Wake Up and Chat: The Effects of Morning Meetings on Teacher-Student and Peer Relationship Quality

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Abstract: Previous research suggests that morning meetings can benefit students' social skills and helps them build meaningful relationships. While the importance of peer and teacher relationships for students is emphasized in the literature, the impact of morning meetings on these relationships has not been studied. This study aimed to address this gap by using daily morning meetings and surveys to assess their influence of students' relationships with their peers or their teachers. The results indicated that morning meetings did not have a significant impact on these relationships. However, students reported learning more about their peers and teacher and feeling closer as a class. Further research with the larger sample sizes and longer durations may yield more significant results.

Introduction and Justification

Morning meetings are a useful tool that teachers can implement into their daily routine. Oftentimes, instructional routines can get in the way of teachers being able to develop meaningful relationships with their students. Especially in the younger grades, it is so important that teachers take the time to foster these meaningful conversations with their students in order to make their classrooms more productive learning environments. Allen-Hughes (2013) makes the argument that there are so many stressors and expectations placed on teachers in their classroom and the lack of time to accommodate all of the required academics. This lack of time leaves no structured space left in the classroom to create a caring community where teachers can model behaviors and students can safely practice their social skills with their peers.

With a structured and specifically designed morning meeting, teachers can create a safe space for students to practice these important skills. Kriete (2003) explains the impact that morning meetings have on the tone of the classroom. "When we start the day with everyone together, face-to-face, welcoming each person, sharing news, listening to individual voices, and communicating as a caring group, we make several powerful statements. We say that every person matters. We say that the way we interact individually and as a group matters" (p. 4.) Through this welcoming environment, teachers can develop meaningful relationships with each of their students. Teachers can learn about student interests, family life, etc. Through these meetings, students can also develop better relationships with their peers. Oftentimes, students do not have a chance to learn about their classmates interests and hobbies, rather they focus more on their academic abilities. Morning meetings allow students to get to know one another on a deeper level and find out common interests. In my morning meetings, I was sure to incorporate student interaction

by having them physically come to the Smart Board and interact with it. I also allowed students to lead the meeting if they volunteered to do so. I encouraged all students to participate in morning meeting to ensure that everyone's voice was heard from. My research questions are: "Does the implementation of morning meetings improve student-teacher relationship quality?" and "Does the implementation of morning meetings improve student-student relationship quality?". I anticipate that the students will develop a more meaningful connection with me, as well as with their peers.

Literature Review
Teacher-Student and Student-Student Relationship Quality

With the current intensive focus on academics in elementary school, there are limits placed on the opportunities for developing social skills and abilities for students. There are numerous ways for teachers to improve their relationship quality with students, and the strategies they use should be adapted for their specific students and their needs. Teacher-student relationship quality can have direct impacts on students' academic achievement and psychological development. In their study, Hernandez et al. (2017) determined that programs that focus and invest in both early achievement skills and effortful control abilities would promote child academic development. This increase in academic achievement would be especially critical for children who are at the lower end of achievement and could be the difference between being classified as low average or average.

The ways in which teacher-student and student-student relationship qualities can improve are quite similar and can be done simultaneously. In order to create these bonds, it is the teacher's responsibility to foster a classroom environment where all students feel comfortable and safe. A growing amount of literature has emphasized the characteristics of these relationships with more positive qualities, such as closeness, affection, and open communication, with fewer negative qualities such as dependency and conflict. These have benefits for children's personal, social, and academic adjustment in the early years of school (Harrison, et. al, 2007).

Similarly, in another study, Longobardi and his/her colleagues (2019) found the importance of stable, low-conflict teacher-student relationships as a protective factor from increased internalizing and externalizing symptoms during all normative school transitions. In White (2013)'s research, they emphasized the importance of teacher-child relationships to children's learning. Children who lacked the support of a positive teacher-child relationship likely felt less secure in relationships with teachers and thus were not able to take full advantage of the learning opportunities available, which likely impacted their performance in writing. Likewise, in a study by Rudasill and Rimm-Kaufman (2009), they explain that relationships are key resources for young children. There is agreement among multiple researchers that the quality of young children's relationships with teachers predicts social and academic performance in school. Positive teacher-child relationships allow children to develop and use effective social skills to negotiate and navigate challenges. Such relationships provide children with school support systems that act as safety nets in academic and social situations and promote children's more positive perceptions of school in general.

COVID-19 and school closures had a direct impact on children's peer relationships, especially in elementary school. Research has shown the negative effects that childhood peer relationships can have on achievement and employment. Children who experience difficulty making friends and getting along with their peers have been shown to be at increased risk of a wide range of adverse psychosocial outcomes, spanning conduct problems; delinquency; mental health problems; and substance abuse. Some of the strongest associations have been found between the quality of children's peer relationships and their subsequent academic achievement and participation in school-related activities (Woodward, 2000). On the other hand, Hermann (2021) evaluated the outcome and process of an empathy training for the whole school staff, including leaders. They concluded that instead of leading to social polarization and worsening conflicts, crisis can lead to the use of social qualities and relationships as resources and strengthen resilience on all levels of the social field: crises can humbly remind us of our shared humanity, our interconnectedness, and the necessity to hold together, cooperate, and take mutual care and attentiveness in response to crises. Both peer and teacher relationships impact a student's academic skill development. Kiuru found that upon entry to primary school, children's interactions with teachers and classmates come to play an interestingly important role in their development. It has been shown that primary school students who have supportive relationships with their teachers and classroom peers are more likely to do better in school. It has been shown that teacher feedback to target students influences peers' perceptions and liking for such students, over and above the effect of the target student's behavior and peer reputation. It is known that well-accepted students get higher grades, test scores, and graduation rates (Kiuru, 2015).

Morning Meetings

Morning meetings are an effective tool that promotes social and emotional intelligence within classrooms. Literature agrees that problem solving, critical thinking, empathy, collaboration, creativity, and respect are skills that need to be taught to students in order to facilitate their success in the future. Literature supports that community building meetings in the classroom help to promote necessary learning and social skills which in turn empower the student both academically and socially. Morning meetings help to build a safe and encouraging environment where community, trust, and respect flourish. Through the process, social and emotional intelligences develop and students begin to practice and use the previously mentioned skills in their academic work and social relationships (Allen-Hughes, 2013).

Zimmerman (2019) explains how to build a classroom community of caring, self-directed learners through the use of morning meetings. They emphasize that learners thrive in safe, supportive environments and that they are safe from negative repercussions. Teachers should work to make connections with each of their students at the beginning of each day, starting from the first day of school. The time that is invested in creating a successful morning meeting is repaid with the sense of belonging, the skills of attention, listening, expression, and cooperation it develops. They also become the foundation for every lesson, transition, conflict, and resolution all year long (Zimmerman, 2019). Dooley (2019) completed a study on the effect of morning meetings on student behavior and peer relationships. Dooley determined three potential advantages of morning meetings: builds

classroom community, promotes social skills, and supports learning. Morning meetings provide teachers a strategy in creating a positive classroom environment. These environments are essential in students' academic, social, and emotional success. Even with the changes in education, classroom community and classroom management will always be essential. Teachers desire strategies that are simple to implement but will benefit their classroom. The Responsive Classroom approach and Morning Meeting provide teachers the structure to create a positive classroom environment and community (Dooley, 2019).

There is little research on how morning meetings directly impact both teacher student relationship quality and peer relationship quality. After the COVID-19 pandemic, now more than ever, students of all levels need to develop meaningful relationships with their peers as well as their teachers. Some students were out of the classroom for more than a year, and these relationships unfortunately suffered. Morning meetings will allow these relationships to develop at the same time. Students can learn about their peers and their teacher, and the teacher can learn about their students. Morning meetings can also provide students with essential social traits.

The research questions are
1. What effect do morning meetings have on teacher-student relationship quality?
2. What effect do morning meetings have on student-student relationship quality?

Methods

Context and Participants

The participants of this study consisted of a class of 2nd grade students of 23 individuals. These students are 7-8 years old who spent most of their school career during the COVID-19 pandemic. The majority of the students are White, with few minority counterparts in the class. The class has 3 students with IEPs and 2 504 plans. These students get special accommodations throughout the day. Within the class, there are 7 students who are struggling readers and 6 students who struggle in mathematics. Since these students have spent most of their school career online, they have not been able to develop significant relationships with their peers or teachers. During a three-week intervention period, students participated in morning meeting activities as a class.

Intervention

The method for my study was based on the work of Murray and Zvoch (2011), who conducted an inventory of teacher-student relationships. Thus, I implemented 15-minute daily morning meetings, where students have open discussions and can share information about themselves in order to learn more about one another. Students will have the opportunity to lead the morning meeting after they understand the routine. I will scaffold some of the activities we do within the morning meeting to ensure that the students with IEP's can also be included. The morning meeting will be introduced when students return from winter break and will occur every day.

Type of Methods

In this study, I collected qualitative data. Students were given surveys to assess both peer and teacher relationships. They were given a seven-question survey to assess teacher student relationship quality (see Figure 1) and a six-question survey to assess peer relationship quality (see Figure 2).

Data Collection

For the purposes of informational analysis for this study, I utilized quantitative data. Before and after the intervention period, students were given surveys about their relationships with both their peers and their teachers. The survey required students to use an emoji scale to answer questions about their relationship and feelings toward their teacher and peers.

Students partook in whole class morning meetings in order to promote meaningful relationships with peers and the teacher. Typically, in the mornings, students would come into the classroom and immediately begin working on their morning work for the day. Instead, students engaged in a fifteen-minute morning meeting that consisted of guided questions and allowed students to engage in meaningful conversations with peers. I facilitated the meeting in such a way that all students had the chance to participate in the discussion. I had students take the surveys before starting the morning meetings process, and then once we had completed them at the end of three weeks.

Before collecting data, I received consent from all parents of the students in the class. From there, I began collecting data before the students left for winter break. The first step before implementing the morning meetings was to gather data on the students' peer relationships and teacher-student relationships. I id by having the students complete the surveys prior to them leaving for break. See Table 1 for a breakdown of each question and its data source.

Table 1:

Research Questions and Data Sources

	Data source 1
What are the effects of morning meetings on TSRQ?	7 question survey- students will use emoji scale of 4 to answer questions about how they feel regarding their relationship with their teacher (see Figure 1)
What are the effects of morning meetings on peer relationship quality?	6 question survey- students will use emoji scale of 4 to answer questions regarding how they feel about their peers (see Figure 2)

Data Analysis

I conducted a t-test for both sets of my data. One for the change in teacher-student relationship quality, and one for peer relationship quality. For my first research question, I ran a

t-test to assess the changes in students' teacher-student relationship quality from the beginning of the study to after the implementation of morning meetings. For my second research question, I ran a t-test to assess the change in students' peer relationship quality from the beginning of the study to after the implementation of morning meetings. Comparing the differences in students' responses provided evidence of the effectiveness of each. The alpha was set at .05. Cohen's *d* were used to calculate the effect size.

Results

Does the implementation of morning meetings improve student-teacher relationship quality?

The results from the pre-test (M = 11.6, SD = 3.3) and post-test (M = 11.3, SD = 2.5) teacher-student relationship quality survey indicated the implementation of the daily morning meetings did not significantly influence students' relationship quality with their teacher (p = .56) (See Table 2). This data's small effective size suggests that the results did not deviate much from the null hypothesis, meaning that there was no real change in students' teacher-student relationship quality from pre-implementation to post-implementation of the morning meetings (d=0.12).

Table 2

Paired 2 tailed t-test Comparing Pretest and Posttest Scores
TSRQ

	n	*M*	*SD*	*p*	*d*
Pretest	20	11.6	3.3	0.56	0.12
Posttest	20	11.3	2.5		

Does the implementation of morning meetings improve student-student relationship quality?

The results from the pre-test (M = 11.9, SD = 4.6) and post-test (M = 11.5, SD = 3.2) peer relationship quality survey also indicated that the implementation of the morning meetings did not significantly influence students' relationships with their peers (p = .59) (See Table 3). This data's small effect size suggested that there was no real change in students' peer relationship quality from pre-implementation to post-implementation of the morning meetings (d = 0.1) .

Table 3

Paired 2 tailed t-test Comparing Pretest and Posttest Scores
Peer Relationship Quality

	n	*M*	*SD*	*p*	*d*
Pretest	20	11.9	4.6	0.59	0.1

6

Posttest	20	11.5	3.2

Conclusions and Implications

My intervention did not result in a statistically significant improvement in students' relationship quality with their peers or with their teacher. While the outcomes of this experiment were not statistically significant, there is evidence that individuals were positively impacted by the intervention.

Through conversations with students, it was clear that students learned a great deal about their peers and felt closer as a class. They would bring up information mentioned in morning meeting in classroom conversation. Once the intervention period was over and we were no longer doing the morning meetings, students expressed interest in starting them again since they learned so much about myself, as well as their peers. They came into school each day very excited about being able to share something new with the class.

Limitations

Several factors may have contributed to the results of the experiment. The sample size was small (n = 20) and some students missed morning meetings due to absences. In addition to this, students' pre-implementation survey scores for teacher-student and peer relationship quality were already high, leaving little room for improvement. The intervention period was only three weeks may have also limited the results. It is likely that this time constraint limited the results of both teacher student relationship quality and peer relationship quality. Although the p-values associated with the changes in students' relationship quality with both peers and their teacher were non-significant, it is likely because students' pre-intervention scores were so high.

Implications

I believe that were the aforementioned limitations not present, or at least, not as severe, a similar study to this could be carried out in a way that would produce statistically significant results in alignment with the targets presented in the research questions. When conducting research in the future, I will develop and administer my data collection tools with more precision and care. Specifically, I will conduct interview with students to obtain qualitative data. My own lack of experience in creating data collection instruments could have had a sizeable impact on my ability to collect data in the most effective manner, and, thus, on the outcome of the results of my experiment.

Despite this, I observed positive effects of morning meetings on my classroom environment and will continue to utilize this practice throughout my career as an educator. I will continue to foster meaningful discussion among students, encouraging sharing and promote inquiry to build community and TSRQ.

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Appendix

Appendix A
Student Survey (TSRQ)

Name: _____   Date: _____

1. My teacher understands me.

2. I trust my teacher.

3. I tell my teacher about my problems.

4. My teacher helps me understand myself better.

5. My teacher respects my feelings.

6. I feel comfortable talking to my teacher.

7. I get easily upset at school.

Appendix B
Student Survey (Peer Relationships)

Name: _____   Date:_____

1. I have lots of friends.

2. I make friends easily.

3. I get along with kids easily.

😁   🙂   🙁   😭

4. I am easy to like.

😁   🙂   🙁   😭

5. Other kids want me to be their friend.

😁   🙂   🙁   😭

6. I have more friends than most other kids.

😁   🙂   🙁   😭

Appendix C
Active Consent Form

Your child is invited to participate in the study entitled "Wake up and chat: The effects of morning meetings on teacher-student relationship quality and peer relationship quality." My name is Rileigh Krell and I am a student at St. Mary's College of Maryland working on my Master of Arts in Teaching degree. As part of my degree, I will be conducting a study examining the effects that morning meetings have on students' relationships with both their peers and their teacher.

Your child will be asked to take two surveys that inquiries about their relationships with their peers, as well as their teachers. Your child will also be asked to participate in short interviews to get qualitative responses. Your child will then be asked to participate in daily morning meetings. The morning meetings will be a whole group activity focusing on classroom community building. After the 3-weeks of daily morning meetings, your child will complete the same two surveys and interview questions to assess their peer and teacher relationships.

We do not foresee any risks to participating, although if they are uncomfortable answering any questions on the survey or interview, they may refuse to answer that question or choose not to continue.

There is no direct benefit to you or your child from participating in this research, but your data will help us understand how morning meetings impact teacher student relationship quality and peer relationship quality.

In order to protect your child's confidentiality, researchers will assign numbers to each of the students, rather than having their names on any of the documents. No name or number will be collected for the interviews.

If you are interested in discussing the research further, please contact Rileigh Krell at rgkrell@smcm.edu . If you have any question regarding your and your child's rights as a participant in this study, please contact the Chair of the Institutional Review Board at St. Mary's College of Maryland, at irb@smcm.edu, or 18952 E. Fisher Rd., St. Mary's City, MD 20686.

Your and your child's participation in this research is voluntary and you or they may choose not to participate at any time. The decision whether or not to participate will not jeopardize any future relations with St. Mary's College of Maryland.

Parent/Guardian Name (Print): _____ Signature:_____

Child's Name (Print):_____ Date:_____