an issue for only six students in the class. Those six students then agreed to meet as a group and come up with a solution. I asked if they felt they needed my help with this. They stated that they thought they could handle it on their own and Mike agreed to facilitate the meeting. Mike showed a lot of poise and leadership. He had the students sit in a circle, share their feelings and then brainstorm some solutions. Mike suggested that they create a chart for the different recesses and assign a time for each student. They created a chart for each recess we have during the week. They then randomly drew names out of a hat and filled in the chart. The finished product was hung on the wall next to the playground box. It was amazing. I sat back and observed the process from the outside. Mike made sure everyone listened to each other
and had a chance to speak. They decided to use the computer to create the chart and they took turns entering their names using the computer. They were cooperating, listening to each other and sharing. When the process was complete, they were thrilled. When I later asked Mike how he felt about the process his response was that it felt great but “that was a lot of work for a four square ball!” Again, the solution was a simple one, but because it was their idea, it worked.

In my survey of parents about class meetings (see appendices C & G), I asked if students talk about class meetings at home and if so what they say. Mike’s mom mentioned this particular meeting. She said, “He mentioned one (a class meeting) where his idea helped reach a solution. He was proud that he came up with an idea regarding checking out the four square ball.”

**Raising Awareness and Consciousness**

When a student puts an issue on the class meeting agenda, they have three choices for how they want to handle the issue. The first choice is to simply share their feelings while others listen. The second choice is the agenda item is discussed without fixing the problem. The final choice is to ask for problem solving help. Many times the students choose to do a combination of the first and second choice. The students and I have found that at times the process of having an honest and respectful discussion is enough. Students are given an opportunity to share their feelings and state their opinions. In the past, I always had students try to come up with a solution for problems. However, there are many problems that do not have an easy, neat solution.

A few months ago an issue was put in the class meeting box that stated there was a lot of teasing of students and mean jokes being told. Students were telling “your mama” jokes and it got carried away. We had an honest and open discussion about teasing and how bad it can make people feel. Some students shared about times that they were teased and shared that they felt sad, hurt, and insulted. Other students shared that the jokes they were telling were not meant to be mean but they acknowledged how someone might take it the wrong way. A few students suggested that instead of jokes that put people down, they could tell “put-up” jokes.
This is a classic example of a problem that does not have a simple and easy solution but we all benefited from the honest, open and respectful discussion that took place. Students felt like they were heard by their classmates and that their feelings were validated. It is exciting to experience discussions like this. I could have chosen to simply lecture the students on the evils of teasing but it was more meaningful to them to hear their peers share how teasing makes them feel.

Wheel of Choice

One of the main focuses of my action research was to determine if the frequent use of class meetings would help my students see themselves as capable problem solvers. During class meetings, we spent a lot of time working through and discussing problems and coming up with solutions. Because we have been able to successfully work through many problems, the students know they can solve problems as a group. However, I was interested to see if these problem-solving skills were carried outside of the class meeting setting and on to the playground.

During several class meetings in February, the students and I created a Wheel of Choice (See Appendix E.) The idea of the Wheel of Choice came from the book *Positive Discipline in the Classroom*. The wheel lists choices for the students to try if they are having a conflict with a peer. The idea is for students to realize that they have many choices in solving conflicts and that they do not always need an adult to solve conflicts for them. Unless it is an emergency, the students are to try at least two choices from the wheel before they seek help from an adult.

After we created and adapted our own wheel, I needed to come up with a way to track if the students were using it. I created a survey that I had students fill out several times after various recess periods (See Appendix F.) The survey asks students if they used the Wheel of Choice and, if so, what options they tried. They then are asked if it helped and, if so, how.

I was pleasantly surprised at how often students used the various choices for solving conflicts and how often they seemed to work. For example, one boy stated that he tried three options from the wheel: *rock-paper-scissors, ignore it, and ask them to please stop.* He explained that the options “did and didn’t work.” When a certain boy, Jerry, was out
on the playground it did not help because he “was being bad.” But earlier in the day, when Jerry wasn’t on the playground, it did help. Jerry is a fifth grade special education student who has mental and emotional problems. Another girl stated that she used several options: rock-paper-scissors, ignore it, use an “I” message to talk it out, ask them to stop and go back and try it again next time. When asked if this worked, she stated that “yes” it did. “When I asked someone to stop, they stopped. Another girl said she used an “I” message to talk it out. She stated that it did help because “someone was on the tire swing way too long and I told them how I felt it was unfair and they got off.” I was especially pleased to see that a tire swing incident was solved WITHOUT an adult’s help. A girl stated that she did “rock-paper-scissors with Annie to sort out a problem and in the end we ended up just sharing it!”

Of the 14 surveys I received from students who said they used the Wheel of Choice, 9 were girls and 5 were boys. All five boys used rock-paper-scissors as at least one of their choices and 3 of the 5 boys said it helped them solve their conflict. The other problem-solving strategies used by the boys were ask them to please stop, and ignore it.

Of the 9 girls who said they used the Wheel of Choice, 6 of the girls used rock-paper-scissors as at least one of their choices for solving the conflict. Other choices used were ignore it (2), go back and try it again next time (2), ask them to please stop (2), Use an “I” message (3), ask permission to put it on the class meeting agenda (1), say I need some space and walk away (2), need some time to cool off (1), and offer your help (2). All nine of the girls stated that the Wheel of Choice helped them solve their conflict. As a matter of fact, one girl stated she use the strategy Ask if you can offer your help when she was playing with 2 other friends. When some other girls came to join them there was a fight. This girl was able to help the group figure out a way that they could all play together.

Ideally, I would have liked to have collected more data on the use of the Wheel of Choice. For purposes of this paper, I surveyed the students twice, after two separate recess periods. I was also able to receive some feedback about the use of the Wheel of Choice from the class meeting survey (Appendix A & B) I gave the students in March. My conclusion is that some of the students are incorporating the Wheel choices. I still have students coming up to me with conflicts that could be solved on their own using the
Wheel of Choice. I always ask students which choice from the wheel they have tried first before approaching me. If they say they haven’t tried any, I walk over to the Wheel and have them choose a few options to try. I then ask them to try to solve the conflict on their own using those choices with me watching. My hope is that this will reinforce the idea that the students are capable problem solvers and that they do not need an adult to solve their conflicts for them.

**Conclusion**

Let me restate my question again: **How does the frequent use of classroom meetings help foster community and help students see themselves as effective and capable problem solvers?** Looking through my data, notes from class meetings, the journaling I did, results from the class meeting survey (Appendix A & F) and the results from the parent survey (Appendix G), I realized that community has been formed in room 226. Did the use of class meetings contribute to that? Yes. Was it the only reason? No. However, I believe that the class meeting offers a forum for students to discuss many issues, concerns and dreams for the year. It has been an opportunity for us to express our thanks and appreciations to each other. According to the survey, the students felt appreciated and valued by their peers and teacher (Appendix A.) Class Meetings have been a venue for us to learn to communicate effectively with each other. All this has helped foster a sense of community.

The idea of students seeing themselves as effective and capable problem solvers is a little less clear. I think some students feel like they can solve problems and some students do not feel as comfortable. According to the survey, more students saw themselves as having choices about solving their problems and feeling like they could solve their problems or help others solve problems (Appendix A.) With more time, practice, and experience I believe more students will feel comfortable with the problem solving strategies we have learned.

**Reflections**

The classroom action research process, while at times frustrating and overwhelming, has been a valuable one for me. I appreciated the time I was given to use to reflect on my
teaching practices. It is so hard to find the time to be intentional about reflecting on our teaching yet it is so valuable. If I could do it all over again, and I hope to be able to do this again, I wish I had had a clear question at the beginning of the year. I feel my data was not as accurate as it could have been given the late start.

I grew and learned a lot throughout this process. I was able to give up control and power and walk with children as they struggled to find solutions that our community could live with. We strove to get rid of the “majority rules” solutions and worked at compromising with each other.

We, as a class, gained a lot as well. I found the tone in our room to be positive and encouraging. As the year went on, students were able to take risks both academically and socially because they knew they would feel supported and accepted.

Next year, I will continue with class meetings three times a week. I would like to incorporate some problem solving role-plays, especially using the wheel of choice. I believe the more students practice solving their own problems, the more capable and confident they become.

I am grateful for the time to have been able to stop and reflect on my teaching practice and discuss ideas with a supportive and encouraging group of people.
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