

The Impact of Improving Positive and Constructive Attitudes on Motivation to Succeed, Work
Ethic, and Relationships

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine whether the investment put into Morning Meeting (and other socioemotional curriculums) could significantly promote a child's growth. The Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment was given in order to assess the child's growth as well as a Growth mindset pre- and post-survey. Each of these measures evaluated the students' academic performance and their ability to accept challenges to grow. In conclusion to the research, findings of significant academic advances were discovered when Morning Meetings were consistently included throughout the students' learning day.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

The county that this researcher teaches in has had a major push toward Morning Meetings in order to build relationships (peer-to-peer and peer-to-educator) in classrooms. The researcher has observed the influence that these positive relationships has on primary students by addressing the human need to feel this sense of belonging. Building these relationships by daily meetings can help to “develop foundational thinking and language skills” (Kriete & Bechtel, 2004, p. 17).

This action research isn't solely based on relationship building. The purpose of this study was to determine whether the investment put into Morning Meeting (and other socioemotional curriculums) could significantly promote a child's growth. This action research will dive deeper to determine whether there is a correlation between positive relationships and academic successes.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of improving positive and constructive attitudes on motivation to succeed, work ethic, and relationships.

Hypothesis

The null hypothesis of this study is that Morning Meetings will not produce a positive value in enhancing student-teacher relationships that, in the long term, produce constructive attitudes which better allow the student to succeed.

Operational Definitions

The independent variable is the Morning Meetings that were implemented regularly in a classroom setting. The dependent variable includes students' success on their reading benchmark scores

based off Fountas and Pinnell data as well as an increase in their growth mindset based off a pre- and post-survey.

Operationally, the dependent variable will be defined by determining the students' average growth in terms of Fountas and Pinnell data. Another way to define the growth mindset portion of the dependent variable is by administering a growth mindset survey. This survey asked multiple questions with regard to having a growth mindset (i.e. Did you work hard today? Did you try something new? Did you get stuck on something?). A second survey was given to determine change.

Operationally, the independent variable will be defined by observing students participating during Morning Meeting and engaging in relationships throughout the school day. The researcher will solely rely on in-class participation during Morning Meeting and observe how these relationships are displayed throughout the school day.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review will evaluate and examine the impact that positive and constructive attitudes within teacher-student relationships have in enhancing the student's motivation, work ethic, and relationships. Building positive relationships is a common goal among teachers of all grade levels. However, many factors intervene and can meddle with the growth of these relationships. This review will examine the importance of teachers building and forming these relationships with students to increase their academic advances.

This literature review has five specific sections. In section one, teacher-student relationships will be defined as well as the rationales and strategies used to produce these relationships. Section two will go into greater depth about relationship building by providing specific examples and reflections of prior educators. Following this, section three will discuss Morning Meetings and how they assist in building relationships. Then section four will explain the connection between a supportive classroom management structure and how that leads to fewer classroom behavior problems. Lastly, section five will discuss the importance of an effective learning community.

Teacher-Student Relationships

An exemplary teacher-student relationship is “characterized by closeness, warmth, and positive affect” (Collins, O'Connor, Supplee, & Shaw, 2017, p. 72). However, there are also low-quality teacher-student relationships. These relationships have “conflict, discordance, and anger” (p. 72). Creating relationships provides students with the necessary opportunities to build self-regulation in order to successfully develop socially and emotionally.

Social-emotional development has become a huge push in many school districts today. The rationale behind this initiative points to the research attesting to the importance of both genuine and encouraging relationships in order to establish a school climate that is welcoming (Anyon et al., 2018, p. 222). Producing positive relationships comes through caring, supportive interactions that promote an open and authentic school climate. However, when negative relationships arise, they may be attributed to poor classroom management, low teacher control, a decline in student engagement, or disrespect from either party.

Focusing on the importance of relationships, Anyon et al. (2018) demonstrate a rationale by stating that building these relationships “created a foundation for productive problem solving in times of conflict” (p. 225). When teachers are conscious of their students’ backgrounds, they respond appropriately to issues, misbehaviors, and proper discipline. Anyon et al. suggest that when teachers show a sense of respect, students are actually “more willing to take responsibility for their actions” (p. 225). They concluded that teachers who use this key strategy of building positive relationships with their students will help lower negative behavior.

Another study that promotes the importance of teacher-student relationships was performed with college students and their online professor. Today, many college students are participating in online courses. Limitations arise because social and affective opportunities are usually unavailable. Due to these limitations, challenges arise, and dropout rates are heightened (Kim & Thayne, 2015). Specifically, Kim and Thayne (2015) discussed ways to incorporate strategies to build relationships in online classes to enhance the rapport of the learners and their instructor. Strategies that were implemented are as follows: the instructor used a warm and friendly tone, the instructor provided personal stories about real-life connections to the curriculum, and the instructor provided encouragement and constructive feedback. Therefore,

this study was able to defend the idea that these relationship building strategies did, in fact, provide a positive impact on the learners' attitudes and motivation to complete the course.

This research has proven that increasing positive rapport with students is beneficial to their social, emotional, and cognitive development. When the rapport between instructors and students is a positive one, students become more engaged and problem behaviors are lessened. However, with the absence of these positive relationships, the effect may be reversed.

Relationship Building

Many school districts are now focused on promoting healthy social-emotional development (Anyon et al., 2018). In order to accomplish this, authentic relationships that are supportive and encouraging are becoming an essential aspect. Phillips (2011) specifically discusses how the well-known social media site Facebook was used as an active domain to develop and promote relationships with students who were attending universities. Phillips underscores how university libraries began to post statuses on Facebook and the effect of these posts. These statuses both shared information and built rapport with the student population. The libraries shared university experiences, events, and even their campus's values. These libraries targeted areas that most likely displayed a significant emotional pull to their current student enrollment. Due to the information that these libraries shared on Facebook, the campus was able to gain student input on current issues and national interests. By using social media and displaying topics that were interesting, the site began to attract students' passions. Therefore, efforts made to seek student input heightened due to the libraries trying to form relationships with the student body.

It is apparent, with the support of research, that building positive relationships is beneficial to a classroom environment. Yandle (2018) discusses a teacher's reflections on why

building these relationships are so critical. In Yandle's study, the teacher stated that showing love and support will promote students' learning. These successes will be displayed because confidence begins to build for those students. Once students' confidence is reinforced, they become more motivated to take the risks needed to further advance in their academics. A strategy that this educator used to build relationships was incorporating a tool called Morning Meeting.

Morning Meetings

Morning Meeting is a "treasured and flexible teaching tool" (Kriete & Bechtel, 2002, p. 9). Usually Morning Meetings are held daily, first thing in the morning. This activity lasts about 20-30 minutes, and it is imperative to make sure there is time to achieve the desired social-emotional and academic goals of this tool. Morning Meetings are broken down into four components. The order in which these components should occur is significant. They must go in this sequence: greeting, sharing, group activity, and morning message. Greetings are incorporated to function as a warm-up. These can be as simple as "Good morning, [student's name]," and then give their classmate a wave, fist-bump, high five, etc. The greeting sets the mood for students to feel a sense of comfortability in order to move on to the next component. Sharing is when the either the whole group shares or partner sharing occurs. Sharing is the component that focuses on a social and/or academic topic chosen by the teacher. This area helps students get to know one another, develop social and emotional competencies through conversations, and develop the listening and speaking skills. After sharing, the group activity is completed. This component is incorporated to build a sense of community, foster engaged participation, include all students, and reinforce or extend previously learned academic and social skills. The final step in completing a Morning Meeting is administering the morning

message. This is the written part that is usually displayed on large chart paper. During this component teachers can build their community through written information and reinforce academic concepts. They can do so by focusing on literacy skills, mathematical problems or strategies, writing concepts, and much more.

There are many purposes of Morning Meeting. To start, implementing this teaching tool will assist with developing connections among the students and also between the students and their teacher (Kriete & Bechtel, 2002). Academic, social, and emotional learning are also all merged together during this time through classroom discussions. During Morning Meeting, teachers are daily creating opportunities to review content or practice skills previously learned throughout the message. Teachers also set a tone for every student to respectfully accept others and learn how to speak as well as listen to each other. In addition, Morning Meeting allows motivation, confidence, and a sense of belonging to be established.

With these components and purposes of Morning Meeting, it is also important to recognize the research behind implementing this teaching tool. Twenty-first century society is rapidly changing. Therefore, it is important to deliver appropriate opportunities for students to be competent in the areas of cognitive, social, and emotional skills (Kriete & Bechtel, 2004). In addressing all these areas, students can become stronger learners. In over 200 studies, researchers demonstrate that students who receive social-emotional learning have advanced in standardized achievement tests due to positive attitudes about school. Morning Meeting provides an avenue for integration of this social-emotional learning. It also provides a time for social interactions to occur and skills to be developed.

For Morning Meeting to be a productive tool, effective implementation is critical. Wasik and Hindman (2011) explain specific strategies to ensure that Morning Meeting is successfully

executed. To summarize these approaches, it is vital to connect content, introduce key vocabulary, write the message with the students at a complexity level they understand, incorporate modeling, and ask questions. In addition, this meeting is occurring in small or whole group setting. These guidelines will incorporate a foundation to promote and optimize a child's learning.

Lastly, it is important to understand that Morning Meeting can be cross-curricular. It can implement content from multiple subjects or just one. The activities need to be designed by the teacher to meet the needs of their specific students. Zhang and Quinn (2018) address best practices in early writing skills through Morning Meeting. Their article discusses that incorporating writing into Morning Meetings allows children to express themselves differently than engaging in the normal routine (Zhang & Quinn, 2018). They also suggest that relationships can be built by incorporating writing. For example, the teacher could have the students share what they wrote with their classmates, discuss each other's work, and even compare their work to other classmates. Once again, this shows that Morning Meetings provide ample opportunities for social-emotional development, building a classroom community, and supporting relationships.

Classroom Management

Classroom management is an important skill for every educator to implement. Honing this skill provides a teacher with a social curriculum that personifies a guideline for how to manage students' behaviors (Skiba, Ormiston, Martinez, & Cummings, 2016). Throughout an average day, many obstacles impact what will happen in the classroom. How a student interacts, expectations of the teacher, rules of the classroom, and consequences all fall under this social curriculum. However, classroom management is not simply based on the teacher's control.

Instead, classroom management embodies a much broader process. Elevating classroom climates (mood, attitude, etc.), enhancing student engagement, and lessening conflicts and disruptions in class are the main purposes of classroom management.

Researchers have found that there is significant data to support the link between positive relationships and successful classroom management (Skiba et al., 2016). Having effective classroom management is a structural support for students to be on task, engaged, and successful. If this structure is used in areas like instruction, procedures, and classroom rules, it will ensure a positive and safe climate for instruction. Forty years of psychological research as well as classroom observations concluded that “classrooms with quality teacher-student relationships have fewer classroom behavior problems and better academic performances” (p. 123). The importance of social-emotional learning was also cited. If instruction incorporates social-emotional learning, the de-escalation in student negative behavior is evident.

When focusing in on the classroom climate, the management aspect is crucial to obtain. However, once this management is established, relationships begin to form naturally. This, then, creates a link between a productive classroom and building meaningful, positive relationships.

Effective Learning Environment

Teachers who can build a foundation for their learning are creating an effective learning environment. When these learning communities begin to form, the teacher provides caring, loving support to their students. Over time, the critical components are trust and respect (Bartel, 2005). A way to develop these components is through committed and meaningful relations. Allowing all voices to be heard promotes a sense of unity and fairness.

Building this successful and self-sustaining community strengthens learning because ambition is heightened and students become more productive (Bartel, 2005). However, the key

word there is building. Classroom communities do not just arise. On the contrary, the community depends upon the teacher's ability to produce a classroom that is a constructive place to learn. Developing relationships with students allows a connectedness to become apparent and eventually creates an "environment conducive to learning" (p. 152). Student learning will then stem from this learning environment. This environment will also produce learners who display motivation. This ambition will then allude to a strong work ethic.

Conclusion

Relationship building is an essential part of being an educator, although this may be one of the most difficult skills to obtain. Each student brings to school their invisible backpack. No one may know their backgrounds, stories, or hardships that are stuffed inside that backpack. Nonetheless, these exist and could cause a fatal decline in their educational journey. Positive and constructive attitudes are needed to ensure support, build relationships, and promote academic success. This literature review provides evidence that creating this type of atmosphere for the child will benefit their academic advancement.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of the investment put into Morning Meeting (and other socioemotional curriculums) and to determine whether they are beneficial to promoting a child's academic, socioemotional, and behavioral growth. This study will help determine whether there is a relationship between the concepts of improving positive and constructive attitudes in order to motivate and success, work ethic, and relationships.

Design

The design was a quasi-experiment design. The quasi-experimental study collects data from a selected group rather than randomly selecting individuals. In this case the data was collected in a Kindergarten classroom. The design for the study is given below.

O X₁ O?

The independent variable was the use of Morning Meetings. The independent variable was manipulated. This was done by using a variety of positive relationship-building activities to encourage participation during Morning Meetings. To collect the data needed to analyze results during this intervention, a pre- and post-assessment were given. There was a student survey and data collection based on Fountas and Pinnell reading levels. To collect the initial data, a survey was given to determine students' personal view of their mindset (growth or fixed) as well as the reading levels at which they entered Kindergarten. After these were collected, engaging and encouraging relationship-building activities were used as action steps to improve the situation by creating better, stronger teacher-student relationships. The study was concluded by implementing the same survey to compare students' answers and data collected from the Fountas and Pinnell February benchmark.

Participants

There were 17 Kindergarten students participating in this study. Of these 17 students, nine are females and eight are males. These students range between the ages of five and six. Within this class, there are students with different backgrounds. Below is a table displaying their demographics.

Table 1

Student Demographics

Male	Female	White	AA	Asian	Hisp.	Multi-racial	Pacific Is.	Amer Ind.	IEP	504	ELL	FARMS
8	9	15	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0

The sampling technique was convenience sampling. This group was chosen due to their similar academic ability, their current grade level, and their presence in the researcher’s class.

Instrument

A pre- and posttest were administered at the beginning of the study and at the conclusion of it. A survey was also provided. The pre-survey was given in January (mid-experiment) and the post in April (end of experiment). Questions that were asked during this survey were: 1) Did you think hard today? 2) Do you feel like you were challenged? 3) Did you try something new today? 4) Did you get stuck on something? 5) Do you feel like you struggled? 6) Could you have done something better today?

Procedure

First, students completed a pretest to determine their reading level in the fall when entering Kindergarten. Then this group participated in daily morning meetings to build positive relationships and advance their learning. Throughout these meetings, ground rules were set and followed. Four specific components were completed in order each day within a 20-minute period: greeting, sharing, group activity, and morning message.

Observations were made of the students throughout these morning meetings, and students gave input via a growth mindset survey. After administrating this posttest, the data was analyzed to conclude whether or not there is a correlation between positive relationships and an increase in student reading scores.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to determine whether there was an impact in motivation to succeed and a heightened work ethic that correlated to the improvement in building positive relationships. Solely looking at academic data, students' reading levels were determined based off The Fountas and Pinnell Reading Benchmark Assessment. The graphs below represent the pretest and posttest of these levels.

Figure 1

Pretest Fountas and Pinnell Data

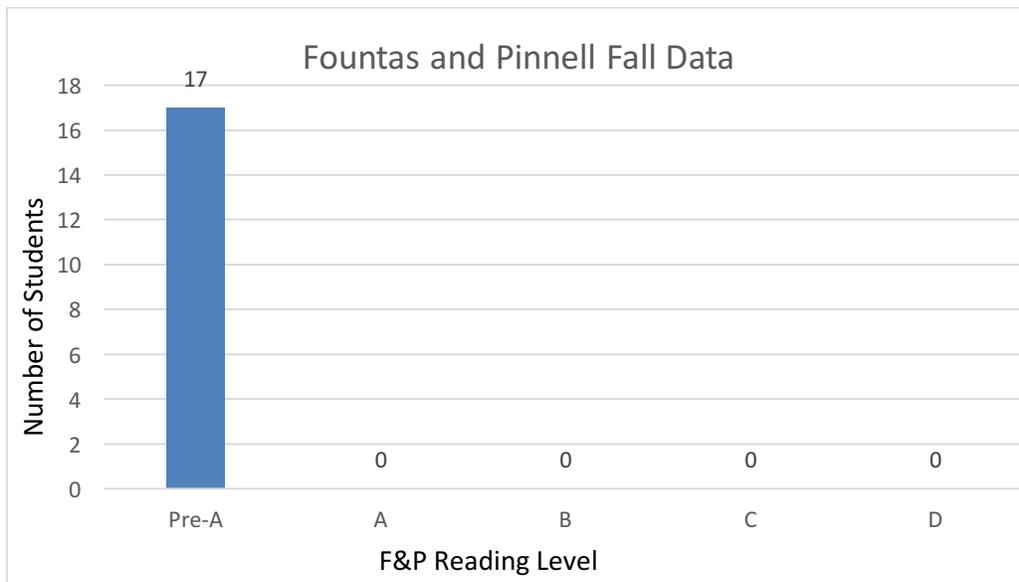
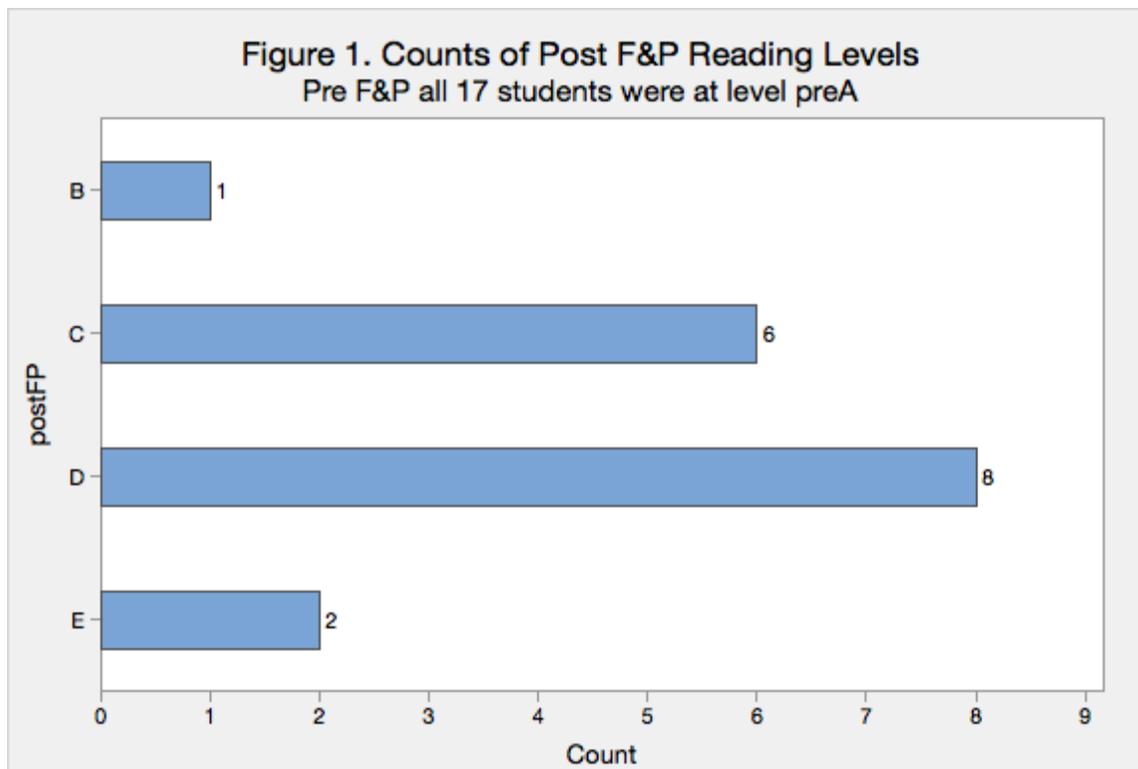


Figure 2

Posttest Fountas and Pinnell Data



When analyzing these graphs, it becomes noticeable that a substantial amount of improvement was made. All 17 students were at a Pre-A reading level on the pretest of the Fountas & Pinnell Assessment. Growth of the students' scores were determined if they advanced their reading level. When looking at the results, all 17 of these students improved their reading levels from the pre-to-posttest. Ten of the 17 reached levels of a D or E. This provides evidence that a majority of these students were performing at or above grade-level (with regard to Anne Arundel County's guidelines).

Another important feature to look at is the Growth Mindset survey. This survey was taken in the middle of the year and then again at the end of the year. Students answered this survey with thumbs up or thumbs down, thumbs up meaning that they agreed with the statement and thumbs down that they did not. Below are the results of each question, cross-tabulating the pretest with the posttest.

Table 2

Growth Mindset Survey: Question 1) Did you think hard today?

Rows: pre1 Columns: post1

	1	All
0	2	2
	100.00	100.00
1	15	15
	100.00	100.00
All	17	17
	100.00	100.00

Cell Contents: Count

% of Row

Table 3

Growth Mindset Survey: Question 2) Do you feel you were challenged?

Rows: pre2 Columns: post2

	0	1	All
0	2	9	11
	18.18	81.82	100.00
1	0	6	6
	0.00	100.00	100.00
All	2	15	17

11.76 88.24 100.00

Cell Contents: Count

% of Row

Table 4

Growth Mindset Survey: Question 3) Did you try something new today?

Rows: pre3 Columns: post3

	0	1	All
0	3	3	6
	50.00	50.00	100.00
1	0	11	11
	0.00	100.00	100.00
All	3	14	17
	17.65	82.35	100.00

Cell Contents: Count

% of Row

Table 5

Growth Mindset Survey: Question 4) Did you get stuck on something?

Rows: pre4 Columns: post4

	0	1	All
0	12	0	12
	100.00	0.00	100.00

1	2	3	5
	40.00	60.00	100.00
All	14	3	17
	82.35	17.65	100.00

Cell Contents: Count

% of Row

Table 6

Growth Mindset Survey: Question 5) Do you feel like you struggled?

Rows: pre5 Columns: post5

	0	1	All
0	12	1	13
	92.31	7.69	100.00
1	2	2	4
	50.00	50.00	100.00
All	14	3	17
	82.35	17.65	100.00

Cell Contents: Count

% of Row

Table 7

Growth Mindset Survey: Question 6) Could you have done something better today?

Rows: pre6 Columns: post6

	0	1	All
0	2	1	3
	66.67	33.33	100.00
1	2	12	14
	14.29	85.71	100.00
All	4	13	17
	23.53	76.47	100.00

Cell Contents: Count

% of Row

These tables display significant data. Tables 2-7 display a cross-tabulate of the pre- and post responses. This allows the ability for the progress made from pre-to-post to become visible. To see the effect on each question, data points are constructed for each. In question 1, all 17 students either stayed at “thumbs up” or moved from “thumbs down” to “thumbs up.” For question 2, nine of 11 during the pretest with thumbs-down moved to thumbs-up on the posttest. Question 3 results displayed that half of the six thumbs-down on the pretest moved to thumbs-up on the posttest. Question 4 presented that all 12 thumbs-down on the pretest remained at thumbs-down on the post, and two of the five thumbs-up on the pretest moved to thumbs-down on the posttest. Question 5 showed that 12 of the 13 pretest thumbs-down remained at thumbs-down on the posttest. Lastly, question 6 revealed that 12 of the 14 pretest thumbs-up stayed at thumbs-up on the posttest.

Table 8

Growth Mindset Survey –Written Responses: Could you have done something better today?

Pre - Could you have done something better today? Count Percent

being a good citizen	1	7.1429%
being kind	1	7.1429%
being nice	1	7.1429%
calling out	2	14.2857%
helping others	1	7.1429%
raising my hand	1	7.1429%
reading group	2	14.2857%
sharing	1	7.1429%
sitting quietly	1	7.1429%
with reading group	1	7.1429%
working better	1	7.1429%
working hard	1	7.1429%
N=	14	
*=	3	

Post - Could you have done something better today?	Count	Percent
adding more detail to my answers	1	7.6923%
asking for help in the google meet	1	7.6923%
asking questions	1	7.6923%
attending the google meet this morning	1	7.6923%
follow my schedule better	1	7.6923%
listen to the story better	1	7.6923%
listening better to the story	1	7.6923%

listening to the IRA	1	7.6923%
pay attention to the story more	1	7.6923%
tried a new guided reading center	1	7.6923%
tried a new strategy	1	7.6923%
used my time better	1	7.6923%
working hard	1	7.6923%
N=	13	
*=	4	

Table 9

Growth Mindset Survey –Written Responses: What would you like to improve on in school?

Pre – What can you improve on?	Count	Percent
calling out	2	11.7647%
Nothing	1	5.8824%
reading	8	47.0588%
reading	1	5.8824%
writing	5	29.4118%
N=	17	

Post – What can you improve on?	Count	Percent
reading	5	29.4118%
reading	1	5.8824%
writing	11	64.7059%

Tables 8 and 9 display written responses to the questions at hand. These questions allowed the students to state specifics on what they could do better next time and which academic skill they want to improve on. Dissecting their answers on the pre versus posttests, it becomes apparent that the students are becoming more persistent and are starting to recognize that they are able to learn from their mistakes.

All in all, this survey signified that students are beginning to build their growth mindsets as young learners. It became evident that they began to believe that knowledge is just one-stepping stone of success. As a result, they are building their growth mindset and will reach even higher levels of achievement to promote their successes.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to determine whether building relationships impacts student successes. The null hypothesis stated that Morning Meetings will not show a positive value in enhancing student-teacher relationships that in long term produce constructive attitudes to better assist the student succeed. This research proved that this null hypothesis was not supported owing to the academic improvement in their reading abilities as well as their attitudes towards a growth mindset.

Implications of Results

The data indicates that using Morning Meetings to build student-teacher relationships impacted students' successes in reading. This implication is supported based off the data collected from the Fountas & Pinnell reading assessment displaying significant growth of all students. Due to this factor, students' fluency, accuracy, and comprehension all improved based off the assessment that was administered. It was noticeable from a collection of data from the assessments that students were either at the appropriate level or higher for the time of year. These results indicate the importance of building teacher-student relationships in order to positively affect students' academic successes.

Theoretical Consequences

The literature review demonstrated that relationship building is an essential role of an educator. Positive and constructive attitudes are important in order to ensure support, build relationships, and promote all academic successes. When teachers create this type of atmosphere, the child will benefit. The data collected from this research supports this theory. Self-control, listening skills, and respect are skills that can be "molded, experienced, practiced, extended and refined in the context of social interactions" (Kriete & Bechtel, 2002, p. 11). These skills in are essential to academic achievement. The results of this study reinforce information from these studies.

Threats to the Validity

Despite the fact that this study obtained conclusive results, threats to validity are still present. The selection of the group studied brings a threat to the validity of the research. This is due to the fact that the selection of students was not random; rather, they were a controlled group who were students of the researcher. As such, this nonrandom sampling poses one, threat to validity. In another situation, this variable could be changed causing an unknown variable that could arise.

There is another threat to validity: maturation. Basically, biological evidence shows that over time students will eventually develop. Since this is the case, students will improve their academic successes regardless of any type of intervention. A related threat was the lack of a control group to test whether the pre to post gain was only due to maturation.

Connections to Previous Studies/Existing Literature

Researchers have supported the importance of creating a foundation to build positive relationships to benefit the classroom environment. Anyon et al. () attests to this importance in order to establish a school climate that is accessible and approachable. A positive school climate provides multiple benefits to social, emotional, and cognitive development.

Conclusion

This study was able to demonstrate that all students selected were able to heighten not only their growth mindset, but also their independent reading level. The conclusion is this: by building and promoting these positive relationships, teachers enable students to display a heightened academic achievement.

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