Reducing Stress Through Morning Meetings

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Reducing Stress Through Morning Meetings

by

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A thesis submitted to the
Department of Education and Human Development of the
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Reducing Stress Through Morning Meetings

By

Denell Jodine Knaub
Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the students who were the driving force behind it. Each of them reminded me on a daily basis of why I became a teacher. This thesis is also dedicated to my husband, Matthew Knaub and my mother, Mary Lonski. Their encouragement and support have made all the difference.
Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge my thesis advisor, Dr. Thomas Allen. His support through the writing of this thesis has enabled me to grow academically and professionally. Dr. Allen challenged me to expand my abilities as a writer and researcher. Through that I believe I have walked away from this experience with a greater confidence and sense of pride in my accomplishments as a graduate student.
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Chapter I

Countless children in today’s society are carrying burdens far heavier than most adults could ever imagine. For some children, even at the young ages of nine and ten, life has already forced them to take on responsibilities and experience hardships that are far beyond what would be considered as the norm. Or maybe the realization is that the majority of adults and educators are simply not taking the time to look at what is just beyond the surface of today’s youth.

Children today experience great amounts of stress brought on by environmental, geographic, and social factors. These stresses cause changes in academic performance and social behaviors. In order for students to succeed not only academically but also socially they need to be provided with safe, positive outlets for their stress. With these outlets they also need to be taught positive coping strategies that will help them deal with the often-unavoidable situations that life throws at them.

Today children of all ages are exposed to various forms of violence, whether it is from television, radio, family, peers or society in general. According to research conducted by Ulrich (2002), victims of crime tend to be people from low income and living in neighborhoods that are considered to be high poverty. Children living in these neighborhoods have high levels of exposure to violence, which are marked as high stress points. The exposure to violence, especially for children of young ages can have lasting effects. For countless children some of the only positive role modeling they are exposed to is from within the school they attend. It is the responsibility of teachers, administrators and districts to provide all students the necessary supports to grow into successful adults.

In a study conducted by Bennett-Johnson (2004) possible solutions for school violence were suggested. The author researched possible contributing factors that may be linked to the increase in school violence that can be found especially in urban schools.
According to research done by the author, urban children that come from families with an income of $7,500 or less per year were more likely to be the victims of a crime or be exposed to violence. The author contributed this factor to the risk factors that are associated with some families of this income level. These factors included possible histories of family crime and violence, lower lack of expectations by parents, lack of parental supervision and parent involvement in drugs, child abuse and neglect.

Bennett-Johnson also suggested that children living in these home situations were more likely to be exposed to community factors such as drugs, violence, availability of weapons, large numbers of broken homes and transient populations. In turn, the author explained that this raised the risk of these children falling into gang involvement, academic failure and delinquent behaviors and lack of commitment to school. The author suggested that schools should implement plans of action or prevention. In addition, educators would need to be familiar with resources that are available for people in the community, schools need to provide safe areas for students, and teachers need to encourage student led anti-violence activities and celebrate student accomplishment.

According to Fager and Boss (1999) there is an extreme need for educators to be proactive in becoming a positive role model in the lives of their students in an effort to prevent the cycle of violence. Through their research, Fager and Boss presented theories that gave educators an insight into understanding violence, warning signs and ways in which to implement violence prevention. The authors suggested that in an effort to prevent violence teachers need to be proactive. Through classroom efforts educators were recommended to use interactive teaching methods such as cooperative learning and class discussions to provide students opportunities to develop positive social skills.
Statement of the Problem

The student population that I collected data on is considered to be living in poverty and have been exposed to various types of violence. The majority of these students are living in neighborhoods that are considered to have high violence and gang activity. Research indicates a direct relationship between poverty and violence (Bennett-Johnson, 2004). On a daily basis my students are dealing with issues of low self-esteem, aggression and withdrawal due to the effects that stress has on most of my students. In this action research project, I developed a support system in my classroom through daily morning meetings that provided students with a safe environment that allowed them to discuss issues that were causing them stress at school. Through the use of daily journaling, weekly surveys, group meetings and anecdotal notes, it was my intention to reduce student stress. I followed this design for the remaining weeks of the 2006-2007 school year. Data collection and findings determined whether or not the design would be modified or continued for the following school year.

Significance of the Problem

Daily, I witnessed the students at my school deal with the various issues brought on by peer pressure, academic stress and bullying. In an attempt to minimize these issues my school has implemented a bullying prevention program. As part of the program it was only recommended that teachers try to hold morning meetings with their students at least once a week. I wanted to investigate how holding daily morning meetings, along with providing children with the chance to write about how they feel, affects how they feel about issues bothering them at school. I believe that students deal with stressful issues at school on a daily basis, not just one day a week. It was my hope that through research, I would be able to provide other educators with data that shows how the use of my design could benefit their students.
My data collection plan involved daily journaling of the children in my classroom. Data was also collected by a survey given to the participating children every Friday. I also looked at data that I collected through anecdotal notes during the discussions held in our daily morning meetings.

I kept track of my ongoing analysis through anecdotal notes made on surveys that were collected and kept as part of the study. I also kept a separate binder divided into sections according to student number for purposes of identification. In these sections, I recorded dated notes in response to journal entries that I read. These were kept private and not exposed to students or other outside sources except for the purpose of reporting in my study. With this data I was able to look for reoccurring patterns or trends in situations that cause stress, their frequency and impact on the students. I also was able to measure the effect that discussion of coping strategies had on student response to dealing with the stressful situations.

**Purpose**

The purpose of the research was to develop an understanding of how educators can help their students reduce their stress and develop appropriate coping strategies for dealing with situations that numerous students encounter daily at school. The significance of this project was that it would provide research to educators on ways in which daily morning meetings can benefit both students and classroom teachers. The results of this project have contributed to general knowledge because the data has provided educators with student feedback on issues that cause them stress and/or what coping mechanisms are effective.

**Rationale**

Through my experiences working as an elementary teacher in the Rochester City School District, I have wondered what could be done within the classroom to help reduce
the stress levels of the children. In my opinion, the stress that my students experienced from violence and bullying greatly affected their ability to do well both academically and socially. From my direct observations, the majority of my students lacked the coping mechanisms needed to deal with the stress in a healthy and productive way.

One of my responsibilities of being a teacher is to be a positive role model in the lives of the children that I teach. With this responsibility it was beneficial to those students that I fully understand the causes of urban childhood stress and be able to offer them appropriate ways to deal with its effects. It was my intention that through the use of morning meetings I would be able to teach my students coping strategies to approach conflicting or problematic situations in an effort to reduce the stress brought on by these circumstances (Pincus & Friedman, 2004). Through the completion of this action research project I have collected and analyzed student data that will help me grow professionally so that I can more effectively meet the countless needs of the student population that I teach.

Definition of Key Terms

The definitions of terms as used pertaining to this study are as follows.

*Poverty* as defined by Bennett and Johnson (2004), is considered to be any household with an annual income of $7,500 or less. Members of the household are also struggling to meet basic needs to promote academic, physical or social growth.

*Bullying* for all purposes of this paper, are any words or actions that cause another individual to feel physically or emotionally uncomfortable, threatened or scared (Olweus, 2003).

*Stress* is defined as feelings brought on by external factors that cause feelings of sadness, anger, anxiety, fear or hopelessness (Stormont, Espinosa, Kippling and McCathren, 2003).
Coping Strategies have been defined as any skills that are taught to help an individual approach conflicting or problematic situations (Jewett and Peterson, 2002).

**Summary**

Students today are in need of appropriate support systems within their schools to help them effectively and positively deal with the many stresses they encounter living in today's society. Urban students, such as those who participated in this study have proven themselves to be part of a student population in great need. The review of literature found in the following chapter captures the focus of the research conducted to support the theory and rationale behind this study.
Chapter II

The burdens that numerous children in today’s society carry are beyond what many adults could imagine. Students are carrying hidden burdens to school with them each day that are not always easily noticeable on the surface. For many students living in poverty, the constant worry of violence, drugs, family and money greatly interferes with their daily activities both inside and outside of school.

Kliewer, Adams, Taylor, Jackson, Walker and Shivy (2006) stated that students living in these environments face unique coping challenges. In addition to worrying about their safety, some of these adolescents are coping with stressors that result from ineffective parenting, death of family and friends from violent acts, and peer pressures. The authors noted that school, community and family could assist these students in developing strategies to cope with these stressors.

The literature review is divided into sections that relate directly to research topics that have been collected for the purpose of this study.

Family

As children grow and learn they are greatly influenced by the behaviors that are modeled within their families. Nacev and Brubach (2000) reviewed data that had been previously conducted on the relationship between family systems and bullying in children. The authors found that children who come from households or homes where parents’ exhibit bullying behavior are more likely to display aggressive behavior toward their peers at school. Nacev and Brubach further found that in most cases, children that have experienced abuse will in turn be more likely to show abuse toward others. Their research also referenced findings that suggest that school based intervention programs can be useful in preventing violent behavior in school.
The authors concluded that there is also a direct connection between single parent homes in which abuse takes place, and aggressive and abusive behaviors displayed by the children. Children that are raised in environments with great levels of hostility and aggression will learn to use those same behaviors as their coping mechanisms in daily situations (Nacev and Brubach, 2000).

In another study, Clements, Martin, and Warren (1997) conducted research on families that experienced violent marital conflict versus families that did not experience violent marital conflict and how these differences affected the social competencies of the children involved. Their study included forty-eight four year-old children and their parents. Half of the married couples were physically violent while the remaining half had not experienced physical violence in the past year. During the study the families completed a variety of interaction tasks and self-reporting measures, including family games, group discussions, and peer games. The study found that parents in violent relationships were more negative, engaged in greater negativity such as rejection, coercive control and withdrawal. The study also found that children of parents who experience violence were more likely to engage in violent behaviors, had less confidence and were reported to show more hyperactivity and conduct problems. Reported conduct problems included the inability to follow directions, appropriately interact with other children and adults and accept imposed limits.

Clements et al. concluded that the findings of this study supported the notion that families are a critical component for the development of children’s interpersonal skills and competencies (Clements et al., 1997). Family violence and increased stress appeared to influence the children’s social interactions, relationships, and adjustments with peers and teachers. In turn, the research suggested that the children of marital violence had limited exposure to conflict-resolution strategies.
The data collected from these two studies are valuable in helping to understand the backgrounds of the research participants. Many of the students that the researcher teaches on a daily basis have been exposed to various types of violence. As a researcher working closely with children who are linked to these experiences, it is crucial to develop an understanding behind the foundations to many of their behaviors.

Violence

In today's society children of all ages are exposed to many forms of violence. Whether it is from television, radio, family, peers or society in general. The exposure to violence, especially for children of young ages, can have lasting effects. For many children, some of the only positive role modeling they are exposed to comes from within the school they attend. It is the responsibility of teachers, administrators and districts to provide all children the necessary supports to grow into successful adults (Bennett-Johnson, 2004).

According to Richards, Larson, Miller, Luo, Sims and Parrella (2004), constant exposure to violence within the community tends to be a common aspect of life for urban youth. The trauma associated with this exposure to violence has negative psychological and behavioral effects. The authors stated that an important risk factor for the exposure to community violence is the amount of unstructured and unmonitored time that countless youth spend with their peers. Due to the lack of resources and funding that numerous poverty stricken urban neighborhoods have, there is little access to organized sports, lessons and clubs. This leaves many of the youth with large amounts of unstructured free time. Richards et al. stated that violence often occurs during this unsupervised time (Richards et al 2004).
The authors analyzed data that was collected from a study that consisted of 167 sixth through eighth grade African American students that were living in neighborhoods considered to be high poverty. Neighborhoods that were considered to be in poverty had an annual income of $12,852. During the time of the study the participants were asked to complete questionnaires regarding whether or not they were the victims of or witnessed violent behavior. Participants also reported the times, locations and individuals they were with during these occurrences.

Richards et al. found that exposure to violence reported from adolescents that had substantial amounts of unsupervised time with peers was significant. Youth who reported spending more time with their families in structured activities did still report exposure to violence but not as frequently as the unsupervised youth. Richards et al. observed that in both cases violence was directly related to behavior and emotional difficulties that were displayed by some of the participants. The authors suggested that communities should provide more supervised recreational facilities and after-school programs to occupy youth time and decrease their likelihood of being exposed to and participating in violence (Richards et al, 2004).

Luther and Goldstein (2004) also acknowledged that children living in inner city neighborhoods that have high poverty rates are witness to, and victimized by an astonishing number of violent incidents. The authors reviewed data that was previously collected on adolescents from inner city neighborhoods that had reported witnessing or being a victim of violence. Luther and Goldstein reported that of the population of youth that data was collected on, at least half had been exposed to three or more violent events within a six-month period. One out of five adolescents had known someone who had been shot or killed. Based on these findings, Luther and Goldstein emphasized the need for immediate intervention (2004).
The authors suggested that prevention efforts must first focus on the environment in which the adolescents are exposed to. The community and family must be primary targets for support and resources to foster appropriate interventions. These interventions include: communities receiving adequate funding to provide resources to school programs, parent support groups and training, and partnerships between the police, and mental health centers. Luther and Goldstein also recommended interventions at school. The authors emphasized the importance of positive teacher and student relationships to help support at risk students.

Fager and Boss (1999) conducted research that gave educators information to improve their understanding of violence, warning signs and effective ways to implement violence prevention. The authors recommended that in an effort to prevent violence, teachers need to be proactive. Through classroom efforts educators were recommended to use interactive teaching methods such as cooperative learning and class discussions to provide students opportunities to develop positive social skills. Through these teaching methods the researchers indicated the possibility of building self-esteem and a sense of hope in the students. This would result in the children learning to address problems in a non-violent manner. A heightened sense of community would also be established which would assist in improved classroom management and positive student interaction.

In another study conducted by Galinsky and Salmond (2002) research was conducted to gain the insight of youths’ views about violence. Data was collected through interviewing and surveying a sample of children ranging from fifth to twelfth grade in Colorado. The purpose of this research was to identify the relationships between school, home, and the community and the ways they influence violence. Galinsky and Salmond discovered a direct relationship between the ability of the classroom teacher to help students develop coping strategies and build positive relationships. They also found
that improved and positive relationships with teachers would reduce violence at school and within the community.

The research concluded that youths need positive relationships in all aspects of their lives. This includes relationships among parents, family, teachers and the community. Since a large portion of today’s youth call on adults to change the environment to help them feel safe, it is essential that educators help to improve the larger culture. Addressing stress, family economic health, drugs, violence and general community improvement can do this (Galinsky and Salmond, 2002).

**Bullying**

Bullying and victimization among school-aged children is an epidemic that has always existed. For years this issue had gone without recognition and had forced countless children to endure physical and emotional abuse from their peers with limited or no support from their teachers or school officials. Numerous people had perceived bullying as a rite of passage amongst school-aged children and that it was a part of growing into an adolescent (Olweus, 2003).

Dan Olweus has been known as the pioneer in bullying research. Olweus (2003) began researching the effects of bullying in the early 1970’s. In 1983, Olweus conducted a study among 40,000 Norwegian school aged children. Data proved that one out of every seven children experienced some form of bullying on a daily basis. Since his initial study, further research has indicated that these numbers have continued to steadily grow.

Olweus stated that since there are many types of bullying it is possible to divide them into two forms. The first form of bullying is referred to as direct. Direct bullying involves open attacks that are usually face-to-face confrontations. The second form of bullying is referred to as indirect. This form involves bullying attacks that are concealed.
and subtle, making it difficult for the victim to easily identify the primary attacker (Olweus, 2003).

As a result of his research on bullying and its lasting effects on children, Olweus devised a prevention program known as the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program. This program is used to prevent or reduce bullying in school.

Lumsden (2002) examined the effects of bullying, steps schools have taken, and strategies that can be used for prevention. According to the author, many school authority figures often minimize or underestimate the extent to which bullying is occurring at their school. This in turn forces some victims to take situations into their own hands and can lead to fatal results. According to research data the author collected from the U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center, out of thirty-seven school shootings, the majority of the shooters had suffered severe and long-term bullying. Lumsden defined bullying as having occurred when a person willfully and repeatedly exercised power over another with hostile or malicious intent. For many bully victims, the fear is so great that some will find ways to avoid going to school, hide at school, feel anxious, stressed, depressed and in some cases attempt suicide (Lumsden, 2002).

Lumsden further discussed strategies that many schools have implemented such as anti-bullying policies, violence and conflict resolution training, intensified security and monitoring of students. According to Lumsden, additional prevention methods could be implemented through positive peer intervention and modeling and increasing prevention training and support (2002).

In another study by Khosropour and Walsh (2001) data was collected to determine what a selected group of fifth grade students defined as bullying and teasing. For the purpose of this study, Khosropour and Walsh used the definition of bullying as
unwanted words or physical actions that make a person feel bad. Data was collected through a series of interviews and surveys of forty fifth-grade students from four different schools. The researchers' findings suggested that both boys and girls perceived bullying in the same way but in most circumstances did not experience it in the same way. Both genders perceived bullying as unwanted words or actions that make a person feel bad. According to the collected data, boys experienced bullying in the form of physical aggression, while girls tend to experience it in the form of relational aggression, such as being excluded from a group. The data analysis conducted by the researchers suggested that most students did not consider name calling to be bullying and that bullying in most cases, was viewed as being more of a physical issue.

The effects that bullying has on individuals can last throughout childhood and well into adulthood. Bullying was one of the driving forces behind the purpose of this study. On a daily basis children experience fear, hurt and suffering. The data collected by the researchers sends a strong message to society: Children need their teachers to be their advocate and guide.

Coping Strategies

Stormont, Espinosa, Kippling and McCathren (2003) researched data to provide educators of primary aged children, strategies that would open opportunities for educational success for vulnerable children. The authors defined vulnerable children as those who entered kindergarten with ties to language barriers, poverty, and increased exposure to social problems. In addition to the daily challenges of meeting the typical needs of a group of students, educators also need to be prepared to work with children who are at risk for failure in school. According to the authors most children are at risk at some time in their school experience. When looking at the increase of divorce rates, the growing number of single parent families, and the general complexity of life in today's
society, many children come to school unprepared due to the stress that their families are undergoing (Stormont et al., 2003).

Suggestions were offered by these researchers to help educators implement ways to establish positive peer relationships and effectively work with the social interaction needs of the students, which directly involved addressing challenging behaviors. The researchers also stated that it is extremely important for teachers to clearly teach all expectations, monitor interactions, target needs for extra support, and access additional support services provided by the school.

This can be accomplished through the use of small group interactions, interactions with peers and friends, and positive teacher-student interactions. The strategies identified by the authors helped to address the issue of educators being prepared to deal with the various issues many children bring with them to the classroom (Stormont et al., 2003)

Pincus and Friedman (2004), found that intervention programs that have taken place in schools in an effort to teach children ways to cope with stress yield positive results. The authors’ findings were based on research and data collected on a school prevention program. The study was conducted during twelve sessions and focused on teaching fourth to sixth grade urban children various skills for coping with stress. According to the authors the inability to cope with everyday problems leads to emotional dysfunction, but children can be taught the skills to use coping strategies to approach conflicting or problematic situations.

Pincus and Friedman discussed two types of coping methods that children use. The first method is problem-focused coping and the second method, emotion-focused coping. In problem-focused coping, an individual will try to change the environment or external pressures to make the situation less threatening. Emotion-focused coping involves an individual seeking emotional support, expression and cognitive distraction,
such as avoiding or repressing thoughts and feelings associated with the stressor. The authors suggested that children have the ability to change their coping method based on the demands of the situation. Through their research, they found that most primary age children used problem-focused coping. Circumstances in which this strategy was most used, included situations of peer conflict, school failure and parent conflict. Most of these students were also lacking the appropriate skills necessary for emotion-focused coping.

The study taught children ways to identify feelings, how those feelings related to their experiences and how to identify solvable and unsolvable problems. After the study was complete, children who participated displayed less anxiety and less problematic behavior at school.

An intervention component that can help students learn coping strategies within the classroom is the use of morning meetings. Olweus and Limber (2007) have promoted the implementation of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program in schools across the United States. A key component to this program is the use of morning meetings to prevent bullying, teach children what bullying is, and how to get help. The effects of bullying include but are not limited to stress, anxiety and social withdrawal. In order for children to learn effective coping strategies through the use of morning meetings, teachers need to model positive behavior and problem-solving techniques. Effective coping strategies that can be taught during the morning meetings include but are not limited to: the use of journaling to express feelings, anger reduction techniques, such as breathing or counting, learning how to calmly discussing feelings and using role playing to express and diffuse issues.

Olweus and Limber support the rationale behind this component through data that had been collected through six large-scale evaluations involving more than 40,000 students for each study. This research indicated significant decreases in bullying,
reductions in anti-social behavior, and improvements in positive peer relationships and attitudes toward school and schoolwork.

Kriete and Bechtel (2002) point out that the use of morning meetings is an excellent time to teach appropriate social skills. These meetings help students develop democratic and cooperative skills. They also contribute to building a classroom climate that allows students to interact appropriately alongside their peers both socially and academically. The authors noted that all students need to have a sense of belonging, a feeling of significance, and to be recognized as a valued and contributing member of both the school and outside community. Kriete and Bechtel recommended that teachers get to know their students individually, culturally, and developmentally. By doing this a clear picture can be developed of what factors are contributing or preventing students from having positive and appropriate abilities to handle daily situations.

Morning meetings can help children learn self-control, gain self-esteem, a sense of community and belonging, feel valued and become more comfortable in social situations. These skills are all an essential part of managing and reducing the stress that many children are faced with daily.

According to Kriete and Bechtel, success in these types of meetings relies on the teacher’s ability to observe students’ skills, both socially and academically. It is then that by understanding these abilities that the teacher can reinforce and redirect needed skills to promote a reduced stress level and climate within the classroom. During these meetings an equal opportunity to participate must be present. Gender or personality traits of other students should not dictate participation patterns (Kriete and Bechtel, 2002).

**Stress**

Jewett and Peterson (2002) researched the types of stress that can manifest in
children, ways in which children may experience and adapt to stress, and ways in which adults can respond to children’s stress. The authors stated that there are two types of stress: acute and chronic. Jewett and Peterson defined acute stress as sudden, intense and short term. The authors defined chronic stress as ongoing, extremely intense, and causing detrimental effects on brain chemistry. Jewett and Peterson suggested that most children who experienced either acute or chronic stress are more likely to display such behaviors as crying, sweating palms, running away, aggressive or defensive outburst, headaches, stomachaches, and nervous fine motor behaviors such as nail biting. Children will adapt to the stress and its outcomes by distancing themselves emotionally or acting in ways to cover or conceal their feelings, such as showing aggression (Jewett and Peterson, 2002).

Jewett and Peterson gave suggestions for adults to help children deal with the stress. Some of the suggestions offered were to provide time for children to disclose their concerns and stresses privately or in a group, to practice relaxation breathing techniques, to encourage children to ask questions, to recognize and express their feelings, and to help the child find ways to anticipate what events may be stressful.

This research supports the rationale behind the use of morning meetings. These meetings will provide the students a safe outlet to discuss and deal with issues that are bothering them. The use of morning meetings will also help to facilitate positive peer relationships and support.

Ulrich (2002) recognized the direct relationship between stress and children who are living in poverty stricken neighborhoods. Neighborhoods considered to be in poverty were reported as having an annual household income of $10,000 or below. Ulrich stated that poverty stricken neighborhoods are more crowded, contain lower quality housing, and are consumed with much higher decibels of noise. These qualities that Ulrich has
associated with poverty-stricken neighborhoods can be directly linked to the abundance of people on the streets, high volumes of vehicular traffic, high numbers of people living in one household, and sound systems in cars. Students living in these neighborhoods have significantly less opportunity to find areas, such as parks or playgrounds, which are free from many of the environmental factors that can cause stress (Ulrich, 2002).

Ulrich's research also reported that victims of crime tend to be people living in neighborhoods that are considered to be high poverty. Children living in these neighborhoods have high levels of exposure to violence, which are significant in creating high levels of stress.

Adults and children living in poverty are faced with various circumstances that challenge their emotional well-being. Countless children living in urban neighborhoods such as those described by Ulrich, learn that the stressful, rather chaotic environment that they live in is considered to be normal (Ulrich, 2002). These children are often left to feel hopeless and struggle to find ways to reduce the stress from the high demands the society has placed on them.

Social Constructivism

Social constructivism is how people learn from others through their interactions, observations and experiences. It is through these experiences we are able to construct meaning in our lives. It is crucial in the development of children that these interactions are positive and meaningful, since they will greatly impact their future interactions. Social constructivism is an instrumental part of many of the studies discussed throughout this literature review. The research that has been presented thus far, establishes concrete evidence of how all elements of the environment in which students are exposed to, shape and guide their development, whether it be positive or negative.
According to research conducted by Singer (2001) it is important for teachers to develop an understanding of the logic behind the behavior of young children. The author argued that in order for teachers to be able to resolve conflict between children they must first understand the driving forces behind their actions during play and conflict. Singer based her findings on research she collected while observing interactions between children at Finnish and Dutch day care centers. Following these observations she reported that children are able to construct logic in their actions long before they are able to verbalize it. She found that teachers who immediately intervened often caused the conflict to continue to grow between the children or caused feelings of rejection, since the teachers had often taken the side of the “victim”. On the other side, Singer also observed that teachers who gave the children an opportunity to resolve their own conflict, often spent less time intervening because the children were able to find personal strategies to defuse the issue.

The author stated that in peer conflict with or without the teachers’ help, young children are socializing. During these situations they use the emotions of the caregiver as a guide to how they are expected to feel and act in a particular situation. So if a teacher is quick to react and taking sides, they are ultimately teaching the children to react in an upsetting manner to conflict. Teachers who tend to take the back seat while they observe, stay calm and remain neutral teach the children more rational calming approaches to conflict. Ultimately Singer stressed that teachers need to give children an opportunity to understand their world and surroundings. Children spend large amounts of their time playing, experimenting, learning by doing, looking, imitating and communicating with peers and caregivers. It is our responsibility then to provide and model appropriate actions (Singer, 2001).
At young ages, children are taught what is socially unacceptable and acceptable by what they see being modeled around them. This directly affects how children will handle themselves in various situations.

According to Whiting and Lee (2003), the meanings that we attach to our past events shape our present and future. The researchers conducted an ethnographic analysis of interviews that took place with children who, at the time, were living in foster care. The children who participated in the study were African American and Caucasian, between the ages of seven and twelve years old, and from low income, urban settings. Most of the children were reported to have been victims of physical, sexual and emotional abuse. A number of them had also witnessed the abuse of other family members. During the interviews, the children talked about their past experiences, current situations and how they felt about themselves and their futures.

After analyzing information collected during these interviews, Whiting and Lee concluded that the environment in which the children were exposed to, had the greatest influence on their perception of their world. For example, if an African American child had a negative experience with a Caucasian foster mother, he or she believed that all Caucasian people would treat him or her the same way. The authors also stated that the children based their self-worth and outlook on the future of the situations they experienced and the relationships they were exposed to. Most were not hopeful and exhibited displaced anger in various situations. Whiting and Lee stated the importance of caregivers to understand and get to know each child individually, so that they can handle situations with these children with more sensitivity. The researchers were able to show, through their data collection, how environment, and what is seen and taught, greatly influences and affects the emotions and behaviors in children (Whiting and Lee, 2003).
Children today are consumed by a variety of factors that both promote and prevent the healthy development of various aspects of their social and emotional well-being. The research and data collected and presented for the purpose of this study support the notion that children need to be able to understand, handle and reduce their stress. Educators of today’s youth need to recognize the changes that society has brought to the implementation of what was considered standard curriculum. Teachers today are presenting lessons that go beyond everyday math, science and social studies. Changes desperately need to be incorporated to teach not only academic but life skills as well.
Chapter III

Research indicates a direct relationship between poverty and violence (Bennett-Johnson, 2004). On a daily basis my students are dealing with issues of low self-esteem, aggression and withdrawal due to the effects that stress has on most of them. This topic of study was extremely important in helping me become an effective teacher in the classroom environment in which I teach and in helping the students learn how to deal with the unavoidable challenges they face.

Target group

The design of my study was influenced by the needs of my students. During the time of this study, I taught third grade in an urban school district. The students were between the ages of eight and nine years old. Most of them were living in neighborhoods that were considered to have high poverty and crime rates. On numerous occasions my students had reported incidents such as bullying, fighting and violence in and out of school that was causing them to have difficulty managing their time for learning within the classroom.

Goals

The questions below were the focus of my study. Through student journaling, weekly surveys and my anecdotal notes I was able to understand how the structure of classroom morning meetings reduces stress. The first question was my main question; the following were my sub-questions.

- Can talking about issues during morning meetings reduce stress?
- What issues cause stress in children?
- What coping strategies can be implemented in the classroom that can help students deal with stress?
Objectives

It was my intention that through this study the students would find positive ways to deal with the challenges they face on a daily basis, which cause levels of stress in their lives. I hoped that through this experience the students would realize that there are always alternatives to violence. I also wanted to instill in them the belief that there are always people in whom they can turn for support and guidance.

Participants

The student population was considered to be living in poverty and had been exposed to various types of violence. These students lived in neighborhoods that were considered to have high violence and gang activity. During the time of the study there were a total of eighteen students in my classroom. Data was collected from fourteen of my third grade students. The remaining four students had chosen either to not participate in the study or parent consent was not received. Students who were exempt from the actual study were still able to participate in morning meetings but did not partake in journaling activities or weekly surveys.

Since I wanted the students to be honest in their responses, I was the only one reading their journals and reviewing their surveys. The children were also asked to share during the discussion portion of the morning meeting strictly on a voluntary basis. Also, instead of writing their names on their journals and surveys, each student was assigned a number. Journals and surveys were locked in my file cabinet to prevent student identities from being revealed.

Procedures of Study

Numerous students of mine were afraid to say things in front of their peers because of the fear of being rejected. From observing this type of behavior, I decided that providing confidential journal activities would be an excellent way for students to discuss
their problems and for me to develop a better understanding of what they are going through. Since I was the only person who would be reading the journals, it was my intention that the students would feel safe and have an opportunity to listen to strategies that directly relate to their problems.

Before data collection began, I explained the purpose of the study to my students. I then asked the students if they would like to participate. Those who were interested in participating took home a permission slip to their parents. The letter that was sent home to the parents explained the purpose of my study and asked for consent to have their child participate. Each student needed parental consent to participate (see Appendix A). Students who returned parental consent then needed to give student participation consent, which they filled out (see Appendix B). Each student understood that it was fully his or her choice to participate in the study.

In the morning while the students in my class were completing bell work, I distributed the daily journaling activity to each student who had consent to be part of the study. Each day I reminded them that the journaling activity was completely voluntary and that I would be the only person to read their responses. Before students began working on their journal, I read each question once as they followed along. The students were then allowed to pick a private area in the room and complete their journal activity. Student’s identification during the data collection was anonymous. The average length of time to complete the journal activity was fifteen minutes.

When each student was done, they would hand me their paper, return to their seat and complete their bell work for the remaining time left until the class gathered for the morning meeting. I was able to identify students’ work by the assigned number that I had given them.
Before starting the morning meeting each day, I took the time to read and make anecdotal notes about the student responses to the given journals. This allowed me to see what issues were going on with the participating students, how they felt and how they handled with the situation. As part of the dynamics of our class meetings we sat in a circle and passed a red stuffed animal lobster around. It was understood that the only person talking was the one that held the lobster. If someone did not want to share during the meeting, they simply passed the lobster to the next person. After someone was done sharing, students then had the opportunity to raise their hands to make comments or offer suggestions. At that time I was able to help lead the discussion into what positive strategies could be used for dealing with the given situation.

During the study, I discussed issues written in the journals at the end of each meeting. This way if the student that wrote the response did not want to share out loud, their issue would still be discussed and the student would remain anonymous.

Along with the daily journaling activities, participating students also completed a weekly survey every Friday (see Appendix C), after completing their journal activity for that day. The purpose of the survey was to collect data on student feelings as a result of morning meetings and their use of strategies discussed during the daily morning meetings.

My role in the data collection was observer-participant. I read student journals, surveys and facilitated student discussions. I participated by being a discussion facilitator and role model.

*Instruments for study*

First and foremost my data collection plan involved daily journaling of the children in my classroom (see Appendix D). The journaling activity was distributed each morning, to participating students. The journaling activity consisted of seven questions
that required written responses from the participant. The purpose of this instrument was to collect data on those issues causing the students to feel happy, sad, angry or hurt. The journal also provided data on the location, frequency and student responses to the issue stated by the student.

Data was also collected from a survey given to the participating children every Friday. The survey was distributed to the participating students after they completed their journal activity. The survey consisted of eight questions that were measured using a three point Likert-scale format and written explanations. The Likert-scale was formatted to three points because of the age and reading abilities of the participants. The purpose of the survey was to identify impacts the meetings had on the students and their use of strategies discussed during the meetings.

I also looked at data that I had collected through anecdotal notes during the discussions held during our daily morning meetings. These notes were a record of the issues students discussed and the strategies they used to deal with them. I collected these notes so that I could look for trends in student behaviors and responses to situations that were causing them stress at school.

Procedures for Data analysis:

The following is a list of various measures I took towards analyzing my collected data:

- Analyzed student journal responses for situations that were causing acute or chronic stress by looking for trends in the type of occurrences and frequency (Jewett & Peterson, 2002).
- Analyzed student journal responses for evidence of positive use of coping mechanism by looking for critical passages that reflected student understanding and use of strategies discussed during the morning meetings (Lumsden, 2002).
- Analyzed weekly surveys by recording and identifying trends in increasing or decreasing student feelings of sadness, happiness and anger during school.

- Developed a deeper, personal understanding of situations that were causing stress in the students I teach by reading and taking anecdotal notes of journal passages in order to understand their situations.

- Analyzed anecdotal notes from class discussions to identify any possible reoccurring patterns or trends in settings or circumstances where bullying or violence occurred that causes the stress.

I kept track of my ongoing analysis through anecdotal notes made on surveys that were collected and kept as part of the study. I also kept a separate binder divided into sections according to student number for purposes of identification. In these sections, I recorded dated notes in response to journal entries that I read. These were kept private and not exposed to students or other outside sources except for the purpose of reporting my study. With this data I was able to look for reoccurring patterns or trends in situations that cause stress, their frequency and impact on the students. I also was able to measure the effect that discussion of coping strategies during the morning meeting had on student response to dealing with the stressful situations.

Additional activities that I engaged in during the data collection phase included: role playing to examine negative situations and ways to positively find solutions, in class visits by the school psychologist or social worker to discuss feelings, bullying, and to promote self-esteem building. Peer response groups also took place in the form of morning meetings to help students realize they were not alone in the situations and feelings they experienced. This also became a time for students to receive positive support from their teachers and peers.
Activities that I engaged in after I completed the data collection included: On going daily morning meetings and journaling, scheduled weekly esteem building sessions with school counselor or social worker and a student reward system that was earned each time a student modeled positive coping mechanisms to stressful situations. Some of the positive coping mechanisms were not engaging in physical fights, name-calling or using personal journaling time-outs as a way to cool down when upset.

Through the use of these activities, I was able to continue to look for trends in improved student responses to stress while at school following the study.
Chapter IV

In order to find out the effectiveness of daily journaling activities and in what ways they may promote class discussion, students participating in the research study completed daily morning journaling activities. The students that participated were part of the third grade urban class that I was teaching during the time of this study.

Results of analysis of data collected:

In order to analyze my data I looked for and recorded trends in student responses that indicated reoccurring circumstances that were causing stress. I also looked for trends in student responses to dealing with the stress. My overall research question was Can talking about issues during morning meetings reduce stress? Below are the sub-questions to my research question and the data that I have collected through my research.

1. What issues cause stress in children?

* These are the most common issues listed by the students:

- Bullying.
- Someone not wanting to be friends with me.
- Name-calling.
- Pushing.
- Eye-rolling.
- Talking about me.
- Threatening me.
- Hitting me.

The issues that are listed above support the notion that overall bullying seems to be a reoccurring issue that was causing stress in the children at school. I found it interesting that some students simply listed the word bullying, while others viewed things like name calling and pushing as being separate from bullying. During our morning
meetings I took the time to discuss what students viewed as bullying based on the results I received from the journals. While analyzing the data, it became clear that most of the students were experiencing different forms of bullying each day. The reported bullying experiences included physical altercations, name calling, being shunned from a peer group or having personal property damaged.

2. What coping strategies can be implemented in the classroom that can help students deal with stress?

*The following are some of student responses to this journal question:

- "I asked them to stop but they didn’t, and I told the teacher."
- "Nothing."
- "I walked away.
- "I pushed her back."
- "I called the person a filthy name."

Based on the student responses to how they dealt with the situation I was able to begin to understand how students were dealing with their problems and whether or not they were using the positive solutions we discussed during the meetings. Through data and anecdotal notes I did see a change in attitude towards the situation from some of the students. Observed changes included various students seeking adult support in dealing with their issue, rather then responding with violence, and an increased level of positive peer verbal support.

*Results and Findings of Journaling Activity:

Information found in Table 1 on page 32, represents the most common responses to the journaling activities as reported by the students in relation to what was making them feel sad, angry or hurt. The responses to those feelings, as reported by the students, were indicators of what specific situations were causing stress. As part of the journaling
activity students also had the option to discuss situations that caused them to feel happy.

Findings on those results will be discussed later in the paper.

Table 1 is divided into sections by the number of students and common responses to journal questions. As previously stated, each student was assigned a number in place of his or her name to ensure confidentiality. Adjacent to each student, you will find their most common responses to each question presented to them on the journal activity throughout the course of the study. At the bottom of the table you will find a key indicating what the exact question from the journal was, with its corresponding question number. Table 1 appears on the following page.
Table 1
Most Common Student Responses to Daily Journaling Activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Journal Question #1</th>
<th>Journal Question #2</th>
<th>Journal Question #3</th>
<th>Journal Question #4</th>
<th>Journal Question #5</th>
<th>Journal Question #6</th>
<th>Journal Question #7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sad</td>
<td>Hit me.</td>
<td>- Before and after school.</td>
<td>Hurt</td>
<td>- Hit back.</td>
<td>- Walked away.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Angry</td>
<td>Talking about me.</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Angry</td>
<td>- Told my sister.</td>
<td>- Told my teacher.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sad</td>
<td>Kids call me fat.</td>
<td>- Bus</td>
<td>- All the time.</td>
<td>Sad</td>
<td>Cried</td>
<td>- Kids would leave me alone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hurt</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Breakfast</td>
<td>- Everyday.</td>
<td>Angry</td>
<td>- Told</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Angry</td>
<td>- Call me names.</td>
<td>- Bus</td>
<td>- Every day.</td>
<td>Sad</td>
<td>- Sit there.</td>
<td>- Kids would leave me alone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Sad</td>
<td>- Swear at me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hurt</td>
<td>- Say it back.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Angry</td>
<td>- Call me names.</td>
<td>- Bus</td>
<td>- Almost everyday.</td>
<td>Sad</td>
<td>- Ignored them.</td>
<td>- Kids would leave me alone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Sad</td>
<td>- Throw food at me.</td>
<td>- Hall</td>
<td>- A lot.</td>
<td>Hurt</td>
<td>- Cried</td>
<td>- They would get in trouble.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hurt</td>
<td>- Want to fight me.</td>
<td>- Breakfast</td>
<td></td>
<td>Scared</td>
<td>- Avoided the kids.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>- Sad</td>
<td>- Call me names.</td>
<td>- Hall</td>
<td>- Wanted to hit her.</td>
<td>- Angry</td>
<td>- Sat there.</td>
<td>- Kids would stop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hurt</td>
<td>- Mean to me.</td>
<td>- Bathroom</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Hurt</td>
<td>- Told teacher.</td>
<td>- People didn’t die.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- My cousin got killed.</td>
<td>- Lunch</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Angry</td>
<td>- -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>- Angry</td>
<td>- Roll their eyes at me.</td>
<td>- Bus</td>
<td>- Lunch.</td>
<td>- Angry</td>
<td>- Hit back.</td>
<td>- Kids stop talking about me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Sad</td>
<td>- Talk junk.</td>
<td></td>
<td>- End of the day.</td>
<td>- Called them names.</td>
<td>- Called them names.</td>
<td>- Some kids wouldn’t ride my bus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Try to fight me.</td>
<td></td>
<td>- A lot.</td>
<td>- Told</td>
<td>- Told</td>
<td>- -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>- Angry</td>
<td>- Kids talk about my mom.</td>
<td>- Outside school.</td>
<td>- Morning</td>
<td>- Angry</td>
<td>- Talk about them.</td>
<td>- Kids leave me alone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Sad</td>
<td>- I get in fights.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Mad</td>
<td>- Fight them.</td>
<td>- Don’t talk about my family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- People lie to me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- They get in trouble.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>- Angry</td>
<td>- Threatened me.</td>
<td>- Bus</td>
<td>- A lot.</td>
<td>- Angry</td>
<td>- Nothing</td>
<td>- Kids leave me alone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Sad</td>
<td>- Rolled their eyes at me.</td>
<td>- Hall</td>
<td>- End of day.</td>
<td>- Mad</td>
<td>- Tried to ignore them.</td>
<td>- Don’t touch my stuff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Broke my pencils.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>- Angry</td>
<td>- Ignore me.</td>
<td>- Bus</td>
<td>- Morning</td>
<td>- Angry</td>
<td>- Scream at them.</td>
<td>- Kids leave me alone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Sad</td>
<td>- Say mean things.</td>
<td>- Lunch</td>
<td>- After school.</td>
<td>- Mad</td>
<td>- Say mean things.</td>
<td>- -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Hurt</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Bathroom</td>
<td>- A lot.</td>
<td>- Sad</td>
<td></td>
<td>- -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>- Angry</td>
<td>- Make fun of me.</td>
<td>- Breakfast</td>
<td>- Everyday.</td>
<td>- Angry</td>
<td>- Talk about them.</td>
<td>- Kids leave me alone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Sad</td>
<td>- Call me names.</td>
<td>- Lunch</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Mad</td>
<td>- Nothing</td>
<td>- -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Say mean things.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>- -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>- Angry</td>
<td>- Ignore me.</td>
<td>- Outside school.</td>
<td>- Before and after school.</td>
<td>- Angry</td>
<td>- Ignore them.</td>
<td>- Kids leave me alone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Sad</td>
<td>- Say mean things.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Mad</td>
<td>- -</td>
<td>- -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Cry</td>
<td>- Kids leave me alone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>- Angry</td>
<td>- Call me names.</td>
<td>- Lunch</td>
<td>- A lot.</td>
<td>- Angry</td>
<td>- Cried</td>
<td>- -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Sad</td>
<td>- School is ending.</td>
<td>- Hall</td>
<td>- End of day.</td>
<td>- Mad</td>
<td>- Told</td>
<td>- Kids leave me alone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>- Angry</td>
<td>- Talk about me.</td>
<td>- Outside school.</td>
<td>- Before and after school.</td>
<td>- Angry</td>
<td>- Fight them.</td>
<td>- Kids leave me alone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Sad</td>
<td>- Want to fight me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Mad</td>
<td>- Ignore them.</td>
<td>- -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Not have to fight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>- Angry</td>
<td>- Roll their eyes.</td>
<td>- Hall</td>
<td>- A lot</td>
<td>- Angry</td>
<td>- Ignore</td>
<td>- Kids leave me alone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Sad</td>
<td>- Want to fight.</td>
<td>- Lunch</td>
<td>- End of day.</td>
<td>- Mad</td>
<td>- -</td>
<td>- -</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Journal Questions
1. Is there anything happening at school with the other children that is causing you to feel happy, angry, sad or hurt? (Pick one and write it below).
2. What is it?
3. Where did it happen?
4. When did it happen?
5. How did you feel when this thing happened?
6. What did you do?
7. What do you wish would happen next time?
Based on the findings presented in Table I, when students reported feeling angry, sad or hurt, they had repeatedly encountered some form of bullying. The bullying in these circumstances presented itself in the form of verbal, physical and emotional abuse. All of these forms of bullying have been proven to cause significant levels of stress in children (Lumsden, 2002).

A trend that was evident from the data collected was the common locations at which the students were experiencing the actions which are causing them stress at school. According to the data, incidents were most prevalent on the bus to and from school, during breakfast and lunch, which both take place in the cafeteria and outside of school, either before or after. There were some incidents reported to have taken place in the hallways and bathrooms, although not as frequently as other reported locations.

Results from the journaling activity data also provided evidence that in response to their feelings of being angry, sad, or hurt, 29 percent of the students hit back or fought, 21 percent engaged in a verbal dispute, and 50 percent cried, ignored or told an adult. These percentages are totals derived from responses collected throughout the entire study.

When evaluating all collected journaling activities, I observed a change in how some students responded to situations from the beginning of the study versus the end of the study. For example, Student 1 originally had only negative responses to upsetting situations, such as hitting other students. By the third week of the study there were less frequent reported incidents of hitting back and more reported incidents of ignoring or telling a teacher. Although the hitting back did not completely cease, its frequency did decline.

Other significant examples of how student responses changed from the beginning of the study versus the end of the study, could be found in responses made by Student 6 and Student 7. These students also showed a change in responses to upsetting situations
by the third week of the study. Both reported walking away, or changing their seat on the bus as a positive way to deal with the given situation rather then hitting or fighting.

As with Student 1, Student 6 and Student 7 did still use hitting as a response to their problem but not as frequently as reported in the beginning of the study.

When analyzing and comparing all journal activities that were submitted by the participants during the course of the study, responses supported evidence that suggested the students did not want to use violence as a means to solving their problems that they are faced with at school. In response to question number eight, *what did they wish would happen next time?* Of the participating students, 99 percent repeatedly stated that they wished that other kids would just leave them alone. While one percent wished that they could walk away and tell their teacher as their response to handling negative situations.

As previously mentioned, students also had the option to discuss situations that caused them to feel happy when responding to the journaling activity. During the course of the study 64 percent of the participants reported at least once, a time when another student caused them to feel happy while at school. Common reasons for the students to reportedly feel happy were celebrating someone’s birthday, making up with a friend after a fight or going on a field trip. Other responses made by this 64 percent did not always relate to school and were based on experiences that happened at their homes. Those findings did not relate to the given question for the purpose of this study.

**Results and Findings of Weekly Friday Survey:**

During the course of the study participating students were given a survey every Friday in addition to their journal response. The purpose of the survey was to find out how students felt about the meetings that took place during the week and to determine if the meetings were helping the students deal with the problems that they faced at school. Table 2 represents data collected from all Friday surveys during the course of the study.
If a student was absent on a Friday, they were given the survey when they returned to school the following week. All percentages represent the total number of times an answer was given for each specific question.

Table 2

**Student Responses to Friday Surveys**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement #</th>
<th>Survey Statement</th>
<th>Student Answers</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I felt good about having morning meetings this week.</td>
<td>75% 15% 12%</td>
<td>Majority of students felt good about having morning meetings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Morning meetings helped me with my problem.</td>
<td>58% 26% 16%</td>
<td>More than half of the students found morning meetings helpful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I felt sad after morning meetings this week.</td>
<td>16% 38% 46%</td>
<td>Based on content of meeting discussions most students did not feel sad after the meetings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Talking with my friends and teacher makes me feel happy.</td>
<td>79% 15% 6%</td>
<td>The majority of the students found that discussing issues in the classroom during morning meetings made them feel happy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I learned a positive way to deal with a problem.</td>
<td>62% 14% 24%</td>
<td>Most students were able to learn a positive way to deal with their problem from what they learned during the morning meetings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I liked talking about good things that happened at school this week.</td>
<td>69% 14% 17%</td>
<td>Most students felt good about discussing positive things that happened within school and not just discussing the negative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I feel better knowing that other kids sometimes feel the same way I do.</td>
<td>75% 16% 9%</td>
<td>The majority of students felt good knowing that many of their peers shared the same issues and feelings that they had.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I felt safe having morning meetings this week.</td>
<td>94% 3% 3%</td>
<td>The majority of students felt safe sharing and discussing issues brought up during morning meetings.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Possible Student Answers**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>A Little</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the findings presented in Table 2, the majority of the students reported that morning meetings were a positive experience within the classroom. Since the purpose of the meetings was to positively affect the students it is important to understand
the data collected regarding statement number three. These results were explained through the written students responses that followed the survey statement.

As shown in Table 2, statement number three was “I felt sad after morning meetings this week”. Student data represented that 16 percent responded “yes”, 38 percent responded “a little” and 46 percent responded “no”. After reading all written comments related to this question, I found that students who responded “yes or “a little” commented that they felt sad about how other people were treated after listening to people share during the discussion. This was important to document in the findings of this study since the purpose of the research was to help students feel less stress.
Chapter V

The research that I have read and the data collected during my study, have enabled me to clearly understand how my students base their knowledge on direct observations of the world around them. Countless children in today's society are left alone to learn how to handle life's problems through their own experiences. Often many of the role models that they have guiding them are the same people who are leading them in the wrong direction.

In following a review of the data, it can be concluded that the use of morning meetings was effective in helping my students reduce their stress to issues that occurred at school. Student data supported my thesis that the majority of the students felt better after the meetings, found a positive way to deal with a problem, felt safe, and were comforted knowing that they were not alone when it came to many of the stressful situations that they were dealing with.

If at any point the meetings were causing students to feel sadness about events happening to them, I would have stopped the study and re-evaluated the instruments being used, and the method and design of the study. The results of the research clearly answered the questions of my study and helped me to understand the issues that my students are faced with on a daily basis. The data helped me to evaluate the way in which I will run my classroom meetings and the approach I will take to conducting morning meetings again in the future.

Conducting this study has provided me with the opportunity to change my thinking towards bullying and its hidden victims. Through the daily journaling activities and morning meetings it became clear exactly how often bullying was occurring. For months, I had believed the majority of my students were not involved in or the victims of bullying. In reality, most of my students were experiencing various forms of bullying on
a daily basis. Countless students become experts at hiding their feelings, protecting their friends and trying desperately to fit in, thus making it difficult for teachers to realize students’ feelings.

The experiences that I have had due to my study have helped me to view teaching and what goes on in my classroom, far beyond the everyday plans that I have written into my plan book. Each morning when my students came into my room I found myself carefully studying their faces and physical actions. When looking at each little face, I can clearly see the young, innocent person who is hidden by the mask they wear for the adult world they are trying to survive in. It has become a priority to take more time to eat lunch with my students, to listen and try to provide them with experiences that allow them to just be children.

Based on the findings from my study, there are few things that I would recommend for other educators that may use this study in the future. The first recommendation would be to have class meetings twice a day. The original plan of my design focused on the research consisting of one morning meeting daily with the students. Upon the completion of the study, I quickly found out that my students were going home upset over instances that had occurred at various times throughout the day. The data collected through the journaling and discussions revealed that many situations start during the day and lead into physical altercations at dismissal, on the bus or walking home. Data also indicated that the location of many problems was on the bus, in the cafeteria during breakfast or lunch and outside school in the morning and afternoon.

These results support my belief that it would be beneficial in future studies adding a second class meeting towards the end of the day to provide students with the opportunity to discuss any problems that may have arisen during the course of the school day. It is my belief that by doing this second meeting, problems may be diffused and
students might be less likely to engage in violent behavior on the way home, ultimately reducing stress.

As part of the Friday Survey, I asked the students to give suggestions on what they felt would have made the morning meetings for that week better. Results of this collected data have led to my second recommendation for future studies. It was rewarding to find that the majority of all responses to that question indicated that the students liked the morning meeting the way they were being conducted. However, there were some student responses that included suggestions such as:

- "Be able to talk about home stuff too.
- "Wish people could dance or act out their feelings."
- "I would like to sing to help us feel happy too."
- "I would like it better if everyone shared something everyday."

These responses were very interesting. Based on this student input, it would be useful in future morning meetings to incorporate some sort of kinesthetic movement as part of a strategy that could be used to help reduce stress. This may include exercising, or short group dance activities. Using age level appropriate motivating music may also be useful as a way to open or close the meetings.

The data and research collected for this study is important to all professionals that have dedicated their life to education. The research has shown a direct relationship to the way students handle and react to situations by what they have been exposed to and have learned from home, peers and society. With this, educators need to step forward and become positive role models and advocates for all students. It is not only our job to educate our students through given curriculum but to provide the necessary tools to grow into successful adults and members of society. This theory strongly stands behind my purpose and belief in the use of morning meetings. My study was valuable in helping me

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to do my part in becoming that positive role model and advocate. It was my intention that through the results of this study other educators will be able to expand their own views and practices towards teaching.

Through the research and data that I have collected from the completion of this thesis project, I intend to approach my administrators with the recommendation to have daily meetings implemented and consistently used throughout all of the classrooms at my school. Recommendations will also be made to administration regarding the need for more adult supervision during breakfast, lunch and outside before and after dismissal. The research also indicted the extreme need for better supervision of the students while riding buses to and from school. It is apparent through student responses that the majority of problems arose when limited adult supervision was present.

Overall, I am excited about the possibilities and changes to the classroom environment that this study has to offer. Conducting this thesis study has allowed me the chance to touch the lives of my students in a creative and positive way. Through this study I developed a bond with my students that had never been present with previous classes. Building this type of family and community within the classroom is something that countless students need. Hopefully other teachers will be able to reference this study in the pursuit of improving the lives of their students.
References


Luther, S., & Goldstein, A. (2004). Children's exposure to community violence:


Appendix A

Parental Consent Form

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am currently taking graduate classes in pursuit of my master’s degree in the Curriculum Specialist program in the Department of Education and Human Development at SUNY Brockport. As part of my graduate studies, I will be conducting research within my classroom to determine how daily group classroom morning meetings can reduce the levels of stress in children. As you know, our children are sometimes faced with challenging issues while at school. These issues may include but are not limited to bullying and academic stress.

It is my intention to help your son/daughter learn positive ways to deal with issues that may be bothering him/her at school. In my effort to do so, I will be conducting daily group morning meetings. This will be a time for students and me to discuss issues at school that may be upsetting and work together to find peaceful, positive solutions. With the morning meeting, the children will be asked to keep a daily journal of their thoughts and feelings on issues they are faced with at school. On Fridays, they will complete a survey on how personally effective the meetings were that week. Any information collected will be kept private and confidential, unless information indicates harm to the safety or well being of the child. Results from the journals and surveys will be shared with SUNY Brockport, but no one will ever know the identity of the children.

I am asking for your consent to collect data from the responses of your son/daughter while participating in our classroom meetings, journaling and surveys. During the course of the study all journal information and surveys will be stored in a locked file cabinet at school that only I have access to. At the end of the study all data will be destroyed and shredded. Please note that participation is completely voluntary, in no way affects grades and there is no penalty for not participating. Your child may withdraw from the study at any time. Thank you for your continuous support in helping to ensure the best for our children. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Denell Knaub

I DO or DO NOT (please circle one) give consent for my child ______________________________________ to participate in Mrs. Knaub’s morning meetings, journaling activities and weekly surveys for her graduate class. I understand that participation is strictly voluntary.

Parent/Guardian Signature __________________________ Date________________________
Appendix B

Participant Consent Form

Dear Student,

As you already know I am taking classes at night as part of a way for me to become a better teacher. Just like you, I have homework in that class. As part of my homework, I want to try to find ways that we can work together as a class to help make school a better place.

For a few weeks, everyday before our morning meeting we are going to spend some time writing in a journal about things that are bothering us at school, how they make us feel and what we can do to make them better. On Fridays, we will spend a few minutes answering a few short questions on a survey. I will be the only person who will read your responses and look at your survey. You will never put your name on anything, only a number that I will give you.

During our morning meeting, you may share ideas that you put in your journal, but only if you want to. During our meeting, we will talk together as a class about positive ways to handle our stress and possible solutions to things that make us feel bad.

Thank you for helping me make our days at school better together. 😊

Sincerely,

Mrs. Knaub

I  DO (or)  DO NOT  want to participate in Mrs. Knaub’s journal activities and surveys for her graduate class. I understand that I may stop working on this at any time. I may also say no to participating, and there will be absolutely no penalty for me. My participation or decision to participate will not have any effect on my grades..

Name: ____________________________________________

Date: __________________________
Appendix C

Friday Survey

How Did I Feel About Morning Meetings This Week?

Date: __________________________

Student Number: __________________________

1 = YES
2 = A LITTLE
3 = NO

1. I felt good after having morning meetings this week. 1 2 3
   Why? __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

2. Morning meetings helped me with my problem. 1 2 3
   How? __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

3. I felt sad after the morning meetings this week. 1 2 3
   Why? __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

4. Talking with my friends and teacher makes me feel happy. 1 2 3
   Why? __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
5. I learned a positive way to deal with a problem.
   1 2 3
   If you said "yes" tell what it was:______________________________

6. I liked talking about good things that happened
   at school this week.
   1 2 3
   Why?_____________________________________________________

7. I feel better knowing that other kids sometimes
   feel the same way I do.
   1 2 3
   Why?_____________________________________________________

8. I felt safe at the morning meetings this week.
   1 2 3
   Why?_____________________________________________________

   I think the morning meeting would be better if
   _________________________________________________________
Appendix D

Daily Journal Response

Date: ____________________________

Student Number: ____________________________ DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME.

1. Is there anything that is happening at school with the other children that is causing you to feel happy, sad, angry or hurt? (Pick one and write it below).

2. What is it?

3. Where did it happen?

4. When did it happen?

5. How did you feel when this thing happened?

6. What did you do?

7. What do you wish would happen next time?